

GAYATRI MANTRA

Invocation to the Goddess Gayatri, the Giver of Light

OM (1)

BHUR BHUVAHA SWAHA (2)

TAT SAVITUR VARENYAM (3)

BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHİ (4)

DHIYO YONAHİ PRACHODAYAT (5)

Translation:

OM. Let us meditate on the adorable Sun, the radiant Source of all Light; may it, thereby, awaken our understanding and spiritual perception on all three planes - physical, vital and mental - and beyond.

Word Meanings:

<i>OM</i>	- the Transcendental; symbol of the Primordial vibration out of which all manifestation, including this embodiment which we call 'I', arises. ¹
<i>bhur</i>	- the physical or material plane.
<i>bhuvaha</i>	- the vital, energetic, or even spacious, plane.
<i>swaha</i>	- the mental, psychic or heavenly plane.
<i>tat</i>	- That; Reality; Brahman; the Absolute; Paramatma; underlying Intelligence.
<i>savitur</i>	- the sun; which can refer both to the physical sun in the sky which nourishes our physical body and to the <i>Atma</i> (Consciousness) which sustains us as intelligent, creative beings. In any case, we can pay our respects to both aspects of Reality which allow us to exist. In the context of the Gayatri Mantra, the sun refers to <i>Atma</i> since it is this Intelligence which can awaken us to a wider dimension of existence and understanding.
<i>varenyam</i>	- most excellent, adorable; fit to be worshipped.
<i>bhargo</i>	- light; radiance; the inner light which bestows wisdom.
<i>devasya</i>	- Divine; the Ineffable.
<i>dhimahi</i>	- may we meditate upon. [Note: <i>dhimahi</i> is plural, not singular which implies that the person chanting is asking for the spiritual perception to be bestowed on all beings, not just on him or herself. Prayers are often selfish; here Gayatri is being chanted for the benefit of all.]
<i>dhiyo</i>	- buddhi (the Third Eye); the mental faculty which allows the flow of Awareness and intuitive perception.
<i>yo</i>	- which
<i>naha</i>	- our

¹ See previous article in this chapter.

prachodayat - enlighten; awaken.

Evolution of the Mantra:

The Gayatri mantra evolved over time.

The oldest form is called Brahma Gayatri (indicating that it is the root form) and comprises lines 3, 4 and 5 (as indicated). It is given in the *Rig Veda* (mandala 3, hymn 62, verse 10) and also found in the *Yajur (Shukla), Sama* and *Arthava Vedas*.²

Line 2 was added later and means ‘*physical, vital and mental*’ or ‘*the earthly, intermediate and heavenly planes*’ or even ‘*the material, spacious and psychic*’. This form is known as the Vishvamitra Gayatri, after the sage Vishvamitra who is said to have first realised the Gayatri Mantra. It means we bring our aspiration on to all levels of our existence.

By tradition, the Gayatri is preceded by OM. This indicates that the practitioner is opening up to the Transcendental, symbolised by Om.

Meaning of Gayatri

The Sanskrit word *gayatri* is a particular metre or rhythm used when chanting Sanskrit mantras. It is also the name of the Goddess *Gayatri* (Sanskrit, *Gayatri Devi*), also known as *Savitri*, which symbolises the energy of the sun which sustains life on earth. (The Goddesses in the Hindu pantheon symbolise different aspects of the world we live in; for example, *Kali* represents time and the energy which orchestrates death). The Goddess Gayatri also symbolises the inner Light by which our understanding can be illuminated so that we may gain a wider, more meaningful vision of existence and our place in it³.

Gayatri in the Scriptures

The Gayatri is known as the Mother of the Vedas; firstly, because it represents the inspiration behind the writing of the Vedas, and secondly, because with practice it can bring about the experience of *veda* - revealed knowledge, insight, or super-sensory perception.

Moreover, it is said that the Gayatri contains the essence of the teachings of the Vedas and indeed all revealed and sacred texts. In turn, the essence of Gayatri is said to be contained in the mantra OM, which in turn is the expression of underlying Consciousness.

Besides those previously mentioned, Gayatri is referred to in a vast number of texts. Some of the most ancient Upanishads – including the *Brihadaranyaka*, *Chhandogya* and *Swetashwata* – explain its meaning and importance. It is also explained in some of the Tantras such as the *Gayatri* and *Sharada Tilaka Tantras*.

Practice

Gayatri can be considered as a concrete expression of our aspiration to go deeper. It can be used as a focal point for meditation, as a prayer (expression of devotion) and as a *sankalpa* (vow). It is an important part of Yoga.

According to tradition, the Gayatri should be chanted during three periods of each day known as the *sandhya* – that is, between night and day (dawn), between morning and

² See Glossary.

³ For more information on Gayatri, we suggest you refer to the two books given in the Selected Reading List for this chapter.

afternoon (midday) and between day and night (dusk). Regular practice can awaken the buddhi, and thereby Awareness.

Benefits

Chanting the Gayatri calms the mind and emotions and prepares us for meditation. It helps to awaken the buddhi – which allows the awakening of Awareness, subtle perception and the capacity to SEE behind the scenes. It initiates us into *nivritti marga* – the ‘path of return’ which allows us to realise our spiritual Source.

May our practice lead to inner awakening.

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