Walk in the Light.
Be in the Light.

Trauma-informed stillness

Selina Sasse, CEO
The Prison Phoenix Trust



Welcome and settling

- Selina, CEO The PPT
- Regular participant in QiCJ conferences, yoga & meditation & mindfulness teacher
- Trauma informed stillness
- The PPT & our founder's link with Quakers
- Our time now
- Arrive together in silence
- Settle into this shared space



Selina Sasse, The Prison Phoenix Trust – Trauma Informed Stillness

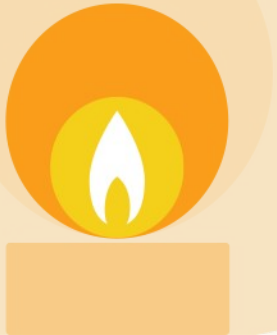
How can we fully be with the Light through shared silence as Quakers when, for some, it feels deeply uncomfortable?

This session explores a trauma-informed approach. While silence is intrinsic to Quaker meetings, for people carrying trauma, particularly though not exclusively, those in prison or prison leavers, it can feel unsafe or overwhelming.

As fellow Quakers and in roles as prison chaplains, how can we be present with stillness and silence without distress getting in the way?

Drawing on the approach developed at The Prison Phoenix Trust, we will share practical tools for centering, grounding, orienting, and returning to the present when memories or strong feelings arise.

Together we will explore how silence and stillness can become a compassionate embodied presence - accessible, steady and enhancing an opening to the Light for all.



About The Prison Phoenix Trust (The PPT)

- The Prison Phoenix Trust supports people in prison in their spiritual lives through meditation, yoga, silence and the breath
- Founder, Ann Wetherall. 1988. Spiritual experience in prison
- It recommends breath-focused stretches and meditation sensitively tailored to students' needs
- This practice encouraging an opening to the light to flourish & offers students ultimate peace of mind
- The PPT encourages people in prison and prison staff through correspondence, books, CDs, DVDs, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes



Dennis’ story

While serving an 18-year prison sentence, Dennis received a letter from his daughter asking him to give up drugs and crime. That moment became the turning point in his life.

Soon after, he connected with The Prison Phoenix Trust and began practising yoga and meditation in his cell. With no classes available, the charity’s written guidance from a mentor, and free resources, helped him build a daily practice and begin to change how he related to himself and his life.

Through yoga, meditation and later support from the Quaker community, Dennis discovered what he describes as his “inner light” – a quieter, steadier way of living guided by peace, honesty and self-respect.

Now 75 and more than ten years out of prison, Dennis lives a completely different life. He is an artist, a Quaker adviser in a university chaplaincy team, and continues his daily yoga and meditation practice.



Being with the Light through silence

- Silence central to Quaker worship
- For some feels deeply uncomfortable, particularly for those with trauma histories.
- How can we be open to silence
- & allow ministry to emerge,
- in a way that is safe and present for everyone?



Quaker silent practice

- Centering down
- Active inward listening
- Expectant waiting
- Collective attention
- Inner Light arises out of silence, guided by spirit
- Spontaneous ministry
- (difference to meditation)



When silence can be hard

- Memories or strong feelings arise
- Nervous system may remain alert
- Body may resist stillness
- Trauma-informed support helps people remain present, so silence can be accessible
- and reduce potential to trigger past trauma



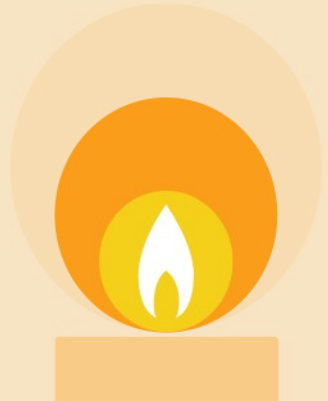
Trauma-informed guidance for sitting in silence

- PTSD, depression, or experiencing flashbacks, go carefully

- Settle your mind & body before time in silence
  - Try a physical or a creative activity (stretches now)
  - Acknowledge distracting thoughts & let them go
  - Palms up or down

- When sitting in silence, if troubling thoughts take over, or you feel anxious:
  - Push feet into ground
  - Look around you - noticing things where you are now
  - If it overwhelms you, stay fully present with THIS moment
  - Stay focused on your breathing, In 1 and out 2. Repeat

- Build up time in silence gradually
- Lean into the support of your meeting & the steadiness of those around you



THE PRISON Phoenix TRUST

Shared silence



Closing reflection

