

## CARAMAYAN – MOVEMENT MEDITATION TO SCRIPTURE

### Aims and effectiveness as a practice

CaraMayan started with the aim of providing a Christian alternative to Yoga and Tai Chi which have been steadily growing in the West as forms of exercise and meditation. In my experience of Hatha Yoga classes, Hatha Yoga being the first level of Yoga where the emphasis is on the exercise, I had found that although the teachers mostly concentrated on the physical there were often inserts at times during the class of the spiritual aspects which have Hindu or pre-Hindu roots. It may be possible to separate the two but in practice this doesn't necessarily happen. The aim of Yoga is to involve body and spirit and to grow beyond the practice of it being purely physical. I felt it was tragic that the Christian community has not widely developed similar practices which have substantial benefits. One of the main reasons for this was because of the Greek philosophy accepted into the early church which regarded the body as inferior to mind and spirit. This was in contrast to its Hebrew roots and biblical teaching. There have been Christians, however, who have taught Yoga, giving it a Christian intent. One example of a modern practice is Praise Moves which has put it together with scripture. However, there are Christians who feel doing Yoga or Tai Chi can be spiritually dangerous which was one of my main reasons for developing CaraMayan.

In CaraMayan I have used modern /contemporary dance as the technical base for the movements in the standing meditations along with biblical worship and creative movement to express the meaning of the words. For the Floor Exercise work I have also used movements from Pilates. Where some of these are similar to Yoga movements I have given different names that reflect the biblical image being used. The name CaraMayan derives from two Hebrew words meaning "to bow" and "well", "spring" or "fountain", suggesting that as we move in worship, the movement helps us to be in touch with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and to activate the well of salvation and rivers of living water that Jesus spoke about in John 3 and 7. It aims to combine exercise with scripture in a way that expresses the scripture through movements that image the meaning and at the same time stretch and strengthen systematically different parts of the body. Certain movements such as roll-downs, lunges, side stretches, head and arm movements, footwork, leg lifts, plies and squats appear frequently and systematically, changing in their choreography to express the particular meaning of the scripture. Most of the movements are slow and sustained with a repetition of each movement phrase four times. This, along with emphasis on breathing patterns, helps to focus and slow the participant down into a more meditational state. The movements are all done to music, much of which has been composed specifically for the meditations. Music makes the combination of movement and scripture even more powerful, attractive and therapeutic. It takes practice to

achieve a state where mind, body and spirit are equally involved but it can be achieved with regular repetition. This wholistic practice mirrors what Jesus quotes from Moses in loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk12:30) and Paul's writing in Rom.12:1 "to offer our bodies as living sacrifices ...which is our spiritual worship." This body worship can show itself in practical service but also in our times moving out our love and prayer in creative artistic expression. Below I have outlined the way in which CaraMayan involves the whole person:

#### BODY:

- exercising of each part of the body
- developing stretch, strength and coordination
- Breathing the correct way with the movements

#### MIND:

- Learning the scriptures
- Remembering the movements.
- Checking the way the movements are being done both to best benefit the body and prevent injury and artistically to express the meaning with beauty and accuracy.

#### SOUL:

- Feeling the emotions, meaning and artistry that are expressed in the words and movements.
- Enjoying and responding to the tune, emotions and rhythm of the music.
- Deciding to put the necessary discipline into learning and doing the meditations and carrying through on that decision.

#### SPIRIT

- Using the meditation to open the spirit in praise, prayer and worship
- Receiving the spiritual benefits given in the scripture such as forgiveness, healing, strength, love.

Research is showing the value of movement and music in learning and healing. As believers we know the power and importance of knowing scripture so putting all these together in a wholistic way can have great benefits to body, mind, soul and spirit .