



Vedanta Letters

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Gayatri Mantra

गायत्री मंत्र



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The mantra. The *Gayatri Mantra* is otherwise known as *Savitri Mantra*. The presiding Deity of the mantra is 'Savitri' or 'Savitur' (Lord Sun). This is the most important mantra written in vedic-metre called 'Gayatri', therefore, by tradition this mantra has come to be known as *Gayatri Mantra*.

The *Gayatri Mantra* is said to be one of the oldest of the Divine Vedic Hymns. It is often referred to as the mother of vedas. The *Gayatri Mantra* was given by the sage Vishwamitra (Rigveda, III.62, 10). The *Gayatri Mantra* is written in vedic-metre called 'gayatri'. The gayatri-metre is generally constituted of three lines of eight syllables each. Sometimes, the three lines of a mantra written in gayatri metre, is preceded by *pranava* and *vyahrtis*.

The *Gayatri Mantra* is usually written in the following way:

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः
तत् सवितुर्वरेण्यम् ।
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

which means:

“we meditate upon the auspicious godly light of the Lord Sun; may that heavenly light illuminate our thought flow in our intellect.”

The *Gayatri Mantra* has three distinct parts and the explanation is as follows:

- the first part is the first line consisting of the *pranava* and the *maha vyahrtis* (the *maha vyahrtis* has been added by Yajurveda). The purpose of this part of the mantra is to prepare the seeker's mind for prayer, meditation, and realization. The symbol 'Om' called *pranava*, represents the supreme reality beyond the three worlds of waking, dream, and deep sleep. Bhur bhuvah suvaha — are called the *maha vyahrtis*. They represent the three worlds experienced by a human. In subjective sense they are — waking, dream, and deep sleep; and in objective sense, they are — heaven, earth, and hell;

- the second part consists of the second and third lines. It is directed to intensify the seeker's aspiration or determination to reach the goal of realization;

- the third part is the last line of the mantra. This brings about an attitude of self-surrender. In other words, the stage of no-effort.

Significance of the mantra The *Gayatri Mantra* invokes the Lord Sun, which in turn invokes the Self, the Atman within. The Atman is the illuminator of all perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, just as the Sun is the illuminator of all the world. The *Gayatri Mantra* is an appeal by the seeker to the divine Sun within to emerge out of the cloud of desires and shine forth its resplendent light.

The greatness of the *Gayatri Mantra* lies in its power — the power of mantra and the power of prayer. It is believed that when the power of

prayer is combined with the power of mantra, one is fully equipped with the most effective instrument for the unfoldment of the spiritual potentialities. It is believed that anyone frightened in the dark, is advised to chant the *Gayatri Mantra* to overcome the nervousness of the fright. The congregational japa of the mantra is also believed to help overcome many of the societal problems.

According to the vedic traditions, a boy must be initiated into the *Gayatri Mantra* at a very early age, generally between 6 and 8 years. This ritual is called *Upanayanam* ceremony or *threading* ceremony (now a days, only *Brahmins* follow this ritual). The Guru initiates the boy into spiritual study by giving him the sacred *Gayatri Mantra*. The boy is considered *dwijah*, which means twice born. The first birth of the gross personality is when the physical body emerges from the mother's womb. The second birth now is that of the subtle body when the mind and intellect are fully grown and ready to receive the knowledge of the supreme Reality.

When and how to chant? The *Gayatri Mantra* is chanted generally at each *Sandhya*. There are two *Sandhyas* in a day — dawn and dusk. The word *Sandhya* means the blending point of day and night. According to one's faith, devotion, and convenience, the mantra can be chanted any number of times at each *Sandhya*.

The Veda advises us to chant the mantra both at the dawn and at the dusk, standing in water and facing the Lord Sun. The devotee chanting the mantra is required to carry water in his/her palm and at the end of each mantra japa, he/she must offer that water to the Lord Sun. The offering of the water signifies that the devotee is "going round" in reverence and devotion round the Lord

Sun. The chanting of this mantra with the right understanding of its sacred meaning is believed widely to have the power to dispel all the negative tendencies in the human mind and thereby unfold the supreme Self within. As a rule, the *Gayatri Mantra* should not be chanted after the sunset.

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