

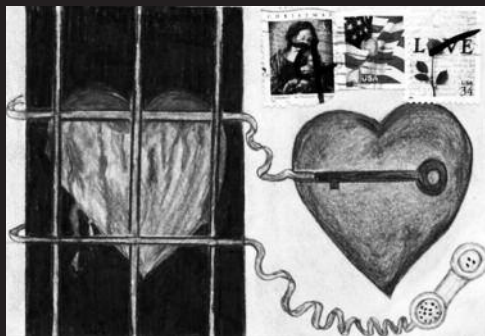
# prison health news

*-better health care while you are in and when you get out-*

Issue 11, Summer 2011

## Who We Are...

We are on the outside, but many of us were inside before... and survived it. We are formerly incarcerated people and allies talking about health issues and trying to bring about a positive change for all people who are in prison now or ever have been in the past. This newsletter is about all of us.



Stay Connected by Edith Sammons  
Books Through Bars Contexts Collection

We will be talking about health issues. For example, what is good nutrition? Where can you get services and information on the outside? We want to take your health questions seriously and break down complicated health information so that it is understandable.

We're also here to help you learn how to get better health care within your facility and how to get answers to your health questions. Don't get frustrated. Be persistent. In prison, it's often hard to get what you want, but with health information, it doesn't have to be impossible. Join us in our fight for our right to health care and health information.

## Read on...

From,  
Angelo, Ben, Carla,  
Cliff, George, Hannah,  
James, Laura, Ronda,  
Suzy, and Teresa

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## write an article!

We have gotten lots of requests for articles already, and we know that everyone who reads this newsletter will have questions or their own story to tell.

Every issue, we have five different feature sections:

**1. Body, Mind & Soul** – on the concrete health information people in prison need access to in order to advocate for standard of care treatment

**2. Words to Live By** – on the strategies for getting health care behind the walls

**3. Breaking the Chains** – on the inspirational work of people who are currently/formerly in prison fighting for the lives they want to lead

**4. Try This Out** – on incredible organizations and projects across the country who are doing the hard work of rebuilding our communities in a time of mass imprisonment

**5. The Big Picture** – on the political issues that drive the prison (and prison health!) crisis in our country

If you want to write an article on something you think is important for prison health, send it and we will consider publishing it in *Prison Health News*. You can also write us first to discuss ideas for articles.

If you want your name kept confidential, you can sign your article with your first name or “anonymous.”

## Beat Stress with

by Teresa Sullivan

*In this article, we discuss the facts about yoga meditation.*

The amazing thing about the practice of yoga is that despite the many myths and misinformation that has been peddled, it is growing in popularity. This tells you that it is actually a good thing with practical benefits.

The first fact is that it is not limited to a particular religion. In fact, it is not a religion, though it was inspired by a religion, which is Buddhism. This means anyone can enjoy yoga meditation. No wonder you will find this form of meditation in all continents across the world.

It is also a fact that yoga meditation helps you stay focused in your mind and body. This is done in a manner that is unlikely to lead to injury or strain on any particular body part. The posture is not limited to a particular manner of bowing. Bowing is a sign of respect and therefore not part of achieving much physical benefit.

Dahn Yoga meditation is a little different from other forms of yoga. It is a version that originated from Korea and may be a little different from Indian and Chinese versions. This Korean version emphasizes the body and mind connection. The brainwave vibration is often used while meditating to connect the body and the mind.

Besides meditation, Dahn Yoga comes with many other practices that benefit the individual. These include DahnMuDo, which is a martial art. The development of good energy through Chakra training is also taught. Healing through this form of meditation aids in

## Dahn Yoga Meditation

management of diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Yoga meditation can be done even if you are just sitting in a chair or on the floor. Or, for those beyond the prison wall, it can be done if you are sitting in your cell. Lowering our stress level is highly important when we are faced with jail time or living with health issues. Besides the fact that we need to keep healthy when doing time beyond the walls, this can become difficult when our minds are not focused and we have to live in a single cell with a person we don't know. Yoga meditation helps us refocus our mind and body energy in a positive light.

Yoga meditation can help relax the stressed-out body and give us a clearer insight on life so that we can get through the rest of the day — or to the next moment, if that is what is needed for now.

Before beginning your yoga meditation, try to do some small stretching of the arms, legs and neck. This will help you loosen up the body and muscles before you begin your daily yoga meditation exercise.

### The Breath of Life

Here is an easy example of yoga meditation:

First, you need to be sitting in a comfortable

position on the floor or bed — even in a chair will do. Then close your eyes and begin slowly inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Imagine that there is a dot (this dot can be called the tension reliever) on the center of your forehead. Picture it there. As you inhale and exhale, move the dot with your mind throughout your face and body to relax your tense mind and body. Remember to keep inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. This should take up to twenty minutes. If you are sitting in the yard, you should be able to do this exercise and no one should be able to tell that you are meditating and trying to refocus your mindset.

### Next Steps

Consider ordering one of these yoga meditation books:

- *Wherever You Go,*

*There You Are:*

*Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*

by Jon Kabat-Zinn

- *Zen Meditation in Plain English*

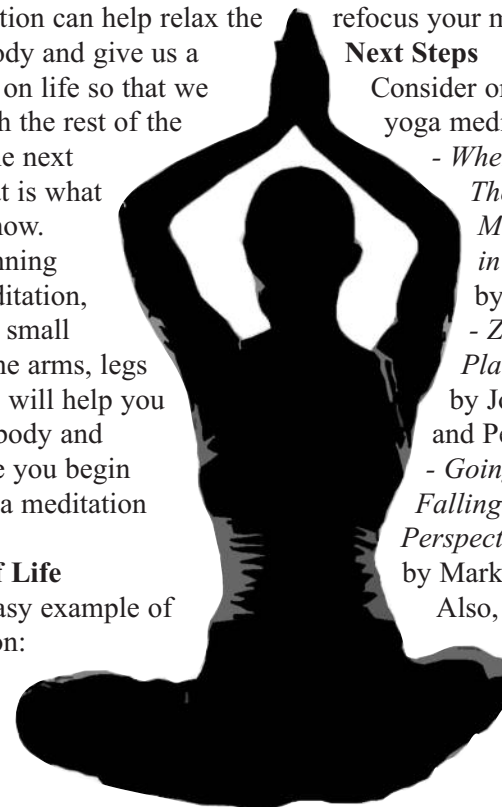
by John Daishin Buksbazen and Peter Matthiessen

- *Going to Pieces without Falling Apart: A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness*

by Mark Epstein

Also, if you are willing,

you can start your own yoga meditation classes or group.



# Fasting for Human Rights in Secure

by Suzy Subways

For the first three weeks of July, at least 400 people imprisoned in the Secure Housing Unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay state prison in California refused food in a carefully organized hunger strike against long-term solitary confinement. They were joined by more than 6,600 people in a third of California's prisons, according to the state's own estimates. All racial groups were represented. This was the largest prison hunger strike in California's history.

*Prison Legal News* reports that more than 50% of those in California's SHUs have been sent there for indefinite lengths of time simply for alleged gang membership. The only way out is to "debrief," or cooperate with gang investigators. This coerced information, which may or may not be accurate, usually results in others being sent to the SHU.

SHU cells have no windows. People imprisoned there get one and a half hours each day in a small exercise yard with high walls. Hunger striker James Crawford told *Al Jazeera* news through a lawyer, "We get no trees to see, hardly no sun. If you're lucky, you'll see it five times a year."

In 2006, a US Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons (CSAAP) reported that in some high-security units, "people end up completely isolated, confined in constantly bright or constantly dim spaces without any meaningful human contact – torturous conditions that are proven to cause mental deterioration."

*Pelican Bay Hunger Strike, July 2011 by Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, Minister of Defense,*

The hunger strikers' five core demands are:

- 1. End Group Punishment & Administrative Abuse;**
- 2. Abolish the Debriefing Policy, and Modify Active/Inactive Gang Status Criteria;**
- 3. Comply with the US CSAAP 2006 Recommendations Regarding an End to Long-Term Solitary Confinement;**
- 4. Provide Adequate and Nutritious Food; and**
- 5. Expand and Provide Constructive Programming and Privileges for Indefinite SHU Status Inmates.**

They also demand adequate natural sunlight and quality health care.

To support these demands, family members and community groups held demonstrations across the US and internationally. More than 7,500 people signed petitions. Phone calls poured in to the governor's office and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), pressuring them to negotiate with the hunger strikers. The *New York Times* and other mainstream media sources started paying attention.

On July 20, the *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial demanding access to interview hunger strikers. In response to a CDCR statement that the media were being shut out "due to security and safety issues," the paper wrote, "We'd be more inclined to believe that...if California's prisons didn't have such an extraordinary history of shoddy medical care and inhumane conditions."

# Housing Units of California

As hunger striker Todd Ashker said in a statement released by lawyers of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition, "The basis for this protest has come about after over 25 years, some of us 30, some up to 40 years, of being subjected to these conditions. Of our 602 appeals, numerous court challenges have gotten nowhere. A lot of us are older now, we have serious medical issues coming on... And there's a core group of us who are committed to taking this all the way to the death, if necessary."

By day 12, medical staff at Pelican Bay said at least 200 hunger strikers in the SHU were "progressing rapidly to the organ damaging consequences of dehydration." Family members returning from visits reported that their loved ones were extremely pale, shaking, and had lost 20 to 30 pounds. Some fainted or went into diabetic shock in the visiting rooms. Hunger strikers said that medications they had previously received were being denied as punishment. In response, dozens of health care workers from around the world wrote a letter demanding standard of care treatment.

On July 20, hunger strike leaders at Pelican Bay ended the strike temporarily to give the CDCR a chance to begin making changes in response to the five core demands. As a good-faith gesture, the CDCR had agreed to make smaller, immediate changes in SHU policy to provide some educational programs, all-weather caps (beanies), and wall calendars, while it investigated

*New Afrikan Black Panther Party-Prison Chapter*

making bigger changes. Hunger strikers and supporters outside continue to organize for the five core demands, building on the firm ground gained by the strike.

The CDCR admitted that the strike was "a major disruption to CDCR's normal operations." While it originally said, "We don't negotiate with prisoners," the CDCR was effectively forced into negotiating and making changes. By demonstrating the power of unity and commitment, the strikers have given energy to prisoner-led justice movements across the country.

The hunger strike in California comes just months after Georgia saw the largest prison labor strike in US history. Thousands among all racial groups united to refuse their involuntary, unpaid work assignments for six days in December 2010. They also demanded nutritional food and an end to medical neglect, which can be worse under for-profit health companies. Many strikers were transferred as punishment, and some were beaten severely, at least one to the point of brain damage.

But the Georgia strike inspired a national network of supporters and a blossoming of resistance behind the walls. In January, residents of death row in Lucasville, Ohio, went on hunger strike and won some demands. Supporters of these human rights movements in prisons pledge to keep spreading the word and fighting for the demands made by the brave individuals inside who risked all for justice.

# How HIV Meds Work, Part II: An Update on HIV Drug Classes

by Hannah Zellman

Because of medical advances, people with HIV can now live healthy lives and a normal life span. For people with HIV to be able to make the best decisions for their treatment, it's important to understand the basics of how HIV works in the body and how the medications stop HIV from doing its thing. If there is anything in this article you don't understand, please ask your doctor or write to us.

**None of the HIV medications kill or cure the virus.** HIV meds will reduce the amount of HIV in your blood and give your immune system the chance to repair and rebuild itself.

HIV medications are separated into **classes**. Each class of HIV medication works at a different place in HIV's life cycle. Each part of HIV's life cycle is another point where drugs can stop the virus from working.

## What are the HIV Drug Classes?

- Fusion and Attachment Inhibitors
- Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (Nukes and Non-Nukes)
- Integrase Inhibitors
- Protease Inhibitors (PIs)

## Stopping HIV from Doing Its Thing

HIV attacks specific cells in your immune system, known as CD4 or T cells. The virus weakens your immune system over time, turning your CD4 cells into HIV factories. To do this, HIV has to go through a lot of steps:

**Stage 1: Free virus** — HIV is in the bloodstream, looking for a way into your CD4 cell.

**Stage 2: Binding and fusion** — This is how HIV enters your CD4 cell. To get inside,

HIV attaches to your CD4 cell using one of two **co-receptors**, which are like landing docks on the outside of the cell. These co-receptors are called **CCR5** and **CXCR4**. Some people have both kinds of co-receptors, and some people only have one kind.

>**Selzentry**, an **entry inhibitor**, blocks HIV from attaching to CCR5s. If you are interested in taking Selzentry, ask your doctor about a **tropism test**, which will tell you which kind of co-receptors you have. Selzentry will work for people who *only* have CCR5 co-receptors.

After attaching or binding to the CD4 cell, HIV **fuses** with it. This process is like HIV unlocking your CD4 cell.

>**Fuzeon**, a **fusion inhibitor**, stops HIV from being able to fuse to the cell, kind of like changing the locks on the door so that HIV's key won't work.

**Stage 3: Infection** — HIV gets inside the cell.

**Stage 4: Reverse Transcription** — RNA is HIV's genetic instructions or "blueprints." In order to reproduce, HIV needs to make its genetic instructions compatible with a CD4 cell's genetic instructions. Your CD4 cells have your DNA in them. HIV has to "photocopy" its RNA and make it look like DNA. In order to do this, HIV uses an **enzyme**, a chemical tool that sets something into action, called **reverse transcriptase**. Reverse transcriptase reads HIV's RNA and makes a "photocopy" of it so that it looks like DNA.

>This is where the **Nukes** and **Non Nukes** step in! Nukes are little proteins that look like the reverse transcriptase enzyme. They fake HIV out — HIV thinks it's using a tool to help it replicate, but it's attached itself to something that doesn't work. Non-Nukes work similarly to Nukes, but instead of substituting itself for the enzyme, non-nukes attach to the enzyme and make it useless. It's like wrapping the tool in duct tape so HIV can't use it.

**Stage 5: Integration** — HIV hijacks the central command of your CD4 cell, which is called the **nucleus**. Once inside, HIV edits its DNA into your cell. It's kind of like HIV takes the blueprint for your CD4 cell and adds on the blueprint for building HIV. In order to do this, HIV uses another enzyme, called **integrase**. It's like integrase unlocks the door to central command.

>Isentress, an **Integrase Inhibitor**, stops the integrase enzyme from letting HIV into the nucleus to leave the HIV blueprints there.

**Stage 6: Transcription** — HIV left its blueprint behind, and now the nucleus is an HIV factory. The nucleus produces long chains of proteins that will become HIV.

**Stage 7: Assembly** — The newly formed HIV starts to put all the parts of itself together.

**Stage 8: Budding** — HIV pushes its way back out of the cell, taking a little bit of the cell wall with it.

**Stage 9: Breaking Free** — HIV breaks free of the infected cell.

**Stage 10: Maturation** — HIV completes the remaining steps needed to become a fully functioning virus. Now, that new HIV can go on to infect more CD4 cells.

>Here comes the **Protease Inhibitor**! In order to fully mature, HIV needs to take the parts of itself that are still long chains of proteins and cut them into little pieces. To do this, HIV makes a protein called **protease** that acts like scissors. The Protease Inhibitors gum up these scissors so that HIV can't finish the replication process.

## Making the Most of HIV Medicine

Your doctor will prescribe you a combination of drugs that stop HIV at several points along the life cycle. Scientific advances have made it possible for some people with HIV to take just one pill once a day, because there is a combination of multiple medicines in one pill. Remember, you should never treat your HIV with only one medication! Effective therapy includes three or more drugs, sometimes from the same "class" of drug, sometimes all from different classes.

Ask your doctor about your choices for HIV treatment. Think about your goals for treatment and make sure you tell your doctor. Listen to what their goals are too. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Remember that you're entitled to information about your disease, your treatment and your health. If you want more specific information about HIV, write to us!

# The Society for Employment and

by George N. Murray

The Society for Employment and Equal Rights (SEER) is a component of the Institute for Community Justice (ICJ) at Philadelphia FIGHT. SEER's mission states: "We believe that everyone deserves a chance to achieve their goals, and that it is never too late for equal employment opportunities for all."

SEER started out of two focus groups in October 2010 at the institute to address human rights violations in jail and prison. The conversation shifted, however, to the violations of rights people with a record are facing outside of jail. Employment rights seemed like the area most people were passionate about, leading to this group's creation.

The majority of SEER members are formerly incarcerated/convicted people. The group prides itself on being strongly driven by those people who have actually experienced the difficulties related to employment discrimination. Their belief is that they can really make change due especially to the inspiration and contribution from the real-life experiences of formerly incarcerated/convicted people.

The central efforts of SEER involve advocacy with legislation, resource gathering/sharing, and building relationships with employers. As a result, SEER has undertaken a diverse range of campaign work, including "Ban the Box" legislation and the Support Center for Prison Advocacy.

"Ban the Box" is cutting-edge legislation

that SEER and other activist groups pushed for, which was recently passed by Philadelphia's city council. The legislation simply bans the use of the question "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?" from all job applications.

I got involved in SEER by attending a workshop presented at the 9th Annual Prison Health Care & Re-Entry Summit held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center on June 21, 2011. I was moved by the personal testimonies of the presenters (formerly incarcerated and founding members of SEER who had found employment). So, I thought I would take a closer look at their activities by joining forces and offering my help as a volunteer.

I am a formerly incarcerated individual recently released from state prison who has experienced the difficulties of employment-related discrimination due to incarceration and addiction. I have, however, not allowed these circumstances to deter me in my effort toward gainful employment. Thus, my purpose in attending the Re-Entry Summit and joining SEER. Little did I know I would be asked by *Prison Health News* to actually write an article on this volunteer organization.

I had the opportunity to have a discussion with Kathy Totoki, an ICJ staffer who contributed to the development of SEER, and Rysheen Caldwell, a formerly incarcerated and developing member of SEER. I asked them both what message they felt was

# Equal Rights

most important for those reading this article. They both responded with a resounding, "THERE IS HOPE." And that the only cost to the individual would be a desire to change. Rysheen suggested the change would have to begin within the self and inside the walls. If there is no change inside the walls, the same difficulties experienced inside will only be magnified upon release.

SEER has put together an Employment Resource Guide. Here are some of the suggestions they offer that can be employed on the inside and may translate to employment on the outside.

**PREPARE** - Take advantage of whatever jobs, education or vocational training programs are made available by the institution. Maintain

connections with outside resources such as SEER. Be knowledgeable of current trends and practices. Make use of a library, computer lab or other resource to help you become computer-literate. Document and record your job skills, volunteer activities and accomplishments, and be able to articulate and discuss them with potential employers.

**REMAIN HOPEFUL AND MOTIVATED** - Associate with those people and activities that promote good health, self-esteem and self-development. Join positive support groups or begin your own. Know what you are looking for upon release and know your rights. Maintain a good work ethic and attendance. Doing these things keeps you aware and one step ahead.

It is the hope of *Prison Health News* that each reader understands that maintaining good health, finding gainful employment, and practicing social activism and artistic expression are very important steps toward obtaining personal fulfillment. And, further, that you find this information helpful in your quest. We invite your questions, comments or ideas.



Crucial Garden by Bec Young, Justseeds "Voices from Outside" Portfolio

**Free Your Mind**



**THEN?**

**“Free Thought”**

To freely think and form your own thoughts  
Is a blessing in itself.

Many created beings don't have this function,  
Or the ability to recreate and act on it.

This is an expression that  
Can't be controlled or caged.

So to have an independent  
Individual thought that is all yours,  
Is one of the greatest forms of FREEDOM!

*Breaking The Chains*

**information resources for  
people in prison**

*If you need information while you are locked up, contact:*

**Fortune News**

The Fortune Society  
ATTN: Fortune News Subscriptions  
29-76 Northern Boulevard  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
newsletter on criminal justice issues;  
to subscribe, send your first name, last  
name, ID number, correctional facility,  
address, city, state, zipcode  
\*free to people in prison.

**HCV Advocate**

PO Box 427037  
San Francisco, CA 94142  
monthly newsletter on hepatitis C  
events, clinical research, and education  
(materials also available in Spanish).  
\*sample issue free to people in prison;  
\$10 for a year's subscription

**Just Detention International**

3325 Wilshire Blvd, Ste 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90010  
support, resources and advocacy to  
address sexual violence behind bars;  
survivors should address Legal Mail to  
Cynthia Totten, Esq.  
\*free to people in prison

**Partnership for Safety and Justice**

825 NE 20th Avenue, #250  
Portland, OR 97232  
support directory with health and legal  
organizations, prison book programs,  
resources for LGBT people, and more!  
\*free to people in prison

**Prison Legal News**

P.O. Box 2420  
West Brattleboro, VT 05303  
newsletter on the legal rights of people  
in prison & recent court rulings  
\*sample issue \$3.50, unused stamps  
OK; \$24 for 1-year subscription

**Project Inform**

1375 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103-2621  
Hotline: 800-822-7422  
information & newsletters on HIV  
(materials also available in Spanish);  
responses to treatment questions from  
people in prison  
\*free to people in prison

**Protecting Your Health & Safety:  
Prisoners' Rights**

325-pg bound manual explains the  
legal rights to health and safety in  
prison, and how to enforce those rights  
when they are violated.  
publication of the Southern Poverty Law  
Center, distributed by:  
Prison Legal News  
P.O. Box 2420  
West Brattleboro, VT 05303  
\*\$16 for people in prison



Books Through Bars by F. W. Flores  
Books Through Bars Contexts Collection

# **advocacy and support resources for people in prison**

**If you need help while you are locked up, or when you get out, contact:**

## **In Austin, TX:**

AIDS Services of Austin  
P.O. Box 4874  
Austin, TX 78765  
Phone: (512) 458-2437  
Web: [www.asaustin.org](http://www.asaustin.org)

## **In Boston, MA:**

SPAN Inc.  
105 Chauncy Street, 6th Floor  
Boston, MA 02111  
Phone: (617) 423-0750  
Web: [www.spaninc.org](http://www.spaninc.org)

## **In Chicago, IL:**

Men and Women in Prison Ministries  
10 W. 35th Street # 9C5-2  
Chicago, IL 60616  
Phone: (312) 328-9610  
Web: [www.mwipm.com](http://www.mwipm.com)

## **In Los Angeles, CA:**

Center for Health Justice  
900 Avila Street #301  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Phone: (213) 229-0985  
Prison Hotline: (213) 229-0979  
Web: [www.healthjustice.net](http://www.healthjustice.net)

## **In New Orleans, LA:**

Women With A Vision  
215 N Jeff Davis Pkwy  
New Orleans, LA 70119  
Phone: (504) 301-0428  
Web: [www.wwav-no.org](http://www.wwav-no.org)

## **In New York, NY:**

New York Harm Reduction Educators  
953 Southern Boulevard, Suite 302  
Bronx, NY 10459  
Phone: (718) 842-6050  
Web: [www.nyhre.org](http://www.nyhre.org)

## **In Philadelphia, PA:**

Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Phone: (215) 985-4448  
Web: [www.fight.org](http://www.fight.org)

If you need resources in a city not listed here, **write to us!** We will help you track down answers to your specific questions.

**Write to us** if you know about a great organization that is not yet listed here as a PHN partner.

# **prison health news**

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*All subscriptions are free, and are mailed First Class.*