



## What makes our meditation Christian?

by Kim Nataraja

The discipline of Meditation is to be found in one form or other in all the major World Religions. In all it is a way of attention, a way of focusing the mind in a one-pointed way. It is a way of clearing the mind of all surface thoughts, so that only the sacred phrase or image or sound is upper most in our consciousness and will lead us beyond the material world into the Divine Reality, whatever name we give to that.

But in our modern world it is often used solely as a relaxation technique. Research has proved that meditation produces important physiological effects on the body - lowering of breathing rate, blood pressure and heart rate - the 'relaxation response'. This counteracts the effects of stress, anxiety and even pain. In doing so, moreover, it decreases the urge involved in addictions of many kinds, which are a negative way of trying to lower stress. Patients suffering from serious illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer, find that this decrease in tension improves their general health, mental outlook and even seems to halt or slow down the progress of the disease.

Therefore it is perfectly understandable that many use meditation purely for its health benefits as a body and mind altering relaxation technique. Moreover, it is wonderful to stop the endlessly chattering mind and release stress and tension. It will feel great to have 'time out' from the concerns, anxieties, hopes and fears that generally beset us, to stop the drain of energy of a mind going round and round in circles.

But that would be a missed opportunity; there is much more to meditation than its physiological effects on the body. The effects on the body and the mind are nevertheless an important first step on the road to transformation, to clarity of vision and total awareness. For a serious practitioner, however, relaxing the body is seen only as an essential preparation, leading to the real purpose of meditation of totally transforming the mind, leaving our ordinary consciousness temporarily behind and thus entering in the presence of the Divine. To do that, meditation needs to be a spiritual discipline involving solitude and silence, in which we let go of all sense experiences, images, emotions and thoughts. This will inevitably effect a transformation of consciousness and thus a transformation of the whole person. It will fundamentally change us from people living at the surface to fully alive human beings. It allows us to realise our full potential, which all main religions and wisdom traditions encourage: "I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness." (Gospel of John)

Our Meditation is Christian, as our focus is on Christ. That is why we use the ancient Christian prayer 'Maranatha', 'Come, Lord' as our mantra. As Christians we believe that Christ dwells within our heart and there in the silence we join His prayer to the Father and enter with Him into the stream of love, the Holy Spirit, which is our way into the Divine Presence. It is our faith that makes our meditation Christian.