

34. The Universal Prayer

Om bhoorbhuvaha swaaha

Thath savithur varenyam

Bhargo dhevasya dheemahi

Dhiyo yonaha prachodhayath

THE Gaayathri (Vedhic prayer to illuminate the intellect) is the Universal prayer enshrined in the *Vedhas* (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 *Gaayathri* 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 *Gaayathri* is considered as *Vedhasaara*---"the essence of the *Vedhas*." *Vedha* 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 *Vedhas* are implied in this *Gaayathri manthra*.

Every human being has four birthdays

The *Gaayathri* is usually repeated at dawn, noon and dusk. 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 *Gaayathri*. 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 '*Shaanthi*' thrice at the end, for that repetition will give *Shaanthi* or peace to three entities in you---body, mind and soul.

Every human being has four birthdays. The first is when he emerges from his mother's womb and, being neither holy nor unholy, craves only for food and shelter; the second is when he begins his spiritual study to lead him from darkness to light; the third is when he has gained wisdom, having mastered the disciplines propounded by the *rishis* for achieving self-realisation; the fourth and last is when he realises his true identity and merges with *Brahman*.

Never give up the *Gaayathri manthra*

The *yajnopaveetham* (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. So the *Gaayathri manthra* has been given to you as a third eye to reveal to you that inner vision by which you may realise *Brahman*.

Gaayathri is a treasure you must guard throughout your lives. If you have not caught the sounds of the *manthra* correctly now, learn it from your parents or from your family priest. Perhaps the others may not know the *Gaayathri* themselves or they might have forgotten it through culpable neglect. Then I would ask them to learn it from you.

Never give up the *Gaayathri*; you may give up or ignore any other *manthra* but you should recite the *Gaayathri* 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 *manthra* and have found that when it is recited with the correct accent as laid down in the *Vedhas*, 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 *manthra* is chanted. *Gaayathri* is *Annapoorna*, the Mother, the sustaining Force that animates all life. So do not neglect it. Elders and priests, *manthra*, 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.

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It is as absurd as putting the cart before the horse. The physical is subordinate to the spiritual. The body is the cart and the spirit, the horse. Of course, the cart should be kept in good condition; vice ruins the body and makes it unfit for the journey of life. The mind is the horse and that is neglected and not groomed for the journey. It is starved.

In this land where Meera, Jayadeva, Valmeeki, Thyaagaraaja, Raamadhas and Tukaaram, by their intense yearning and fortitude, showed the path of achieving lasting joy, precious years of life are thrown away in silly adventures.

Sri Sathya Sai