

## Yoga and Christmas

*by Carolyn Reynolds*

Christmas is such an emotional time. Some people absolutely love this time of the year. But then, on the other hand, suicide rates spike during the Christmas season. Sometimes people complain bitterly about the days getting shorter in the fall. Could it be that this is a prelude to Christmas that causes the dread of shortened days? Some think that Christmas is for children. There is great excitement and anticipation in the children. This is true for most children. But truthfully, they sense how the adults in their lives are responding and they may carry with them a feeling of generalized anxiety about Christmas that will persist through their adult years. Christmas seems to open up the closed places and stirs memories we thought were resolved. How can the celebration of the birth of Christ create such awakenings in us? Somehow it seems appropriate.

How can we help ourselves if we are in the throes of the emotional upheaval that comes predictably every year? Yoga and Christianity share a practice that can salve our emotions, focus our lives, center our being, and lead us into the experience of unconditional love during Christmas and all of the other days of our lives. The practice is mantra that leads to meditation.

The early Christian monks, the Desert Fathers, practiced a form of silent, contemplative prayer. They used the Aramaic word, Maranatha. Aramaic is the language Jesus spoke and it means "Come Lord" or "Come Lord Jesus." This may be the most ancient Christian prayer. St. Paul ends Corinthians with it, and St. John ends the book of Revelation with it.

If the Christmas season throws you off center, or if you want to deepen your spiritual connection with Christ, practice the Maranatha mantra faithfully and patiently each morning and evening for about 20 to 30 minutes. Sit comfortably and be aware of the breath at the nostrils, as though nothing else exists. Then let your attention move to the space at the heart center or to the space between the eyebrows. You choose. Having a space in the body to rest the attention is very helpful. Silently repeat the syllables ma-ra-na-tha in rhythm with the breath. This will take you deeper and deeper into the realms of silence if you practice faithfully. In the realms of silence you will rest in your true nature. And you will know that under the trappings of who you think you are is the perfection of who you really are.

"Meditation is what the early Christians called pure prayer. It is a gift of such staggering proportions that we must respond to it gradually, gently. When we begin we cannot fully understand the sheer magnificence and wonder of it. Each time we return to meditate we enter into that reality a little more deeply, a little more faithfully. Because meditation leads us into the experience of love at the center of our being, it makes us more loving people in our ordinary lives and relationships. Not only is meditation the necessary basis for contemplative action, but also it is the essential condition for a fully human response

to life.” This beautiful quote is from The Christian Meditation website, [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org).  
May your Merry Christmas be lovingly merry and peaceful.