

Gayathri, the Vedasaara:

Gayathri Mantra, the universal prayer;
Sandhya Vandanam and Upanayanam



Compiled By
Dr. T Gowri

Tumuluru Prabha and Krishna Murty

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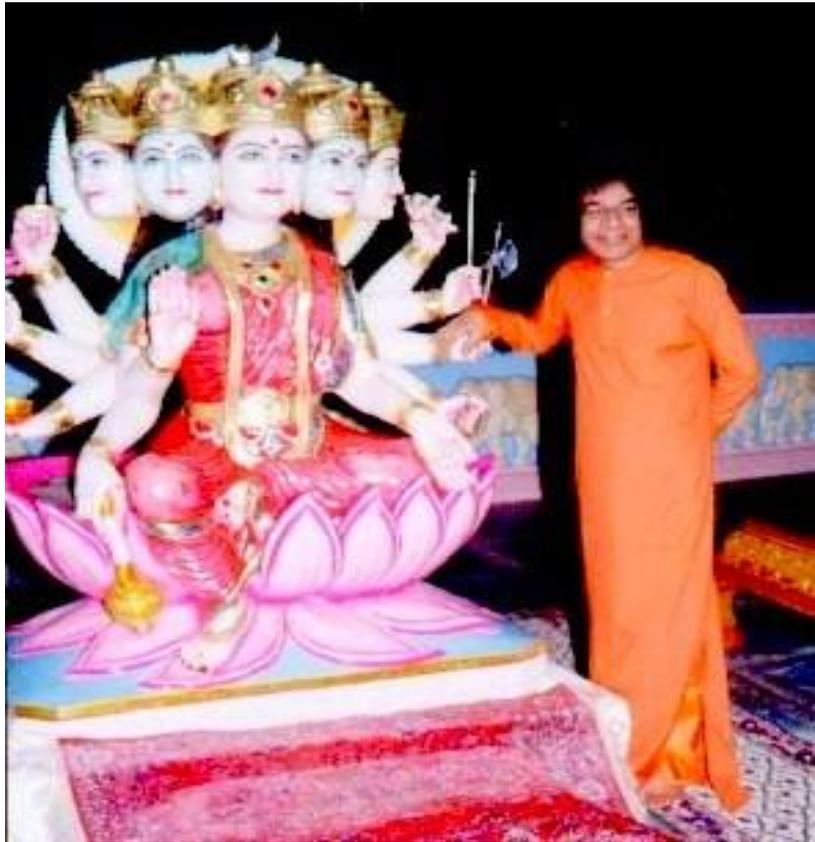


Table of Contents

Gayathri Mantram, the Universal Prayer	11
<i>Gayathri Mantra - Meaning</i>	<i>12</i>
Word for Word Meaning of the Gayathri Mantra	12
<i>Origin, Benefits and Chanting of the Gayathri Mantra</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Gayathri Mantra - Long Form and Praanayama:</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Gayathri Mantra - Mantra or Prayer?</i>	<i>15</i>
Deeper Meaning of Major 4 Parts of Mantra:	16
Aum Bhur Bhuvah Swah	16
1. Aum - the Supreme name of God	16
2. Bhur	16
3. Bhuvah	17
4. Suvah	17
Tat Savitur Varenyam	18
5. Tat	18
6. Sa-Vi-Tur	19
7. Va-Re-Ny-Am	20
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi	20
8. Bhar-Go	21
9. De-Vas-Ya	21
10. Dhi-Ma-Hi	22
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat	22
11. Dhi-Yo	23
12. Yo	24
13. Nah	24
14. Pra-Cho-Da-Yat	24
<i>Gayathri, the Universal prayer</i>	<i>25</i>
Who is Gayathri?	31
<i>Gayathri Devi, the Goddess:</i>	<i>31</i>

5 heads:.....	32
10 hands and weapons:.....	33
Significance behind the five faces:	34
Significance of Ten eyes:.....	34
Significance of Ten hands:	34
Q.1. Why is an idol or picture used for worship of God, who is formless? Are there more than one Gayathri?	35
Q.2. Why is Gayathri visualized as a young woman with its peculiar ornaments?	36
Q.3. In what way the twenty-four emanations of Divine Mother (Matrikas) represent Gayathri?.....	37
Q.4. Are Gayathri and Savitri different?.....	37
Q.5. What are the specific divine emanations associatedwith Gayathri and Savitri?.....	38
Q.6. Why is the Primordial Divine Energy (Gayathri) represented in so many forms (idols)?	38
Q.7. Why is Gayathri represented as a deity with fivefaces?	39
Q.8. Why is Gayathri known as Tripada- Trinity ?	40
Q.9. Why is Gayathri designated as Vedmata, Devmataand Vishwamata? 41	
Q.10. What is the relationship between Gayathri Mantraand other powers of God?.....	42
Q.11. What is Savita?	43
Q.12. Why is Gayathri Upasana considered supremeas compared to other forms of worship?	43
Q.13. What are the basic aims of Gayathri Sadhana?.....	44
Q.14. What is the relevance of Gayathri Upasana inthe modern society? 44	
<i>Four Forms of Worship of Gayathri:</i>	<i>45</i>
Viswamitra and Gayathri Mantra.....	48
Viswamitra handed over Gayathri Mantra to posterity	48
Powers of the Gayathri Mantra:.....	48
Rama and Lakshmana annihilated the rakshasas with the power of mantras taught to them by Sage Viswamitra.....	50
Gayathri mantra is addressed to the energy of the Sun, the Surya.	50
Upanayanam and Sandhya Vandanam	52

<i>Gayathri initiation gives one the Second Birth</i>	52
Four stages of refinement	53
Sandhya Kaalam.....	54
Redemptive Power of the <i>Gayathri Mantra</i>	56
<i>Upanayana</i>	57
Brahmopadesam	59
<i>Yagnopaveetham</i>	59
Who should wear Yagnopaveetham?	61
How many Yagnopaveethas one should wear?.....	61
What should be its length?.....	61
Who are the Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham?.....	62
How to wear & remove Yagnopaveetham?.....	62
When to Change the Yagnopaveetham?	62
Composition	63
Arithmetic of number “96”	64
Significance of Nine layers.....	64
Brahma Granthi	64
Yagnopaveetha dhaarana Manthra	65
Yagnopaveetha Visarjana	65
Yagnopaveetha Visarjana Manthra	65
The Ritual of Upanayanam	67
<i>Introduction: Samskara</i>	72
Upanayana Ceremony Steps.....	74
Devatha Prarthana	74
Gatika Sthapan	74
Ganapthi Puja & Punyahvachan	74
Udada Murthu	74
Matru Bojan	75
Vastrajin Upaveet Mekhaladi Puja	76
Ajin Dharana.....	76
Yajnopavita Dharana.....	76
Pradhan Homa	76
Surya Darshana	76
Brhamchari Agnikaryam.....	77
Savitri Upadesha (Gayathri Upadesha)	77
Mekhala Bandan	77

Danda Dharana..... 77
Matrabiksha 78
Bramchari Upadesha 78

Bibliography 79

Gayathri Mantram, the Universal Prayer

The Gayathri Mantra is a highly revered mantra of the Vedic tradition. Just like all the Vedic Mantras, the Gayathri Mantra is considered not to have an author and like all other mantras is believed to have been revealed to a Brahmarshi, in this case Brahmarshi Vishvamitra. This is a Vedic Sanskrit verse from a hymn of the Rigveda. Gayathri is the name of the meter in which the verse is composed. The most interesting aspect of the mantra is that the mantra is considered to be not different from the divine entity that forms the content of the mantra. Thus the name of the divine entity contained in the mantra is also Gayathri. In other words, the Gayathri mantra is not just a means of worship but is an object of worship in itself. The word 'Gayathri' is used both in reference to the Gayathri Mantra as an object of worship and in reference to the divine entity described in the mantra. It is in this sense of the Gayathri Mantra being an object of worship that the Mantra is personified into a goddess.

As the verse can be interpreted to invoke the deva Savitr, it is often called Sāvitrī mantra. Depending on how Savitri is interpreted, this mantra can be seen as connected to Sun Worship, Yoga, Tantra and Mother Goddess. (From Wikipedia)

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः ।

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं (तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं) ।

भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

"Aum Bhurbhuvah Suvah

tat savitur varenyam led

Bhargo devasya dhimahi

dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat".

Gayathri Mantra - Meaning

Gayathri Mantra (the mother of the vedas), the foremost mantra in hinduism and hindu beliefs, inspires wisdom. Its meaning is that "May the Almighty God illuminate our intellect to lead us along the righteous path". The mantra is also a prayer to the "giver of light and life" - the sun (savitur).

Oh God! Thou art the Giver of Life,

Remover of pain and sorrow,

The Bestower of happiness,

Oh! Creator of the Universe,

May we receive thy supreme sin-destroying light,

May Thou guide our intellect in the right direction.

Word for Word Meaning of the Gayathri Mantra

Aum = Brahma ;

bhur = embodiment of vital spiritual energy(pran) ;

Bhuvah = destroyer of sufferings ;

suvaha = embodiment of happiness ;

tat = that ;
savitur = bright like sun ;
varenyam = best choicest ;
bhargo = destroyer of sins ;
devasya = divine ;

These first nine words describe the glory of God

dhimahi = may imbibe ; pertains to meditation

dhiyo = intellect ;

yo = who ;

naha = our ;

prachodayat = may inspire!

"dhiyo yo na prachodayat" is a prayer to God

Hence the Gayathri is unique in that it embodies the three concepts of *stotra* (singing the praise and glory of God), *dhyaana* (meditation) and *praarthana* (prayer).

The prayer form of the Gayathri be used to pray to Lord Shiva is called Rudra Gayathri. Similarly, one may sing Ganesha Gayathri for Lord Ganesha, Hanuman Gayathri for Lord Hanuman, and Saraswati Gayathri for Goddess Saraswati.

Origin, Benefits and Chanting of the Gayathri Mantra

The Vedas are widely considered to be the source of all true knowledge, the word "Veda" itself meaning "Knowledge". Gayathri Devi also gave to mankind the "Gayathri Mantra", also known as the "Guru Mantra" or the "Savitri Mantra". It is one of the oldest mantras, and generally thought of as being amongst the highest and most powerful mantras of all. This mantra is therefore often

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

referred to as "the Mother of the Vedas". In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna had proclaimed to Arjuna - "Among all the mantras, I am the Gayathri".

Rishis selected the words of the Gayathri Mantra and arranged them so that they not only convey meaning but also create specific power of righteous wisdom through their utterance. The ideal times for chanting the mantra are three times a day - at dawn, mid-day, and at dusk. These times are known as the three sandhyas - morning, mid-day and evening. The maximum benefit of chanting the mantra is said to be obtained by chanting it 108 times. However, one may chant it for 3, 9, or 18 times when pressed for time. The syllables of the mantra are said to positively affect all the chakras or energy centres in the human body - hence, proper pronunciation and enunciation are very important.

Chanting of Gayathri Mantra removes all obstacles in our path to increased wisdom and spiritual growth and development. The teachings and powers incorporated in the Gayathri Mantra fulfill this purpose. Righteous wisdom starts emerging soon after Japa (recitation) of the Gayathri Mantra is performed. Sathya Sai Baba teaches that the Gayathri Mantra "will protect you from harm wherever you are, make your intellect shine, improve your power of speech, and dispel the darkness of ignorance (Dhiyoyonah prachodayaath)".

Gayathri Mantra - Long Form and Praanayama:

The Upanisads (secret texts) of Hinduism contain several references to the Gayathri Mantra. The complete form (or long form) of the Gayathri Mantra contains an invocation to the seven spheres,

followed by the traditional 24-syllable mantra that is most commonly chanted. The final part of the mantra is an invocation to the Goddess of light to illuminate our path as we move towards higher consciousness.

AUM bhUH, AUM bhuvaH, AUM svaH, AUM mahaH
AUM janaH, AUM tapaH, AUM satyam
AUM tatsaviturvarenyM bhargo devasya dhImahi
dhIyo yo nH prachodayAt.h.
AUM Apo jyotiH rasomRRitaM
brahma bhUR bhuvaH svar AUM..

AUM, the primordial sound, resides in all elements of the universe. It permeates the earth (-bhUH), water (-bhuvaH), fire (-svaH), air (-mahaH), ether (-janaH), intelligence (-tapaH) and consciousness (-satyam). We pay homage to Gayathri, the one who shines like the sun (tat savitur), the one who destroys all our sins through her everlasting and effulgent light. Dear Goddess Gayathri, please illuminate our path towards our higher consciousness and lead us to our true purpose in life. Please shine your light (-jyotiH) in our path so we may partake of the everlasting nectar (rasomRRitaM) of brahman while chanting the primordial sound, *Aum!*

Gayathri Mantra - Mantra or Prayer?

The Gayathri Mantra occupies a unique place in that it has both the power of mantra and of prarthana (prayer). It is important then in considering the Gayathri Mantra to distinguish the difference between these two deceptively similar words.

A mantra may be articulate or inarticulate, or a combination of them, as with *Aum*. It has an inherent power, known as "Mantra shakti", which has a positive influence not due to any philosophical meaning behind the mantra, but simply due to its utterance alone.

A prayer on the other hand does have a philosophical meaning behind it, and it is generally through this meaning that the prayer or prarthana has its power. Since this meaning can be easily understood, the method of prarthana is generally the form of worship used by most people.

The Gayathri, or Guru Mantra possesses both the power of mantra and the power of prarthana, and thus has both an intrinsic power (ie "*Mantra Shakti*"), through its mere utterance alone, and also an instrumental power (ie "*Prarthana Shakti*"), which is derived from the understanding of its meaning and philosophical significance. Hence, the repeated and correct chanting of the Gayathri Mantra, with proper understanding of its meaning, is believed to be of the greatest good to the individual. (*Vatika Shakti Peeth*)

Deeper Meaning of Major 4 Parts of Mantra:

Aum Bhur Bhuvah Swah

1. Aum - the Supreme name of God.

Bhur Bhuvah Swah. These three words collectively are known as the "Mahavyahriti". They express the nature of God, and demonstrate his inherent qualities.

2. Bhur

Firstly, the word *Bhur* implies existence. God is self-existent and independent of all. He is eternal and unchanging. Without beginning and without end, God exists as a continuous, permanent,

constant entity. Secondly, the word Bhur can also mean the Earth, on which we are born and sustained. God is the provider of all, and it is through His divine will that we are blessed with all that we require to maintain us through our lives. Finally, Bhur signifies Prana, or life (literally, breathe). God is That which gives life to all. Whilst He is independent of all, all are dependent on Him. It is God who has given us life, God who maintains us throughout our lives, and God alone who has the ability to take away our life, when He so chooses. The only permanent entity, all others are subject to His own will

3. Bhuvah

Bhuvah describes the absolute Consciousness of God. God is self-Conscious as well as being Conscious of all else, and thus is able to control and govern the Universe. Also, the word Bhuvah relates to God's relationship with the celestial world. It denotes God's greatness - greater than the sky and space, He is boundless and unlimited. Finally, Bhuvah is also indicative of God's role as the remover of all pain and sufferings (Aapaana). We see pain and sorrow all around us. However, through supplication to God, we can be freed from that pain and hardship. God Himself is devoid of any pain. Though He is Conscious of all, and is thus aware of pain, it does not affect Him. It is our own ignorance that makes us susceptible to the effects of Maya, or illusion, which causes us to feel pain. Through true devotion to God, we can be freed from the clutches of Maya, and thus be rid of pain and sorrow.

4. Suvah

Suvah indicates the all-pervading nature of God. He is omnipresent and pervades the entire multi-formed Universe. Without Form Himself, He is able to manifest Himself through the medium of the

physical world, and is thus present in each and every physical entity. In this way, God is able to interact with the Universe created by Him, and thus sustain and control it, ensuring its smooth and proper running and function.

Also, Suvah symbolizes God's bliss. All but God experience pain, suffering and sorrow. Devoid of all such things, God alone is able to experience supreme bliss. Happiness as experienced by humans is temporary, a transient state of mental satisfaction, which soon dissolves back into the mire of worldly troubles. Perfect, and without any form of deficiency, God alone experiences true bliss, permanent and unaffected by worldly pains and woes. One who realizes God is able to join in this bliss, and thus God is able to impart true happiness to those who establish oneness with that Supreme Divinity.

The Mahavyahriti can be summed up by comparison to the word Aum itself, and through this comparison to the tripartite structure, can be compared to the essential nature of God, which differentiates Him from the other two entities recognized in that structure (namely, matter and soul), in the same way as the comparison between the three parts of the word Satchidananda, another name also used to describe God...

- Bhur Prana Earth Sat Existence
- Bhuvah Apana Sky Chit Consciousness
- Suvah Vyana Heaven Ananda Bliss

Tat Savitur Varenyam

5. Tat

Literally, this word means "that", being used in Sanskrit to denote the third person. It is also mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita by Sri

Krishna Himself, where He implies the selfless nature of the word. Being used in the third person, the word has implicit in it an idea of selflessness. Sri Krishna uses it to imply the selfless nature of charity (charity, or a gift, being used as an analogy for worship, in the form of action, implying that action should be preformed without regard to its fruits, but simply out of devotion and sense of duty, or Dharma). Tat then is used here in the Gayathri Mantra to indicate that the worshipper is referring to [that] God, and that the praise being offered to God in the prayer is purely directed towards Him, without thought of gaining any personal benefit from that praise.

6. Sa-Vi-Tur

Savita, from which Savitur is derived, is another name of God, this being the reason that the Gayathri Mantra is often known as the Savitri Mantra. The implication of Savita is of God's status as the fountain, the source of all things. It is through His Divine Grace that the Universe exists, and so this word sums up the Mahavyahriti, by describing God's ability to create the Universe and sustain it, as well as, at the right time, bring about its dissolution.

Savita is also indicative of God's gift to mankind. Humans also have, in limited amount, the power, or shakti, of Savita. This shakti acts as an impetus in humans, and brings about the requirement for them to do something. They cannot sit idle, and are constantly searching for something to do. This is what is commonly known as the "creative urge". It is through this shakti that mankind has created art, and it is through this shakti also that scientific advances are made. The gift of Savita also gives creatures the ability of

procreation. Hence, Savita can be thought of as meaning Father (or Mother) also.

Finally, it is the power of Savita that enables mankind to distinguish right from wrong, and vice from virtue. Through this ability, we are able to in some part direct our own selves, and thus, Savita imparts to us a certain self-guiding ability. Thus, by using this word in the mantra, we demonstrate that we are making efforts ourselves also, since God will not help us unless we are willing to help ourselves.

7. Va-Re-Ny-Am

Varenyam signifies our acceptance of God, and can be translated as meaning "Who is worthy". Ever ready to obtain all the material riches of the world, more often than not, they are a disappointment once they have been achieved. God however is the one who, once realized and achieved, has the ability to truly satisfy. We therefore accept Him as the Highest reality, and it is to Him that we dedicate our efforts.

Varenyam can also be interpreted as signifying one who is eligible. We have chosen Him to be our Leader and our Guide. We place our all into His hands, and accept Him regardless of anything else. We place no conditions on this acceptance, as it is all out of sheer devotion.

Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi

This triplet is a further description of the attributes and qualities of God - His functional and instrumental qualities, rather than intrinsic qualities - and through those qualities, His relationship to us.

8. Bhar-Go

Bhargo is taken to signify the Glorious Light that is God's love and power. It indicates His complete purity - being absolutely pure Himself, God also has the ability to purify those that come into contact with Him. Thus, *Bhargo* is indicative of God's power to purify, and to destroy all sins and afflictions. In the same way as a metal ore placed into a fire will yield the pure metal, by merging with God, by realizing His Divine Form and establishing unity and oneness with Him, we can cleanse ourselves and be made pure by His Grace.

Though the soul, being itself Divine in nature, possesses that Light, it lacks luster, having been made impure by the sins and vices, which are a result of the darkness of Maya. By removing the veil of Maya, and cleansing our soul, God can enable the soul to realize its true, Divine self, and thus purify it.

9. De-Vas-Ya

The word *Deva*, from which this word is derived, has been translated by different people in many different ways. It is generally thought of as meaning simply "God". However, its meaning is more complex than that.

Deva, which forms the root of the words "Devata" and "Devi", means "quality" or "attribute", and can be thought of as another word for "Guna". Thus, the various forms of God are given this name, as each of those forms is related to a specific quality and function (for example, Brahma has the quality of Creation, Kamadeva has the quality of love, etc.). Also, *Deva* is thus used to describe anyone who is considered to possess a special quality.

Since Deva is symbolic of the individual qualities of God, the word demonstrates the inherent oneness of those different Forms, and thus the use of this word can be taken as describing the fundamental unity of God. Thus we see that here, we reaffirm that central belief in the Hindu Dharma that "Ekam sat viprah bahudah vadanti" (Truth, or God, is one, but wise men call Him/It by different names).

Thus, Deva is indicative of the various multifaceted entity that is the absolute Personality of God. It describes in one word all the functions, roles and different attributes of God, and symbolizes therefore his absolutely essential nature - without God, nothing can exist.

10. Dhi-Ma-Hi

Meaning to meditate and focus our mind on God. Meditation on God implies that we remove all other thoughts from our mind, since thoughts of the world render our mind impure, and thus we are unable to conceptualize the absolute purity of God. We must be able to concentrate, and direct our mental energies towards the task in hand - which is communion with God.

Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat

Prayer is carried out for four main reasons:

- to praise and glorify God;
- to thank God;
- to ask forgiveness from God;
- or to make a request from God.

Having carried out the other three parts (praise of His greatness, thanks for His generosity in Creation and maintaining us through

our lives, and forgiveness by demonstrating our awareness of our own impurity, which we have realized is present and must be cleansed through contact with God), this part is now our request from God. Since our soul is the Light of Life within us, and that acts on our body via the medium of the brain, we ask God to make this contact pure and righteous. The soul is of course inherently pure, being itself Divine in nature. The body is under the complete control of the mind. The link is the mind, which is affected not only by the soul, but also the outside world. We ask in these four words that God help us to improve our intellect, and guide it towards what is right.

11. Dhi-Yo

Sanskrit for "intellect", this is the essence of this part of the Gayathri Mantra. Having firmly set God in our hearts, we now must try to emphasize His presence and influence on our mind and intellect.

Material prosperity holds no true meaning for the person who is truly devoted to God. Pain and suffering are of no consequence to him as, touched by God, he is imbued with God's own Divine Bliss, and all worldly sorrows pale to nothingness in comparison. However, still the individual must live in the world. Thus, it is important that the person's intellect remains focussed on serving God, and that it is able, through the medium of the body, to serve God to the best of its ability.

Physical objects can be obtained very easily, if one is intelligent enough to know how to go about it. Intellect however cannot be obtained, but must be there from the very first. It is by use of this intellect, in fact, that one is able to cultivate all other qualities

(building of wealth, "success" in life (in material terms), physical fitness, etc.) Thus, intellect is the key to all else in life, and as such, it is the most important possession. We ask God in the Gayathri Mantra to gift us with the highest intellect, and to help us by showing us the way to use that intellect.

12. Yo

Meaning "Who" or "That", *Yo* signifies yet again that it is not to anyone else that we direct these prayers, but to God alone. Only God is worthy of the highest adoration, only God is perfect and free from all defects. It is That God to Whom we offer these prayers.

13. Nah

Nah means "Ours", and signifies the selflessness of the request we make of God in this part of the Gayathri Mantra. We offer this prayer, and make the request of God, not simply for ourselves, but for the whole of humanity. We seek the uplift of the whole of society. Hindu philosophy has since the beginning recognized the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" - "The whole world is one big family". Thus, we pray not only for ourselves, but for each and every member of that great family, that we may all benefit from the greatness and generosity of the All-loving God.

14. Pra-Cho-Da-Yat

Prachodayat, the final word of the Gayathri Mantra, rounds off the whole mantra, and completes the request we make of God in this final part. This word is a request from God, in which we ask Him for Guidance, and Inspiration. We ask that, by showing us His Divine and Glorious Light (*Bhargo*), He remove the darkness of Maya from our paths, that we are able to see the way, and in this manner, we ask Him to direct our energies in the right way, guiding

us through the chaos of this world, to find sanctuary in the tranquility and peace of God Himself, the root of all Happiness, and the source of true Bliss. (*Acharya Shree Shankar - International Foundation*)

Gayathri, the Universal prayer

The Gayathri (Vedic prayer to illuminate the intellect) is the Universal prayer enshrined in the Vedas (Divine Knowledge), the most ancient scriptures of man. It is addressed to the Immanent and Transcendent Divine which has been given the name 'Savitha,' meaning 'that from which all this is born.' The Gayathri may be considered as having three parts --- (i) Praise (ii) Meditation (iii) Prayer. First the Divine is praised, then it is meditated upon in reverence and finally an appeal is made to the Divine to awaken and strengthen the intellect, the discriminating faculty of man.

The Gayathri is considered as Vedasaara---"the essence of the Vedas." Veda means knowledge, and this prayer fosters and sharpens the knowledge-yielding faculty. As a matter of fact the four Mahaavaakyas or 'core-declarations' enshrined in the four Vedas are implied in this Gayathri mantra.

Gayathri is a treasure you must guard throughout your lives. If you have not caught the sounds of the mantra correctly now, learn it from your parents or from your family priest. Perhaps the others may not know the Gayathri themselves or they might have forgotten it through culpable neglect. Then I would ask them to learn it from you. Never give up the Gayathri; you may give up or ignore any other mantra but you should recite the Gayathri at least a few times a day. It will protect you from harm wherever you are---

travelling, working or at home. Westerners have investigated the vibrations produced by this mantra and have found that when it is recited with the correct accent as laid down in the Vedas, the atmosphere around becomes visibly illumined. So Brahmaprakaasha, the effulgence of divine will descend on you and illumine your intellect and light your path when this mantra is chanted. Gayathri is Annapurna, the Mother, the sustaining Force that animates all life. So do not neglect it. Elders and priests, mantra, have given it the custodians of this the go-by. But you, as Inheritors and guardians of the great culture of this country, have a great responsibility in preserving it and demonstrating its efficacy and worth.(SSS Vol.13)

“Gaayantham thraayathe ithi Gayathri” – Because it protects the one who recites it, it is called Gayathri. When Gayathri acts as protector of the life forces, she is known as Saavithree. Saavithree is known in the puraanic story as the devoted wife who brought back to life her husband, Sathyavan. Saavithree is the presiding deity of the five praanas. She protects those who lead a life of Truth. This is the inner meaning.

When one’s intelligence and intuition are developed by the recitation of the Mantra, the activating deity is Gayathri. When one’s speech is protected, the deity is called Saraswathee. Because of the protective roles of Saavithree, Saraswathee and Gayathri, in relation to life, speech and the intellect, Gayathri is described as *“Sarvadhevathaa-swarupini”*- the embodiment of all goddesses. (SSS Vol.16)

through meditating on the Gaayathri, one can become aware of the inner motivating principle of the five elements, the five vital airs in the human body and the five sheaths which encase Aathma. Just as there are three basic energies that govern manPhysical, the metaphysical and the psychical, the Aadhi-bhowthik, Aadhi –daivik and the Aadhi -aathmic, Gaayathri has three facts: Gaayathri, Saavithri, and Saraswathi. Gaayathri fosters the Metaphysical, Saavithri, the physical and Saraswathi, the psychical. These three Karanas or instruments have to be cleansed and sublimated so that man can realize the goal of life. Through the recital of Gaayathri manthra and meditation thereon, this great task can be achieved. (SSS Vol. 15)

The Gayathri Mantra is the royal road to Divinity. There is no fixed time or regulation for reciting it. Nevertheless, the young Brahmacharis (celibates) would do well to recite it during the morning Sandhyaa and evening Sandhyaa (worship during dawn and twilight hours) to derive the greatest benefit. However because the Divine is beyond time and space, any time, any place is appropriate for repeating God's name. The Bhagavatha declares: "Sarvadhaa, Sarvathra, Sarvakaaleshu Harichintanam"- "Contemplate on God always, at all places and at all times." You must learn to think of God in whatever you see, whatever you do and whatever you touch. You must realise that you are playing temporary roles on the cosmic stage. You must get back to your true Divine Selves when the play is over. By regularly reciting the Gayathri, you must purify your lives and be an example to the world in righteous living. This is my benediction for you. (SSS Vol.16, pp. 45-46)

Embodiments of Divine Atma, nothing is greater than love. In the Gayathri Mantra, Om Bhur Bhuvah Suvah means unity of body, mind, and soul. Tat Savitur Varenyam means that we should worship. What happens when we worship? Bhargo means darkness of ignorance. Dhimahi means remove from my intellect. Therefore Bhargo devasya dhimahi means that my intellect is full of the darkness of ignorance; hence, make it shine with wisdom. Dhiyo yonah prachodayaat means just like ten million brilliant suns shining forth dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Thus, just as the brilliance of the sun dispels darkness, so also ignorance, when illumined by the intellect, vanishes.

Discover the Unity that underlies the Diversity

On the basis of differences in behaviour, the *antahkarana* (inner-psyche) has been accorded four names. When it is concerned with thoughts, it is called *manas* (mind). When it is restless and wavering it is called *chiththa* (consciousness). When it is concerned with enquiry and understanding, it is called *buddhi* (intellect). When it is associated with the sense of "mine" (possessiveness), it is called *ahamkaara* (egoism). Why are four different names and attributes given to one and the same entity (the *Antahkarana*)? The mind is pre-occupied with distinctions and differences. The *buddhi* is concerned with oneness and reveals the Unity that underlies the diversity. All our efforts must be directed towards discovering the Unity that underlies the diversity rather than seeking to divide the One into the many.

*The Gayathri Mantra*¹ (Vedhic prayer to illuminate the intelligence) is a sacred *Mantra* which demonstrates the unity that underlies manifoldness in creation. It is through the recognition of this unity that we can understand the multiplicity. Clay is one and the same

¹ The spreading of *Vishnu tathwam* (nature of Vishnu) is known as *Trivikrama tathwam* (nature of Vishnu expanding to the three worlds). The aspect of *Trivikrama tathwam* is represented by the *Gayatri mantra*: '*Bhur Bhuvaha.*' The *Bhuloka Bhularloka* and *Suvarloka* constitute the *Trivikrama tathwam*. It is wrong to conceive of these three *lokas* (worlds) as existing one on top of the other and thus capable of being reached by climbing a ladder, as it were. In fact the three *lokas* are intertwined with each other and one exists within the other.

Real meaning of the 'three worlds'

The real meaning of this kind of geometrical configuration of the three *lokas* is that the *pancha Indriya*, *pancha bhuthas* and *pancha koshas* (five senses, elements and sheaths) aspects of man's *deha* (body), is *Bhuloka*; the aspect of *prana Shakti* or *manas tathwam* is *Bhularloka*; and the microscopic state of Anandam (bliss) represents *Suvarloka*. So it can be said that the three worlds, *Bhuloka*, *Bhularloka* and *Suvarloka*, are nothing but the *deha* thathwa, *manas* thathwa and *Ananda thathwa* (essential nature of body, mind and bliss) respectively and the totality of these three represents the *Trivikrama thathwa*. Again, these three aspects of *Trivikrama thathwa* can be understood in terms of the three states of an individual, viz., the one you think you are, the one others think you are and the one you really are. Hence only by proper *sadhana* can one transcend from *Bhuloka* through *Bhularloka* to *Suvarloka*. The attainment of *Suvarloka* is known as *moksha* (liberation), and it represents the stage of complete mergeance with the Lord. Since it is a state where the aspect of *moha* (attachment) is made to disintegrate, it is known as *moksha* (*moha+kshyaam, mokshyam*). (SSS Vol.14, pp. 189-190)

thing, though pots of different shapes and sizes can be made from it. Gold is one, though gold ornaments can be multifarious. The *Aathma* (Divine Self) is one, though the embodied forms in which it resides may be many. Whatever the colour of the cow, the milk is white always.

There is no object in the world which does not have a form and a name. The Cosmos is made up of things with forms and names. While the forms are subject to constant change, the names remain unchanged. The form may change and even completely disappear but the name remains.

Once we know the name, we can recognise what or whom it represents. In a large gathering, it will not be easy to trace a person merely from the description of his features. But when his name is called, he immediately responds and can be identified. Likewise, through the name of the Lord; the form of the Lord can be visualised. (SSS Vol.16), 17-3-1983

Leadbeater has declared that the correct recital of the Gaayathri Manthra with the orthodox Udhaattha, Anudhaattha and Swaritha, (modulation of the voice and the higher, lower and even accents) can produce experienceable and authentic illumination, whereas incorrect pronunciation and wrong accent result in thickening the darkness! Therefore, instead of scoffing at the disciplines of recitals, meditations, prayers, formulary worship and manthra-utterances, their values have to be accepted and their results tested and confirmed by practice and exercise. (SSS Vol.6)

Who is Gayathri?

Gayathri, the five-faced Goddess, is said to have domain over the five senses or pranas, and protects these five life-forces of those who chant the Gayathri Mantra. In her role as the protector, Gayathri is referred to as Savitri.

Gayathri Devi, the Goddess:

Gayathri is the very source of all Vedas. Gayathri is Stree - embodiment of women. Veda is the mother. When we see all these things, we feel that woman has got a very high place, her birth is something very great and virtuous. The woman has been praised by the Vedas throughout the past and the present. The woman has an exalted place in the various rituals of the ancient times like Vaidika Pooja, Vaidika Upasana and Vaidika Aradhana. (DTB Vol.4, p. 2)

Originally the personification of the mantra, the goddess Gāyatrī is considered the vedamata, the mother of all Vedas and the consort of the God Brahma and also the personification of the all-pervading Parabrahman, the ultimate unchanging reality that lies behind all phenomena. Gayathri Veda Mata is seen by many Hindus to be not just a Goddess, but a portrayal of Brahman himself, in the feminine form. Essentially, the Goddess is seen to combine all the phenomenal attributes of Brahman, including Past, Present and Future as well as the three realms of existence. Goddess Gāyatrī is also worshipped as the Hindu Trimurti combined as one. In Hindu mythology, there is only one creation who can withstand the brilliance of Aditya and that is Gāyatrī. Some also consider her to

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

be the mother of all Gods and the culmination of Lakshmi, Parvati and Sarasvati.

Gayathri mantra is normally chanted thrice a day. Gayathri is the presiding deity of the Morning Prayer and rules over the Rigveda and the garhapatya fire. Every grihasta (householder) was expected to keep 5 or 3 sacred fires (Five fires: ahavaneeya, dakshagni, garhapatya, sawta, aavasadhā) in his house to perform Vedic rituals. Gayathri is typically portrayed as seated on a red lotus, signifying wealth. She appears in either of these forms:

1. Having five heads with the ten eyes looking in the eight directions plus the earth and sky, and ten arms holding all the weapons of Vishnu, symbolizing all her reincarnations.
2. Accompanied by a white swan, holding a book to portray knowledge in one hand and a cure in the other, as the goddess of Education.

5 heads:

She is depicted with five faces representing the pancha pranas /pancha vayus (five lives/winds): prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana, of the five principles/ elements (pancha tatwas) earth, water, air, fire, sky (prithvi, jala, vayu, teja, and aakasha). Another version for 5 heads:

The four heads of Gayathri represent the four Vedas, the fifth head represents the almighty God

Gāyatrī is typically portrayed as seated on a red lotus, signifying wealth. She appears in either of these forms:

- A) Having five heads with the ten eyes looking in the eight directions plus the earth and sky, and ten arms holding all the weapons of Vishnu, symbolizing all her reincarnations.
- B) Accompanied by a white swan, holding a book to portray knowledge in one hand and a cure in the other, as the goddess of Education. Some cases with a rudraksha mala in one hand.

C)

10 hands and weapons:

The following weapons are from Vishnu:

Lotus symbolizes creation (srshti bijam tatha padmam), Discus preservation (chakram sthiti -nibandhanam), Mace disolution (gadha samhara -bijam) and Conch emancipation of the soul from bondage (samkham mukti-nibandhanam)

The plate (kapalam) and pointed weapon (Malu) are taken from lord Siva. One stick (writing tool) is from Brahma. One more lotus, Mann Gayathri represents Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The right hand which shows Abhaya Mudra gives protection. The left hand which points down shows that Her feet are the sole refuge of the individual souls.

Reference 2:

The Gayathri mantra has as its presiding deity, Savita (the divine originator), physically represented by the Sun, this mantra is also known as the Savitri mantra. The transcendental power of the mantra is brought out in the vivid personification of the goddess Gayathri. She is invoked in the dhyana part of worship as follows :

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

"Mukta-vidruma - hema-nila-dhavala-chayair mukhair-tryakshnaih,
Yuktam indu-nibadha-ratna-makutam tatvarthavarnatmikam
Gayathrim varadabhayankusa-kasam subhram-kapalam gadam
Sankham chakram atha aravindayugalam hastair vahantim bhaje"

I pray to the Gayathri, her five faces tinged with shades of pearl, coral, gold, sapphire, and white, whose crown studded with precious stones is topped by the moon, the embodiment of utterances signifying the Supreme Truth, who wields the goad, the whip, the white skull, the mace, the conch and the discus (in six of her hands), and holding a pair of lotuses in each hand, displays with the other two the mudras conferring boons and fearlessness.' (<http://www.harekrsna.com/philosophy/associates/demigods/Gayat hri.htm>)

Reference 3:

Significance behind the five faces:

A darshan of these five faces of Gayathri idol is capable of removing Five Great Sins we have committed if any. While this darshan removes great sins committed by the aspirant , it grants at the same time Five types of Divine grace from Lord Shiva

Significance of Ten eyes:

The eyes of Gayathri are watching at the ten directions (8 directions + sky and Earth) for performing Dushtanigraha (killing bad people) and Sishtaparipaalana (protecting the good)

Significance of Ten hands:

The first five hands signify five types of Sukhas(comforts) obtainable from this earth and the other five hands signify five

types of Divine BLISS obtainable from the Divine and Spiritual lokas.

(<https://in.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20071106071550AAjRe7X>) By C. Sri Vidya Rajagopalan

Q.1. Why is an idol or picture used for worship of God, who is formless? Are there more than one Gayathri?

Ans. It is an oft-repeated question. It should be understood that basic purpose of worship is meditation and contemplation; and name and form are essential for meditation. Everywhere people coordinate feelings and symbols in order to refine their sentiments. Every nation has its own national flag. Its citizens pay reverence to the national flag and get infuriated when it is insulted. Even communists, who consider themselves atheists offer salutation to the red flag and when they go to Russia they pay a visit to Leningrad to have a glimpse of the place where Lenin's embalmed body has been kept. Muslims who do not believe in idol worship offer their prayers facing Kaba. They kiss the symbolic stone 'Sang Asavad' of Syah Moosa in Mecca. Arya Samajists express divine faith in the letter 'Om' and in performing Agnihotra. The obvious reason is that it is convenient to concentrate the mind with the help of symbols. The work of teaching the alphabet to children becomes easy when it is done through pictorial symbols as Ka- Kabutar, Kha-Khargosh, Ga- Gamla, Gha- Ghadi, and so on in Hindi. The same principle applies to installation of idols of gods and goddesses. The Gayathri mahamantra does not have any other form or variant. Its authentic classical form comprises a syntax of just twenty-four letters encompassing three verses of eight letters each, three Vyahritis and one Onkar (o-o-o-m).

It is this ancient Mantra which is used during the traditional Sandhyavandan and for Guru deekcha during Yagyopaveet ceremony. It is also known as the Guru Mantra. It appears that the other variants of Gayathri had been fabricated during the dark Middle Ages by founders of various sects to propagate their own pre-eminence.

Q.2. Why is Gayathri visualized as a young woman with its peculiar ornaments?

Ans. One should not be under the illusion that Gayathri is a living being with one mouth and two arms or five mouths and ten arms. Woman has intrinsic superiority over man and so Gayathri is given mother's form. Having Kamandal and a book in Gayathri Mata's hands are symbolic of knowledge and science. There is no living being in the world having five mouths and ten arms. This is just a symbolic representation. Five mouths signify Panch-kosha as the five, sheaths of human existence and ten arms represent ten characteristic features of religion.

The symbolism of Mother Gayathri sitting on a swan is that the Sadhak should keep discriminative wisdom like a royal swan or Paramhans. It is said about the mythological Rajhans (royal swan) that it has the power to discriminate the good from the bad, to separate milk from water, to pick up only pearls and leave pebbles. It never eats worms and insects. This is an example of the soul status of a Param-hansa. Ordinarily swans live on insects, neither consume milk nor dive to the depths of the ocean to find pearls. The representation of God and powers of Divinity as female deities is a unique feature of Indian spirituality. There are compelling reasons for this insight. Nature has exclusively equipped the female of the

species with powers of reproduction and sustenance of the infant. The expression of selfless love of a mother can only be the true representation of love of God for human beings. Hence, Gayathri has been conceived as Mother. Since, Divinity never grows old and is eternally young and beautiful, Mother Gayathri is shown as young attractive maiden. Besides, meditating on a beautiful woman as symbolic of Divinity also helps one develop a platonic - pious attitude towards women in general. The lotus as Her seat means the presence of Divinity in an environment which is fragrant, pleasant and blossomingly cheerful.

Q.3. In what way the twenty-four emanations of Divine Mother (Matrikas) represent Gayathri?

Ans. As various organs perform specific functions in the human body, the primary divine energies inherent in the Primordial Supreme Power (Adyashakti) of God have been conceived as twenty-four motherly emanations or nine Devis (female deities) - since, amongst the living beings in the world, only the female of the species is capable of creation.

Q.4. Are Gayathri and Savitri different?

Ans. Not exactly. They are different expressions of the Supreme Power of God . As such they are opposite faces of the same coin. Gayathri (idolised with nine faces) and Savitri (idolised with five faces) in fact identify the extra-sensory and sensory excellence in human life which are known as Riddhis and Siddhis in yogic parlance. Gayathri and Savitri are inseparable - inherent like heat and light in fire.

Q.5. What are the specific divine emanations associated with Gayathri and Savitri?

Ans. As mentioned in the answers to Q.No. 4, Gayathri and Savitri are two sides of the same coin. Gayathri has been referred to by innumerable names. Amongst its significant twenty-four thousand aliases, 24 represent its principal emanations. Twelve of these have been idolized for practical spiritual growth and the remaining twelve for material gains. These are enumerated as:

A) Emanations worshipped for spiritual growth (Adhyatmik pragati)

- 1) Adyashakti 2) Brahmi 3) Vaishnavi 4) Shambhavi 5) Vedmata
- 6) Devmata 7) Vishwamata 8) Ritambhara 9) Mandakini 10) A japa
- a 11) Riddhi 12) Siddhi

B) Emanations worshipped for material gains

- 1) Savitri 2) Saraswati 3) Lakhyami 4) Durga 5) Kundalini 6) Pranagni 7) Bhawani 8) Bhuwaneshwari 9) Annapurna 10) Mahamaya 11) Payaswani 12) Tripura (For details please refer to the publication (*Gayathri ki Chaubis Shakti Dharaein' in Hindi-Published by this mission*)

Q.6. Why is the Primordial Divine Energy (Gayathri) represented in so many forms (idols)?

Ans. God is omnipresent. The primordial Divine Energy symbolized as Gayathri take up numerous forms and functions in innumerable ways. The analogy of an actor will illustrate the point. An actor in a play has to wear different costumes on various occasions to portray different roles. For each role, he is made to don specific garments with appropriate ornamentation and adopts suitable histrionics. The person chooses the deity according to one's

need. During Trikal Sandhya for instance, the trinity Brahmi - Vaishnavi - Shambhavi is invoked. Aspirants for strength and success in worldly pursuits worship Durga; for prosperity, Lakshmi; for scholarship and cultural excellence, Saraswati; and so on.

Q.7. Why is Gayathri represented as a deity with fivefaces?

Ans. Descriptions of deities and characters in mythology showing many heads and arms are common and may appear odd and paganish to a person not familiar with the subtleties of Indian spiritual tradition. Brahma and Vishnu have been described as having four faces, Shiva with five, Kartikeya with six, Durga with eight and Ganesha with ten heads. It is said that the demon king Ravana had ten heads and twenty arms; and sahasrabahu, another demon had a thousand hands. Here, the numbers do not refer to the physiology, but to characteristics of the divine or evil attributes of the deities or demons as the case may be.

Indian spirituality frequently mentions five-fold classifications - such as the five basic elements of the cosmos (Tatvas); the five sheaths (Koshas) covering the human soul ; the five organs each of perception and action in the human body (Gyanendriyas and Karmendriyas), the five life -forces (Prans); the five types of energies operating in human bodies (Agnis); the five types of Yoga ...etc. The Gayathri Mantra , too is divisible in five parts namely (1) Om (2) Bhurbhuvaha Swaha (3) Tatsaviturvareniyam (4) Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi (5) Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayat. Each of these corresponds to the five primary emanation of the supreme spirit: Ganesh, Bhawani, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh respectively.

The entire super-science of spirituality too is encapsuled in the four Veda s and one Yagya. The five faces of Gayathri refer to these Divine attributes, which the Sadhak has to deal with in course of Sadhana.

Q.8. Why is Gayathri known as Tripada- Trinity ?

Ans. Gayathri is Tripada- a Trinity, since being the Primordial Divine Energy, it is the source of three cosmic qualities known as “Sat”, “Raj” and “Tam” represented in Indian spirituality by the deities “Saraswati” or “Hreem”. “Lakhyami” or “Shreem” and “Kali” or “Durga” as “Kleem”. Incorporation of “Hreem” in the soul augments positive traits like wisdom, intelligence, discrimination between right and wrong, love, self-discipline and humility. Yogis, spiritual masters, philosophers, devotees and compassionate saints derive their strength from Saraswati.

The intellectuals, mission aries, reformists, traders, workers, industrialists, socialists, communists are engaged in management of equitable distribution of Shreem (Lakhyami) for human well-being. Shreem is the source of wealth, prosperity, status, social recognition, sensual enjoyment and resources.

“Kleem” (Kali or Durga) is the object of reverence and research by the physical scientists. The plethora of scientific research and development depends on the “Kleem” element of Gayathri .

The “Hreem”, “Shreem” and “Kleem” elements of Gayathri have eternally existed in the cosmos. The modern western civilisation has particularly devoted itself to the management of “Kleem” (Heat, light, electricity, magnetism, gravity, matter, nuclear energy

etc.) and Shreem; whereas the occultists and mystics of East have remained particularly engaged in research of “Hreem”. It is evident that the key to lasting global peace harmony and prosperity lies in integral devotion of Hreem, Shreem and Kleem. Gayathri Sadhana is the super-science for mastery of these three aspects of the Divine Mother.

Q.9. Why is Gayathri designated as Vedmata, Devmataand Vishwamata?

Ans. Gayathri has been called Vedmata because it is the essence of source of Veda s. It is called Devmata because there is perpetual growth of divinity and righteousness in its devotee. Its ultimate object is to inculcate and awaken the feeling of ‘Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam’ and ‘Atmavat Sarvabhooteshu’ (Welfare of man - the individual lies in the welfare of all humankind). It is known as Vishwamata since it aims at establishment of good-will, equality, unity and love amongst the entire human race, cutting across barriers of language, race, colour, sex etc. and ultimately uniting the whole world on basis of realised spiritual unity in diversity.

The individual basis of Gayathri is to establish righteous wisdom. ‘Naha’ implies inculcation of cooperation and collective endeavour - mutual caring and sharing.

The absolute wisdom condensed in Gayathri magnified itself as the Veda s. For this reason Gayathri is known as the Mother of Veda s. (Gayathri Mantra is the means for invocation of Divine grace).

Gayathri is the fountainhead of all divine powers (Devatas). It is therefore, known as the Devmata. (Ref. Tandya Brahman).

Gayathri sustains the cosmos as the three Supreme Emanations of the Supreme, known as Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Hence, it is called Vishwamata (Ek Pwan Kashi Khand, Poorvardha 4.9.58)

Q.10. What is the relationship between Gayathri Mantra and other powers of God?

Ans. According to Savitri Upnishad, from the eternal omnipotence of God represented by Om, seven streams of divine power, known as Vyahritis, emanate. Three amongst these (Bhur , Bhuwaha and Swaha) form the prefix of Gayathri Mantra . The Vyahritis are also known as the ‘Sheersha’ (fountainhead) of Gayathri .

When Gayathri - the Primordial Power of the Divine, with Its totality of energy systems, interacts with the five basic elements of material universe (Panch Bhautik Prakriti - Savitri), complex, mysterious reactions are set into motion. Spirituality identifies these five basic elements (of which the entire material universe in its of solid, liquid and gaseous states and physical bodies of animate systems are composed) as Prithvi, Jal, Vayu, Tej and Akash. In course of interaction of the cosmic energies with these basic elements subtle sound waves similar to those produced by twenty-four letters of Gayathri Mantra are created.

In the course of thousands of years of research , Indian spiritual masters and yogis have evolved procedures for accessing divine energy by “tuning” into these cosmic sound waves by chanting of Gayathri Mantra , performance of Yagya and other associated procedures of Gayathri Sadhana . (Also please see the answer to Q.No. 8)

Q.11. What is Savita?

Ans. The deity for meditation on Gayathri Mantra is ‘Savita’. Savita is the cosmic power of God which provides energy to all animate and inanimate systems of the cosmos. In the Sun and other stars, for instance, it works as fission and fusion of atoms.

Q.12. Why is Gayathri Upasana considered supremeas compared to other forms of worship?

Ans. Gayathri is the fountainhead of all streams of divine powers personified and designated as deities (Lakhyami, Durga, Saraswati etc.) Thus by invocation of Gayathri the Sadhak starts accessing divine attributes. Speciality of Gayathri Sadhana lies in the fact that it provides the Sadhak an access to the huge store of spiritual energy accumulated in the cosmos by Tap of innumerable Gayathri Sadhakas since times immemorial. With a little effort, he is able to get assistance from the ancient Rishis in astral realms (the abodes of elevated and enlightened soul) and moves speedily realms on the spiritual path.

Gayathri Sadhana is based on the super-science governing the laws of transformation of matter and energy by influx of divine energies from supramental (Para) realms to the natural (a-Para) realm.

Gayathri is also personification of God’s power of righteous wisdom. Assimilating the substance and meaning underlying its worship leads to far-sighted wisdom. This alone is sufficient incentive to inspire one to lead righteous life and effortlessly get rid of worldly sorrows, grief, pain and suffering. The Sadhak gets patience to endure difficulties which cannot be avoided. He is also crowned with worldly success on account of inculcation of

perseverance and courage to march ahead on the path of integral growth.

Attainment of heaven and liberation are the outcome of refinement in outlook and incorporation of excellence in the method of working. It is not necessary to wait for the next life after death for achieving these twin aims. Liberation from bondage means freedom from the fetters of greed, infatuation and egoism. A person who assimilates the knowledge underlying Gayathri and infuses his soul with inner refinement surely gets liberated from worldly bondage. However, when Japa is performed in a routine manner as a ritual and no attempt is made to assimilate its substance in practical life , no perceptible progress takes place.

Q.13. What are the basic aims of Gayathri Sadhana?

Ans. The science of Gayathri Upasana has been developed to help human beings in ridding themselves of base animal instincts and replace them with the divine virtues. Adherence to the laws of this science provides a Sadhak permanent relief from the shackles of unhappiness and misery.

Q.14. What is the relevance of Gayathri Upasana in the modern society?

Ans. During the last few decades concepts of religion have been increasingly distorted by vested interests. The deliberately induced misconceptions about religion led to the miraculous achievements in the field of material sciences, created an environment wherein people began to doubt the utility of spirituality and became sceptic about the very existence of God . Many of the neo-literates began to

regard religion as superstition to the extent that being an atheist became a symbol of intellectualism.

Now, on the peak of its achievements, science has failed to achieve the wellbeing of the society as a whole, and people have begun to revise their attitude about spirituality . It is being realised that for restoring ethical and the moral values, spirituality is as important as the material aspects of life. Gayathri Sadhana is within the reach of common man, Its methodology is easy to adopt, it is well defined and is easily understood. With the help of Gayathri Sadhana, therefore, one can make remarkable progress in imbibing basic ethical and moral values with minimal effort. (*All World Gayathri Pariwar website*)

Four Forms of Worship of Gayathri:

This Bharat is the land of sanctity and chastity, which has given birth to such great women of exceptional character, who lent glory to Bharat as a nation of heroic women.

From ancient times, the presiding deity of Gayathri mantra, Gayathri Devi, has been worshipped as the Mother of the Vedas, which are held as the most ancient and authoritative scriptures of wisdom. e Gaayathri manthra has in it the validity of the Vedas. It contains the essence of Vedhic teachings. Each of the four Vedhas has a core axiom (Vaakya) enclosed in it.: That thwam asi (That thou art), Prajnaanam Brahma (consciousness is Brahma), (Ayam Aathma Brahma (This Self is Brahma) and Aham Brahmaasmi (I am Brahman) When all these are synthesized, the Gaayathri emerges. (SSS Vol. 15)

Gayathri mantra originated in this holy land. The glory of this mantra has spread all over the world. The people of Bharat have worshipped Gayathri in several ways and have redeemed their lives. Gayathri has been worshipped in four forms: (1) *Sathyavathi*, (2) *Angavathi* (3) *Anyavathi*, and (4) *Nidhanavathi*. All the four are equally sacred, and elicit limitless grace of the Divine.

The first one, *Sathyavathi*, signifies the existence of Atma in every being, just as butter is present in every drop of milk. It proclaims, “*Ekatma sarvabhutantaratma* (One Atma is present in all beings).” There is one Sath (truth), which is spoken of in many ways by the wise.

The second one is *Angavathi*, which signifies the five elements present in all beings and also the five senses of hearing, touch, vision, taste, and smell. There is nothing in this world that is not composed of the five elements. This Angavathi is pancha bhuta swarupa (the embodiment of the five basic elements).

The third one, *Anyavathi*, refers to the attributes of the different forms of the Divine. For example, Lord Siva is associated with trident, three eyes, etc. Vishnu is always described as having conch, discus, mace, and so on. We call him *Sankhachakragadapani*.

Ganapathi is identified by his elephant face and big belly. He is first to be worshipped in all rituals. Saraswathi is described as one with veena in hand, through which she is teaching the Divine sound principle as Nadabrahma. Thus Anyavathi signifies the different constituents of the forms of the Divine.

Nidhanavathi, the fourth, teaches the nine types of worship, namely, sravanam (hearing), keerthanam (singing the glory of God), smaranam (thinking of the names of God), pada sevanam (service), vandanam (prostration), archanam (worship), dasyam (servitude), sakhyam (friendship), and atmanivedanam (surrender).

The world is symbolised by these four forms of Gayathri. That is why it is described as Nature (Prakriti), a female form (Sthri). We refer to our native country as motherland. The importance attached to women in Bharat Bharat (India) has always accorded a high place to women as the upholders of all social virtues. The very fact that in mentioning the names of the divine couples like Vishnu and Lakshmi, Siva and Parvathi, the name of the consort is given the first place, as in Lakshmi Narayana, Uma Maheswara, shows what importance Bharatiyas (people of Bharat) attached to women. (SSS Vol.31, pp. 104-105)

Viswamitra and Gayathri Mantra

GAYATHRI MANTRA

Viswamitra handed over Gayathri Mantra to posterity

Viswamitra was able to hand down the potent Gayathri Mantra to posterity. His name means “Friend for All”, “Well-wisher for the world. It was the Gayathri that entitled him to earn that name. Rig Veda is entirely the product of the insight of such sages. Every name you use for God, every illustration we imagine of His Glory, is in the Rig Veda. Rama, Krishna, Sai, Iswara, are all the very essence of the glory it describes, though you may not recognise the sources. Mantra means “words that save those who meditate on them.” So, whatever is uttered with such intention becomes holy, charged with love for the fellow – men, for the world, for the elements (SSS Vol. 15, p. 270)

Powers of the Gayathri Mantra:

Sage Viswamitra discovered the mantra named Gayathri, which is addressed to the energy of the Sun, Surya. This mantra has infinite potentiality. It is a vibrant formula. It has immense powers, powers that are truly amazing. For, the Sun is its presiding deity. Students of Ramayana know that the same sage, Viswamitra initiated Rama into the mysteries of Sun-worship, through the mantra, Aditya Hridayam. The Gayathri enabled Viswamitra to use rare weapons, which bowed to his will when

the mantra was repeated with faith. Through the powers he attained, in this way, Viswamitra was able to become a great scientist and create a counterpart of this cosmos. A person who is able to increase the capabilities of his hands and his senses " is now considered a 'scientist' but, the term (*Vijnani*) was correctly applied in the past only to those who developed spiritual power and discovered the formulae for delving into, the Divine within, those Imbued with faith and devotion who could spontaneously demonstrate that power in actual day to day living. On the other hand, the 'scientists' of today know only a bit here and a bit there; they exaggerate and boast of what they have managed to learn. They are fond of pomp and proud display. They rise sky high on the fumes of praise. Such absurdities are quite contrary to the true behaviour of a scientist. For he is humble and meek. He is aware that, however much he knows, there is a vaster field which he has yet to know. He is conscious that Divine Grace is responsible for what little he knows.

Viswamitra was a scientist who had recognised truth. So, there is no scientist yet greater than he was. But, though a sage of such immense eminence and with so expansive a heart lived in India, he is not remembered by the people of this land. They honour the foreigners who have glimpsed his greatness; they have placed their faith in those researchers who have elicited valuable lessons from the Veda. The Veda is the Mother of Bharat. But the children do not revere the mother any more. They revere the stepmother and believe in her! This is the result of anglicised educational system. (SSVahini, pp. 183-185)

Rama and Lakshmana annihilated the rakshasas with the power of mantras taught to them by Sage Viswamitra

The mantras contained in the Vedas are of immense significance. When Sage Viswamitra realised that the rakshasas (demon) wanted to stop the chanting of Vedic Mantras and destroy righteous and truth on earth, he sought the help of Rama and Lakshmana who symbolised the divine forces that descended on earth to destroy the demonic forces and establish peace in the world. With the power of mantras taught to them by Sage Viswamitra, Rama and Lakshmana annihilated the rakshasas. This incident signifies the fact that with the power of Vedic mantras man can destroy his demonic qualities. By engaging themselves in chanting of the mantras, the people of Treta Yuga annihilated their demonic qualities. Symbolising the divine powers of Vedas, Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Shatrughna destroyed demonic forces and fostered divine forces in the world. (SSS Vol.37, p. 99)

Gayathri mantra is addressed to the energy of the Sun, the Surya.

The Gayathri mantra has something to do with intelligence. It has nothing to do with religious activity. We say, “*Dhiyo yonah prachodayath*”, and this portion of Gayathri means, “Blossom my intelligence, give importance to my intelligence, remove darkness of ignorance and let the *prajna* in me blossom out”. It prays to the Lord who is present all time, past, present and future and who is present at every place, to come and burn away the darkness of ignorance and give brightness and knowledge. In

man's life, there is his childhood, his youth and his old age. These three stages of man are not distinct and different, but they are simply changes of one and the same content. In the childhood there is youth, in the youth there is old age. This aspect of unity can be referred to the aspect of *Prajnana* and Viswamitra was demonstrating. With the help of this *Prajnana*, Viswamitra could even create a new universe. That is referred to as Trishanka. Ability to create something totally new is an aspect of *Prajnana*.... *Prajnana* enables you stand out only as a witness and experience everything around you. Veda has been telling that is you, thou art that, I am *Prajnana* and I am *Brahman*, in this way it makes you stand out as a witness and not become identical with your body. (SSB 1977, p. 138)

(Ramayana: A Divine Drama - Actors in the Divine Play as scripted by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba)

Upanayanam and Sandhya Vandanam

Gayathri initiation gives one the Second Birth

From the moment of issuing from the mother's womb, one is involved in action. This natural state is common to all and may be described as *Shuudhrathwam* (the state of the *Shuudhra*, that is, one who is not subject to any regimen). After one receives the *Gayathri* initiation, he is born again and becomes a *Dwija* (the twice-born). The *Gayathri* is described as "*Chhandhasaam maathah*"---the mother of all the *Vedhas* (ancient sacred scriptures). One meaning of *Gayathri* is that it is a *Mantra* (sacred formula) which protects or fosters the "*Gayaas*" or *jeevis* (*individual beings*).

The prayer is: "Oh, God, bestow upon me the right boon." This form of supplication is the path of *Bhakti*. When do we reach this stage of prayer? It is only when we quiet our mind in total meditation that we attain the right to ask for God's boon. How do we become able to quiet our mind in meditation? By describing God and reciting His glories in our prayers, we stabilize the mind. Therefore, it is through prayer, meditation, and experiencing that we reach God. That is why the Mahatma is described as one who has unity of thought, word, and deed.

Today, however, man may think one thing in his mind, say something else, and yet do another thing. That is why there is disunity of mind, action, and speech. Gayatri teaches the noble

truth of unity of the world. Today many consider Gayatri worship and the sacred thread ceremony (Upanayana) to be only meaningless, superstitious beliefs, started by some Brahmins. However, the ancient sages and pundits did not advocate meaningless rituals. Even their slightest action had deep inner significance behind it. But today education has changed all this. Directed toward worldly pursuits, it totally misleads mankind and does not inculcate human values. We must revive and experience the ancient culture, understand it, and practise it. Youth today should make a sacred resolution to adhere to truth, develop love, cultivate faith, and promote peace in the world. These are your main duties. Just by wearing the sacred thread, do not think you have done your duty or that samskara (refinement) is attained.

Four stages of refinement

There are four stages of refinement. One is that which is accrued with birth. Pauper and prince both emerge from the mother's womb. The emperor does not fall from the sky, nor the pauper come out of the earth. Both the nobleman and the commoner have to come from the mother's womb. That is the way birth naturally takes place. The *second birth* occurs when one is initiated into the Gayatri Mantra. Today you have taken second birth. You must take a third birth also. What is this *third birth*? This is when you master the Vedas. But even the ability to expound the Vedas is not enough. God is not impressed by knowledge of the Vedas or Shastras. This mastery only gives you mental satisfaction. After learning the Vedas, one should take the fourth birth, Brahminhood. That is, to realize Brahma. Only then does second birth, dwija; third birth, vipra; and fourth birth, Brahmin occur. Who is a Brahmin? Not one born into the Brahmin caste, but the one who conducts himself as a

Brahmin. You are not a Brahmin the moment you are born. Later after understanding the principle of Brahman, you become a Brahmin. (LA, p. 59/64) Once the *Brahman* principle is understood, one merges in *Brahman*. It is only when there is awareness of *Brahman* can one claim to be a real *Brahman*. It is not birth alone, but the realisation of *Brahman* which confers real *Braahmanathwa* (Braahmana-hood) on a person. (SSS Vol.16), 17-3-1983

Sandhyaa Kaalam

The Gayathri Mantras has to be recited three times a day – in the morning at sunrise, at noon, and at sunset. These are called “Sandhyaa Kaalam” – the time of coming together of night and day, of morning and evening, and of day and night. Time, like man, has three qualities: Sathwa, Rajas and Thamas (poised passion and inertia). The day is divided into three parts. The four hours between 4 and 8 a.m. in the morning and between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. in the evening have the Sathwa (equanimous) quality. The eight hours between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. are Raajasik (Passionate). The eight hours between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. which are mainly used for sleep, are Thamasic (inaction). The eight hours of the day (from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) are employed by all beings, including animals and birds, in the discharge of their day-to-day duties and are regarded as Raajasik (active pursuit).

When the four Sathwic hours of the morning (4 a.m. to 8 a.m.) are used for engaging oneself in good actions like worship, virtuous deeds, keeping good company, one is sure to raise, himself from the human to the Divine level. It is during the Sathwic period (from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.) the Gayathri Mantra should be recited. (SSS Vol.16), 17-3-1983

But God being beyond time, it is a result of our limitations that we talk of dawn and dusk. When we move away from the Sun it is dusk; when we move into the light of the Sun it is dawn. So you need not be bound by the three points of time to recite the prayer. It can be repeated always and everywhere, only one has to ensure that the mind is pure. I would advise you young people to recite it when you take your bath. Do not sing cheap and defiling film songs. Recite the Gayathri. When you bathe, the body is being cleansed; let your mind and intellect also be cleansed. Make it a point to repeat it when you bathe as well as before every meal, when you wake from sleep and when you go to bed. And also repeat 'Shanti' thrice at the end, for that repetition will give Shanti or peace to three entities in you---body, mind and soul. (SSS Vol.13)

This Mantra is the embodiment of all deities. It is not related to any particular sect, caste or idol or institution. It is said to embody nine “colours”: (1) Om (2) Bhuh (3) Bhuvah (4) Suvah (5) Thath (6) Savithur or powers (7) Varennyam (8) Bhargah (9) Devasya. “Dheemahi” is related to the meditative aspect. “Dhiyo-yo-nah prachodayaath” relates to the aspect of prayer. The Mantra, as a whole thus, contains three aspects-descriptive, meditational and prayer. (SSS Vol.16)

The Gayathri Hymn of the Vedhas, recited thrice a day by millions, asks for the awakening of the intelligence so that when it brightens like the Sun at its zenith, the smog of delusion is destroyed. Then the waves of indecision and decision that confound, contradict and confuse are stilled. This is the process of yoga or the arrest of the wandering mind, as Pathanjali defined it centuries ago. (SSS Vol.6)

Redemptive Power of the *Gayathri Mantra*

The plea that one cannot find time for reciting the *Gayathri* thrice a day is specious and untenable. People waste so much of their time in worthless activities that they can easily find a few moments for reciting the *Gayathri* when they wake up from bed and before they go to sleep, if only they have the will. The *Gayathri* can be recited even when one is taking his bath. It will mean also offering ablutions to the goddess. At noon, if the *Gayathri* is recited before taking one's meal, the food will get sanctified and become an offering to the deity.

The *Brahmacharis* (celebrates/religious students) should realise the redemptive power of the *Gayathri* Mantra. Through the *Brahmopadesam* (initiation into sacred knowledge), the young boys have had a second birth. It is only when they have achieved the purposes of this second birth will they be qualified to enter on the sacred third stage of "*viprathvam*" (Brahmana-hood), which leads to the realisation of *Brahman*.

"One who is aware of *Brahman*, becomes one with *Brahman*" is the *Vedhic* saying. To recognise the *Brahman* principle, one has to understand one's own true nature. There is a story to illustrate how one can see whether he is qualified to realise *Brahman*. An unmarried girl acquires the right to a haft-share in a man's property after she is married to him and he ties the *mangalasuuthra* (the auspicious marriage thread) round her neck. It is this sacred thread that confers the right on her. Likewise, one remains remote from God as long as one has not acquired the thread of "surrender to the Divine" (*Sharanaagathi- thathwa*). The moment one wears the *suuthra* (thread) of *Sharanaagathi* (total surrender), one acquires

the right to a half share in the energy and authority of the Divine. We must strive earnestly to pursue the path of submission to the Divine Will and offering everything to the Divine.

The attitude of surrender will grow in us as we recite regularly the *Gayathri Mantra*. This is the reason why boys are initiated into the *Mantra* at an early age. There is also another reason for this early initiation. Boys, who have been indolent or dull before getting the *Brahmopadhesam* have been able to develop their intelligence and be more diligent in their studies after they have received the *Gayathri Mantra*. This is a matter of proven experience. Like sunrise after the night, the *Gayathri Mantra* dispels the darkness of ignorance: "*Dhiyoyo-nah prachodayaath.*" The rays of the *Gayathri Mantra* illumine the mind and intelligence and promote knowledge, wisdom and discrimination. (SSS Vol.16), 17-3-1983

It is essential to recite the Gayathri Mantra at least three times during morning, noon and evening. This will serve to reduce the effects of the wrong acts one does every day. It is like buying goods for cash, instead of getting them on credit. There is no accumulation of karmic (result of action) debt, as each day's karma (action) is atoned for that day itself by reciting the Gayathri Mantra.

Upanayana

Upanayana or Upanayanam, the word which has been given to the thread ceremony of initiation, means the conferment of another eye. Your two eyes cannot reveal to you the magnificence and the majesty of the realm of the spirit. They are focussed towards the objective world and its transient attractions. So the 'Gayathri mantra' has been given to you as a third eye to reveal to you that

inner vision by which you may realise `Brahman'. (SSS Vol. 10, p. 124)

Every small word or phrase in a Mantra has immense inner meaning. It cannot be dismissed as superstition. Modern education has ruined our ancient Bhaaratheeya culture. You should know the meaning of the Mantras. People want the fruits of meritorious deeds but they indulge in sinful action. How can you get good results when your action is faulty or sinful? Youth today must pledge themselves to speak the truth, develop love and have unshakable faith in God. They will then be able to establish peace in the world. This is the significance of Yagnopaveetham (the sacred thread ceremony). Upanayanam is a Samskaara (sacrament) that makes a boy fit for pursuing the highest wisdom. There is no difference between one child and another at the time of birth. All are born out of the mother's womb only. This is the first stage of life (sudra). The second stage is getting the upadhesha of Gaayathri at the time of Upanayanam, when the body becomes a Dhvija (twice-born). He is then purified. The third stage is Vipra, when one has mastered the study of the Vedhas. The fourth stage is Brahmana when he actually realises the Brahman through the knowledge of the Self. One becomes a Brahmana not by birth but only when one realises the Supreme Brahman. One becomes a Braahmana by action and not by birth. (SSS Vol.28, p. 125)

Upanayanam is an important step in the Restoration of Varna asramadharma itself. Upanayana means, "near-leading", leading near, leading the boy to the Teacher, taking him to the teacher, the guru for this Upadesa, this initiation. (SSS Vol.6, pp. 10-11)

Brahmopadesam

The ceremony of Brahmopadesam is Upanayanam, because the word means, taking near, taking the young aspirant near Brahman, that is to say, introducing him to Brahmajijnasa, the path of Brahma. It is one of the Samskaras, that is, rites, which reconstruct the personality, reform the mind, purify it and re-build it. It makes the person receiving it a Dwija, a twice born! The boy is born first into the world; now, he is born into the Sadhaka world. He becomes a Brahma-chari, a person who walks towards Brahman. So, it is a very significant day in the lives of these people, a day they must long remember with joy and thankfulness. It is the day when their hearts were turned towards God; and they should try not to run away from God, hereafter; that is great responsibility.

The initiation was done by the Upadesam of the Gayathri Mantram. The Mantram is a universal prayer that can be used by men of all climes and creeds, for, it calls upon the Glorious Power that pervades the Sun and the three worlds to arouse, awaken and strengthen the Intelligence, so that it may lead to intense Sadhana and Sadhana may lead to success. (SSS Vol.3, pp. 225-227)

Yagnopaveetham

The *Yagnopaveetham* (sacred thread) is a symbol of purity which is necessary if you wish to participate in the yajna of Living. Life is a continuous series of sacrifices of the lower for the sake of the higher, of the tiny in favour of the vast. Upanayana, the word which has been given to this ceremony of Initiation, means the conferment of another eye. Your two eyes cannot reveal to you the magnificence and the majesty of the realm of the spirit. They are focussed towards the objective world and its transient attractions.

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

So the Gayathri mantra has been given to you as a third eye to reveal to you that inner vision by which you may realise Brahman.

Gayathri is a treasure you must guard throughout your lives. If you have not caught the sounds of the mantra correctly now, learn it from your parents or from your family priest. Perhaps the others may not know the Gayathri themselves or they might have forgotten it through culpable neglect. Then I would ask them to learn it from you. Never give up the Gayathri; you may give up or ignore any other mantra but you should recite the Gayathri at least a few times a day. It will protect you from harm wherever you are--travelling, working or at home. Westerners have investigated the vibrations produced by this mantra and have found that when it is recited with the correct accent as laid down in the Vedas, the atmosphere around becomes visibly illumined. So Brahmaprakaasha, the effulgence of divine will descend on you and illumine your intellect and light your path when this mantra is chanted. Gayathri is Annapurna, the Mother, the sustaining Force that animates all life. So do not neglect it. Elders and priests, mantra, have given it the custodians of this the go-by. But you, as Inheritors and guardians of the great culture of this country, have a great responsibility in preserving it and demonstrating its efficacy and worth. (SSS Vol.13), Upanayanam Day, Brindhaavan, 20-6-1977

The Triple stranded Yagnopaveetham (Sacrificial Strand of Thread) is to be worn by everyone who is initiated into Gaayathri recital, for he has to perform the three sandhya rites when Sun rises and sets, as well as when the Sun is at the zenith. The rites are in adoration of the Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The purpose of the rites is to invoke Gods to bless the novitiate to lead a good

life at all times (past, present and future), in all places (heaven, earth and nether region). The Gaayathri divinizes the five elements; it represents the presiding deities of all the five. Gaayathri is worshipped as a Five- Faced Goddess – Om, being the first, Bhoorbhuvahssuvah, the second, Thath Savithur Varenayam, the third, Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi, the fourth, and Dhiyo Yanah Prachodayaath, the fifth face. (SSS Vol. 15)

Who should wear Yagnopaveetham?

In olden days both men and women used to wear Yagnopaveetham. But nowadays only men who are eligible and initiated into Gayathri Manthra wear it. Among the Varnas, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya who is a dwija can wear Yagnopaveetham. They should start wearing from the day they are initiated into the Gayathri Manthra which generally happens through a ceremony called Upanayanam.

How many Yagnopaveethas one should wear?

It is said that a Brahmachari (unmarried person) should wear only one Yagnopaveetham that has three strands. A Grihastha (married person) should wear two such Yagnopaveethas. It is in practice to wear three Yagnopaveethas by a Grihastha, the third one that acts as an Uttareeyam (upper dhoti).

What should be its length?

When you wear the length of Yagnopaveetham should come up to the navel level and it should be neither above nor below the navel. It is said that if it is below the navel it will lead to the loss of power of penance and if it is above the navel it is Ayuksheenam (decline in longevity). Manu Smruthi says that the portion below the navel is impure. We also find a reference to this in Dharma Sindhu.

Who are the Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham?

Omkaaram (Pranava), Agni, Naaga, Soma (Moon), Pithru Devathas, Prajapathi, Vayu, Surya and Vishve Devathas are the Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham.

How to wear & remove Yagnopaveetham?

Wear Yagnopaveetham one by one reciting the relevant sankalpa and Yagnopaveetha dhaarana manthra. Every time Aachamanam should be performed and Gayathri manthra should be recited ten times. While wearing Yagnopaveetham it should be held by both hands with the knot in the Yagnopaveetham being held above by the right hand facing upwards.

Similarly old and worn out Yagnopaveetham should not be removed from above the neck. It should be removed from below the navel without touching the feet. Logic behind removing from below the navel could be; Man is said to be purer above the navel. Manu Smruthi says that, portion below the navel is impure. After changing Yagnopaveetham the old one worn becomes a decayed thing. It should not be removed from sacred portion of the body that is above the head.

When to Change the Yagnopaveetham?

When once a person starts wearing Yagnopaveetham in normal circumstances it should not be removed and should be worn always (24 hours-365 days). It is like a woman wearing a Mangala-Suthra forever. But in practice it is not possible to wear the same Yagnopaveetham permanently. Due to wear and tear, it may get soiled or worn out or gets broken and needs to be changed. One

should not wear a broken or worn out Yagnopaveetham. Apart from this it should be changed under the following circumstances.

- Once in a year on the day of Upakarma;
- Whenever there is Jataasoucham or Mruthaasoucham (birth/death in the family) after completion of the stipulated period of asoucha;
- Whenever one visits the Cremation Ground or touches a Corpse;
- Whenever one happen to touch a woman during menstruation;
- Whenever the threads of Yagnopaveetham are severed or it is soiled or worn out;
- Whenever one attends 10th day ceremony and gives Dharmodaka.

Whenever there is a need to change Yagnopaveetham it should not be removed recklessly. First wear the new one and then remove the worn out as per the laid down procedure.

Composition

Yagnopaveetham Navathanthu Nirmitham; Yagnopaveetham is made up of nine layers of woven cotton thread spun by a virgin girl and twisted by a Brahmin reciting Gayathri mantra on an auspicious day. Length of the thread used for making Yagnopaveetham as per scriptures should be 96 breadths of four fingers measured by one's own hand. Thickness of the thread should be of a mustard seed size. Nowadays we don't find such norms being followed in the making of Yagnopaveetham.

Arithmetic of number “96”

It is said that Gayathri Manthra has 24 letters and when it is added together from four Vedas it becomes 96 (24x4) that gives the power or eligibility to the Dwija to perform Yagna or Yagas and to recite Gayathri Manthra. Four fingers represent four states of the soul a man experiences from time to time (waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep, and absolute Brahmanhood)

There is another arithmetic to this number, that is human body comprises of 25 elements, made up of three Gunas (Sattwa, Rajo, Tamo). We have 16 thithis in the calendar, 27 Stars in the Almanac, 4 Vedas, 6 Rithus in three Seasons (summer, winter and monsoon), and 12 months. When all these are added together (25+3+16+27+4+6 +3+12) it comes to 96. It is said that human life rotates around these elements.

Significance of Nine layers

It is said that nine layers represent nine devathas who are the presiding deities of Yagnopaveetham viz. Omkaram (Pranava), Agni, Naaga, Soma (Moon), Pithru Devathas, Prajapathi, Vayu, Surya and Vishve Devathas. Before wearing Yagnopaveetham one should offer prayer to all these nine deities.

Brahma Granthi

As per the scripts it is prescribed that the Yagnopaveetham should have knots equivalent to the number of Pravaras in one's Gothra. But in practice we find only one knot for the Yagnopaveetham. The knot with which the three strands are tied together is called Brahma Granthi that signifies ParaBrahma (Pranavam) who is Sakala Veda

Swaroopa. There are many interpretations about the three strands of Yagnopaveetham.

It symbolizes three trinal Lords (Brahma Vishnu, Maheswara) and when tied together it becomes Para Brahma; three worlds (Bhu-Bhuvar- Suvar); three feminine energies (Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Durga); and three tattwas or qualities (Sattwa, Rajo, Tamo). It is also interpreted as, three strands representing Ida, Pingala and Sushumna nadi through which the Kundalini energy manifests as prana and consciousness. The three strands also indicate that one who wears it should have a triple control over his mind speech and body (thought, word and deed)

Yagnopaveetha dhaarana Manthra

*Yagnopaveetham paramam pavithram
Prajapatheryassahajam purasthath
Aayushyamagryam prathimuncha shubram
Yagnopaveetham balamasthuthejah*

Yagnopaveetha Visarjana

Remove the old Yagnopaveetham after performing Aachamanam and at least reciting Dasa Gayathri. It should be removed from below the navel by reciting the Visarjana manthra.

Yagnopaveetha Visarjana Manthra

*Upaveetham Bhinna thanthum jeernam
Kasmala dooshitham, Visrujaamijale
Brahmanvarcho dheergayurasthu mey*

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

Old Yagnopaveetham should be dropped into water or on a Tree and should not be thrown into garbage.

(Taken from the Blog: bhargavasarma {nirikhi krishna bhagavan} what I know is limited ! what I have to know is unlimited !)

The Ritual of Upanayanam

The word upanayanam in Sanskrit is composed of two parts – upa, meaning near and nayanam meaning to bring. (There are other meanings also, such as nayanam, meaning the eye). The Sanskrit word for rites of passage is samskara. The literal meaning of the word samskara is “to make perfect”, “to polish”. The ceremony is one of 16 major rites of passages. Actually there are 40 rites of passages from birth to death.

All cultures have rites of passages. These are rituals full of symbolism. They are meant to re-enact myths, to connect the individual to the community and society and to connect the individual to nature and universal principles. In addition, they are the best way to teach the children about the myths and the culture of the traditions.

Upanayanam is traditionally performed for the boys in the Hindu Brahmin families and is supposed to be completed at about 7 years of age. After the upanayanam, the boy is initiated into the study of the Vedas. The first birth is physical. Upanayanam is the second birth, birth into the spirituality. (Hence the name dwija, twice-born)

In olden times, girls also had upanayanam. In addition to the brahmins, kshatriya and vaisya varnas also were and even now are allowed to perform upanayanam. However, the age at which

upanayanam is performed is 12 to 13 for kshatriyas and 13 to 16 for vaisyas.

What is the significance of the age of the ceremony? Age 7 is chosen for brahmins, because the boy should be able to read and recite so that he can be initiated to the Vedas. Our ancestors thought that the age of 7 will allow margin for the slow learners. But, they wanted to get the boy interested in spiritual matters before his hormones came into play and distracted him.

The brahmin boy was supposed to stay in his teachers (guru's) house for 12 years after the upanayanam so he can be proficient in all the vedic rituals and other matters. Kshatriyas and vaisyas had to learn other skills and therefore their age for initiation was delayed.

The sudras belonging to the fourth varna were excluded from this. (In spite of all the explanations given for their exclusion, personally I find it a major mistake of our ancestors. As I have mentioned in other places, all systems of religion exclude one group or another resulting in the mistreatment of that group)

This initiation into adulthood and study of religious texts is not special for the Hindu religion. Other traditions have similar ceremonies. For example, in the Jewish tradition, it is called Bar-Mitzvah for the boys and Bat-Mitzva for girls. The age for the girls is 12 and for boys, it is 13. This is when adolescent maturation starts. This is also when most children become capable of abstract thinking. They are considered to be ready to take care of their adult functions and duties, including religious ones.

In Christianity it is called Confirmation. This is one of 7 sacraments, similar to our 16 samskaras. The age is set at 13.

The most relevant one is the Navjote ceremony in the Zoroastrian tradition. Upanayanam might have had its origin in this ancient Persian tradition. This is for both boys and girls and is usually performed after the age of 7 and before they attain maturity. In this ceremony the adolescent gets invested with a shirt called sedreh and a waist-band called kushti which they are supposed to wear all their lives. A waist-band akin to kushti made of straw is tied in the Hindu upanayanam but is discarded the same day. The three threads that are given in upanayanam are considered to be a variant of the Zoroastrian sedreh.

Upanayanam ceremony is celebrated for the boys in all parts of India and Nepal. But the names are different. It is called Poonool ceremony in Tamizh, Odugu in Andhra Pradesh, Munji in Karnataka, Janeu in Hindi-speaking areas, Munja in Marathi and Pravibandha in Nepal.

The upanayanam ceremony has two parts. The main part is the introduction to spirituality and religious studies in the form of OM and Gayathri mantra. This is called brahmopadesam. The other part is the investiture of the sacred thread which is called yagnopavidam. The sequence, however, is wearing the sacred thread first and then the learning of the Gayathri mantra.

What is the meaning behind the three threads? These threads are made of cotton for brahmins, hemp for the kshatriyas and linen for the vaisyas. Why three threads? There are several explanations.

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

That is understandable knowing that three is such a holy number in many traditions. The three threads represent the three Vedas (Rk, Yajur and Saama), say some. Some say that mind (Gayathri), words (Sarasvathi) and deeds (savith) are represented. Other possibilities are: the three states of wakefulness, dreamless sleep and deep sleep; three gunas, namely sattva, rajas and tamas; the three primordial substances of thejas (fire), aapah(water) and anna (food,earth) and so on. Some ayurvedic people think that the three dosahs, humors of vaada, pitta and kappa are represented.

Let us start with that mantra first and then look at the meaning. It starts with:

Hrdistha devatah sarva hrdis pranah pratishtithah
Hrdis pranah cha jyotih cha trivitsutam cha yanmahat
Hrdis chaitanye thisthathi.

This means: “In the heart live the Devas. Pranas are installed in the heart. In the heart reside the Supreme Prana and the Light, as also the immanent cause with its threefold constituents and the Mahat principle. It exists within this heart that is within the consciousness”. This clearly refers to the Samkhya philosophy according to which the universe comes out of the modification of the three gunas (sattva, rajas and tamas) in the Prakriti (primordial Matter) and the first evolved part is the Mahat. If you interpret the three parts as that of Prakriti, it will be fire, water and food (earth). The three threads represent the three original substances or principles.

In a subsequent sloka, it says “sutrata sutram ithi aahuh” meaning

that it is called sutra (or a thread) because it is the warp and the woof of this universe. Then it says,

Yagnopavidam paraman pavitram
Prajapatheh yatshajam purastat
Aayushyam agryam pratimuncha shubram
Yagnopavidam balamasthu thejah.

This translates as: “Put on this sacrificial thread which is supremely sacred, which became manifest long ago with Prajapati, the first created being and which embodies longevity, eminence and purity. May it bring strength to you”. This mantra has to be uttered while putting on the sacred thread.

The practice is to wear the thread(s) so that it crosses the left shoulder, middle of the chest and then goes under the right arm. The knot which ties the three threads is placed in front of the heart, on the left side. (Ramana Maharishi says that the vedic heart is not on the left). The idea is that the sacred trivit sutra worn outside the heart is an external symbol of the three primordial principles which are inside the heart with the knot lying just in front of the heart.

In a later passage, this Upanishad says that although this sacred thread is essential for those who want to perform vedic sacrifices, it may be discarded by the realized souls (true gnanis).

After investiture of the sacred thread, the boy is ready to learn the secret of the Vedas, in the form of the pranava mantram (OM) and Gayathri mantra. The first guru is the father who teaches Gayathri to his son. In olden days, the boy went to the house or ashram of a guru after initiation by the father. During those 12 years with the

guru, the boy is supposed to learn all the vedas, live simple life on food given as alms by householders. This is not “begging” in the modern sense, but in essence it is. The first person, he asks for food soon after wearing the sacred thread and learning the Gayathri is his own mother. This is still enacted in modern day Upanayanams.

Ramana maharishi on the significance of Upanayanam said, “Upanayanam does not mean just putting around the neck three strands of cotton thread. It means that in addition to the two eyes we all know about, there is a third eye. That is the gnana netram (wisdom eye). Open that eye and recognize your swa –swarupa (own from)”. (*From the blog: Time for thought*)

Introduction: Samskara

Hinduism declares that moksa or liberation from the cycle of birth and death is the final goal of life. It is the same as creating God Realization, resulting in the enjoyment of eternal bliss. The effort that is put forth in that direction is called ‘Sadhana’. The first step towards getting ready for the Sadhana is to have the right *Samskara*. The word ‘*Samskara*’ is made of two words: ‘*Sam*’ meaning good way and ‘*Kara*’ meaning doing. Our body and our mind are the main instruments in this Endeavour of obtaining the right Samskara. The act of obtaining the right Samskara is the act of purifying and refining our body and our mind, to get ready for the ‘*Sadhana*’.

The word ‘*Samskara*’ also means ‘to do well’. Like for instance gold coins when subjected to ‘samskara’ by an expert goldsmith becomes a lovely ornament. Basic material (like the gold coin in the example) upon which the action (Samskara) is performed is

called ‘prakrathi’ and the resultant material after Samskara is called “Vikrathi”.

There totally *Shodasha*—sixteen—types of Samskara. These samskara also called ‘*Sacraments*’ purify and refine a human being making him fit for the different stages of life at different ages. In Vedic Dharma, samskara will be conducted to both men and women.

It starts with *Garbhadan To Vivaha Samskara* out of which *Upanayan Samskara* is the 10th samskara.

According to smruthi, every one is born a *Shoodra* (meaning someone who has no discipline in daily life), and after undergoing samskara, he becomes a “*Dvija*”. He thus has a second birth. The first birth is from the mother’s womb and the second is after undergoing samskara.

Upanayana means leading the disciple to the guru or Vedic teacher (upa means near Nayana means leading, taking). It also means providing him with an additional eye: the eye of knowledge and wisdom (upa means additional, nayana means eye). In addition to the two physical eyes he already has, it gives him a third eye—that of knowledge and wisdom--through proper ducation. Consequently, the sacrament of the beginning of formal education too, has been called by the same name ‘*Upanayana*’.

It is also called by other terms such as ‘*Maunjibandhana*’ & *Brahmopadesha*’. Since a girdle made of the munja grass (Dharbha, or Kusha) is tied round the waist of the *Vatu* (boy)

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

undergoing the upanayana ceremony, to support the kaupina or loin-cloth, the ceremony, itself is termed ‘Maunji bandana.

The word ‘*Samskara*’ stands for the Vedas as also for the Gayathrimantra which contains their quintessence. Since, in this samskara, the Gayathri mantra is taught to the vatu the word ‘*Brahmopadesa*’ is quite an appropriate expression for the rite also. The Vatu’s prescribed age limit for the upanayana is between 7 & 11 years.

Upanayana Ceremony Steps

Devatha Prarthana

The Vatu and his parents should pray to the family deity and take the blessings from the elders.

Gatika Sthapan

Five married women should fill water in to a big pot and immerse bowl to measure the auspicious time. This is mostly a symbolic ritual

Ganapthi Puja & Punyahvachan

Prayers should be offered to Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, the Kuladevatha, and the Navagrahas for conducting a successful ceremony. Punyahvachan – the purification ritual – should be done.

Udada Murthu

It will be conducted by vatu and married senior women of the family. It is a practice for the Vatu’s sister to join this ceremony. After this the vatu will be sent to the barber for a haircut. The Vatu

is given a traditional haircut with a “Shikha” (A traditional form of hair cut where the head is shaved bald except for a lock of hair at the back). After the haircut, the vatu is given a head bath by his mother for one last time.

Matru Bojan

Mother will be going to feed yogurt rice along with four other children. It is for the last time in his life would the vatu be fed by the mother. This practice has variants based on the region in which the Upanayana is performed. It is also known as *Kumara Bhojana*. And in these regions the vatu sits for the Kumara Bhojana with his mother and other children who have already undergone the Upanayana Samskara.

Parents of the vatu go to the mantap, perform sankalp and do the Agni pratishthapana. Then Agni samskar Homa has to be performed. The cloth (*Antarpata*) to be held between father and vatu is brought to the mantap. The priest then starts chanting the rhymes and Mangalashataka.

Munji Vatu now having a shikha (tuft of hair), will take bath, wear a new set of dress. He will be decorated and brought to Mandap by his maternal uncle. Vatu has to come holding a coconut in his hand.

Vatu will place the coconut in front of his father and take his blessings, he will do the same with his mother and give that coconut to the priest. Priest will bless the Vatu by chanting the Rhymes.

Vastrajin Upaveet Mekhaladi Puja

Cloth etc to be blessed by all elders, Small piece of thread to be tied to the waist for wearing the *Kaupeena*, (Loin-cloth). This cloth will be given by the mother. The vatu has to change over to clothes colored in kavi (saffron). It is a symbol of re-birth.

Ajin Dharana

This sacred thread comprises three strands of string and the knot resembles a cow in the sitting posture. At the time of the upanayana a small piece of krishnajina is also tied to this sacred thread. In the ancient days people used to wear the krishnajina or an upper cloth during yajnas or sacrifices. The yajnopavita is a remnant of that practice

Yajnopavita Dharana

Sacred thread comprises three stands of string and the knot resembles a cow in the sitting posture. Once the vatu wears it, he is expected to look at his life as yajna or sacrifice – to be dedicated to the welfare and service of the society. The three stands of the sacred thread stand for the three Vedas reminding him that he has to study them and incorporate their message in his life. The strands also represent purity and control of body, speech and mind, which again should be dedicated to the service of the society.

Pradhan Homa

Main homa to be performed along with vatu.

Surya Darshana

Vatu to be taken outside and shown the sun. The assumption here is that he will be protected by the sun – Soorya deva.

Brhamchari Agnikaryam

Vatu will do the homa guided by the priest. The vatu circumambulates the sacred fire and offers sacrificial fuel into it. The priest administers him certain vows. they are: performing achamana (ceremonial sipping of water with mantras) before any religious rite, control of speech, avoiding sleep during the day and offering fuel sticks in to the sacred fire and so on. Vatu prays for long life, brilliance, intellectual acumen, general competence, name and fame.

Savitri Upadesha (Gayathri Upadesha)

The heart of the whole sacrament is the savitri upadesha. It means imparting the Gayathrimantra. Savitr or Savita means God or creator. He is identified with the sun. He is the Supreme Lord residing in the heart of the sun. Hence the real name of the mantra is 'Savitrیمانtra'. Since it was revealed to the sage Vishvamitra, for the first time in the Vedic metre known as Gayathri, the mantra itself has been identified with it and has popularly come to be known as the *Gayathri Mantra*. The Acharya (priest) has to teach it to the vatu little by little with proper intonation until he picks it up completely.

Mekhala Bandan

A griddle made of munja grass (Dharbha or Kusha) should be worn round the waist. It is thus technically called maunjibandhana. This indicates the beginning of life of brahmacharya or self control of which celibacy is the most important aspect.

Danda Dharana

The next step is holding the danda or the staff made of palasha wood. Actually the vatu is expected to keep it throughout his

Gayatri, the Vedasaara

student-life as an inseparable companion. It stands for *Dama* means control of the sense-organs at the psychological level. In his day-to-day life at the gurukula, it helps him to take care of the cows of the household and also comes in handy in times of dangers as weapon for self protection.

Matrabiksha

Last comes the begging of food by the vatu from his own mother and other elderly ladies of the family. Since he has to beg his food as long as he lives in the gurukula.

Bramchari Upadesha

Vatu will be taught the duties to be performed daily by the priest. Medhajanana and anupravachaniya homa will be concluded. The priest and all the other attendant elders will bless the vatu.

Upanayana Sanskara

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(taken from the Web: Puja123)

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The country of Bharath had been the abode for centuries to *Sanathana Dharma* (The Eternal Religion) and great Sages and Seers who tread the path of Spirituality. It is a sacred land of the Vedas, Spiritual practice and Renunciation. However, a time has come when every citizen of this country has to enquire whether the present situation in this country merits such great honour. It is now clear that the culture of Bharath is in a ridiculous situation. The *Gayathri Manthra*, the essence of Vedas is no longer heard in this country. It is now confined to a mere ritualistic practice of holding the nose with one's fingers. The *Pranayama* (the control and regulation of inhaling, retention and exhaling of the breath associated with the 'Soham' manthra) and *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses from the external world and turning them inward) have totally disappeared. *Yama* (giving up of attachment to the body and the senses) and *Niyama* (Inner sense control) are no longer to be found. The so called *Sanyasis* (Renunciants) have developed more attachment to name and fame, wealth and possessions than the householders. As a result of such perverted fools, one is tempted to doubt whether one is living in the country of Bharath at all! In fact, rampant unrighteousness had set in, the moment Lord Krishna left His mortal coil and became formless. Subsequently, several *Paramhansas* (Ascetics of the highest order) and *Daivamasa sambhuthas* (Bits of Divinity born as human beings) are born and dedicated their lives for propagation the *Sanathana Dharma* among people and helping them cross the ocean of *Samsara*.



**Manasa Bhaja Rey Guru Charanam
Dustara Bhava Sagara Taranam
Guru Maharaj Guru Jai Jai
Sai Natha Sad Guru Jai Jai**