

SECRETS OF MANTRA VIDYA

Gayatri Mantra Explained

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य
धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



Learn more about the Gayatri Mantra – one of the most important and powerful of all mantras, that is said to contain the essence of all the Vedas.



SWAMI PURNACHAITANYA

About The Author



Swami Purnachaitanya is an author, speaker, and spiritual guide to many around the world. He is a sought-after teacher of yoga, meditation and mantras, and an enthralling storyteller, who has transformed the lives of people from all backgrounds with his uncanny ability to decode profound ancient wisdom and impart it with simplicity, making it practically applicable in modern life.

Swami Purnachaitanya was born in the Netherlands to a Dutch father and an Indian mother, who played a central role in kindling in him a keen interest in the spiritual practices, cultures and philosophies of the East. This led him to practice an extensive range of Eastern martial arts which would prove to be providential.

The defining moment in his life came at the age of sixteen, when he met Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, in whom he recognized his spiritual master. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a world-renowned peace ambassador, humanitarian and spiritual leader, and is the Founder of one of the largest volunteer-based humanitarian non-profit organizations in the world, The Art of Living. Swami Purnachaitanya became inspired to go deeper into the ancient Vedic traditions and practices, leading him to embark upon his journey into understanding the nature of reality and consciousness.

After completing his university studies in Indology with a specialization in Sanskrit, he left the Netherlands and moved to The Art of Living International Center in Bangalore, India to master the Vedic knowledge, rituals and recitation of mantras and Vedic hymns. He received his title (swami, monk) as an acknowledgement of his high state of consciousness and commitment to dedicating his life to serving others. Purnachaitanya is the name given to him by his Master, meaning he whose consciousness (chaitanya) has fully blossomed (purna).

Swami Purnachaitanya is currently a Director of Programs for the Art of Living where he conducts a range of personal development trainings and oversees various service projects in India and Africa. These projects include but are not limited to rural development, prisoner rehabilitation, and educational initiatives. He has also represented Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and The Art of Living at various national and international forums, seminars and conferences. Apart from this he is a senior teacher trainer with the Sri Sri School of Yoga and is known for his skill in teaching this style that connects a balanced and thorough discipline of physical postures, breathwork, meditation and yogic wisdom.

In the last 15 years he has travelled extensively in Asia, Africa and Europe, conducting a wide range of programs in over 20 countries. He has addressed various educational, corporate and government institutions, and conducted special workshops and Master Classes for top executives of leading companies such as Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Microsoft and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). At the cusp of a critical moment in history, Swami Purnachaitanya has opened the treasure of ancient knowledge and has been selflessly sharing the peace, joy and fullness he has found in his life with hundreds of thousands of people.

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Introduction to Mantras

Mantras are sounds, the vibrations of which have a specific and definite effect on the surroundings, both on the physical and the subtle level. The ancient knowledge of how to use different sounds effectively for a wide range of purposes is known as Mantra Shaastra or the Science of Mantras.

The *Rishis*, or sages of the Vedic Tradition, were called *Mantra Drashta*, which means '**the ones who perceived the mantras**'. They did not 'create' the mantras. With their refined consciousness and entering into deep meditation, they were able to perceive these vibrations in Creation, the sounds connected to them, and their specific effects. It is similar to Newton 'perceiving' the law of gravity and how it works – he did not 'create' gravity, nor its law, as it has always been there, yet he had presence of mind and refinement of consciousness to 'see' the principle behind the falling apple, instead of seeing just the apple.

It was using this principle, of using powerful vibrations, that the ancient Rishis were not only able to influence, alter and balance the world around them, but even the world inside of them. For mantras also have a profound effect on our mind, emotions, and the more subtle layers of this Creation. This is why *Mantra* is defined in the scriptures as '**mananaat traayate iti mantra**', which means '**mantra is that which allows us to transcend the mind**'. Mantras chanted in the proper manner allow us to use the power of consciousness to invoke and enhance certain vibrations or energies in our body, mind and day-to-day life.

It is said that every mantra is connected to a specific *Devata*. The word *Devata* is often translated as god, but this is not to be confused with The God. The Vedas describe a range of gods and goddesses, so to use a less confusing translation for *Devatas* we could call them Angels. These gods and goddesses all are considered manifestations or representations of the various aspects of and powers inherent in Consciousness and Creation, just like how the different colors of light are inherent in the spectrum of sunlight. This is also why the statement that the Vedic tradition recognizes or worships millions of gods is not entirely correct – rather it recognizes the One Consciousness or Divinity in all its different manifestations or qualities.

The *Devata* is therefore the quality or power of Consciousness that is invoked or enhanced by that mantra. This is why *Devatas* are said to have a *Mantra Sharira*, which means '**a body made of mantra**'. The concept of describing and depicting different *Devatas* in a humanlike form, and



making murtis or statues, started much later than the Vedic times and is symbolic. The various aspects or qualities of that energy or vibration were depicted visually in these statues, to make it easier for people to relate to something as abstract as an unseen energy.

The Gayatri mantra is one of the most important and powerful of all Vedic mantras. It is called ***Chandasam Mata*** or ***'the mother of all mantras'*** and is also called ***Veda Mata*** or the ***'mother of the Vedas'***. The Gayatri is said to contain the essence of all the knowledge or the Vedas, but the sacred mantra has to be received and practiced in the proper manner.



The Importance of Gayatri Mantra

The Vedic tradition attaches the utmost importance to the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. According to the Vedas, knowledge is an inherent quality of the Self of consciousness, and it is the light of knowledge that can dispel the darkness of Avidya, or 'ignorance', and allow us to realize the supreme truth. And this is also why the Gayatri mantra is accepted by all as the greatest and most noble prayer. It is a sincere prayer, not for any material wealth or any comfort in this world or the next, but for imbibing wisdom and inspiring our intellect, so that we may realize our true nature. It says in the Vedas 'samaano mantrah', which means 'let one mantra be common to all', and that mantra is Gayatri mantra.

The definitions of the Gayatri mantra that we find in the ancient scriptures also very beautifully reiterates this purpose or power of the mantra. It is defined as '*gayantam trayati sa gayatri*', which means '*that which protects the one who sings it, or chants it, is called Gayatri*'. It is also described as '*prana vai gayastan trayati tasmad gayatri*', which means '*that which saves, or protects, the life in us, is gayatri*'. It is often described in the scriptures as the best or highest mantra to attain self-realization.

In the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna proclaims that among the mantras He is the Gayatri, which means that it is considered as supreme amongst all mantras. Gayatri is also considered the mother of the Vedas or *Chandasam Mata*, the '*mother of all mantras*'. In one of the *Dharmashastras* (scriptures on *Dharma*) it is said that the Gayatri mantra is equivalent to all the four Vedas, relating a story where *Brahma* is said to have put all the Vedas in one part of a scale and Gayatri in the other part, and both were at par. It is thus believed Gayatri contains the essence of all the knowledge or the Vedas within itself. However, even with devout practice it may take a lifetime to realize the true meaning and significance of the Gayatri mantra.

The Gayatri mantra gets its name from the Vedic poetic metre or *Chandas* called *Gayatri*, which contains 24 syllables. It is known as a *Samashti Mantra* and not an individual mantra, which means that it is chanted for the benefit of all, not just for oneself. The prayer it contains is that 'all our intellects may be illumined and inspired' to realize the highest – not just 'my intellect'. And this is another important principle of the Vedic tradition, as it considers all to be part of



Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or a **'one-world family'**. Our existence is part of this world, and our actions, words and thoughts should take into consideration the greater good of all the beings, not just ourselves.

The Gayatri is also very special because it is called the **Guru Mantra**, as it is the mantra that the Guru would traditionally give to the student upon accepting him or her as a student. The Gayatri mantra is therefore only to be learned after proper initiation by one who has attained **Mantra Siddhi** or **'perfection in this mantra'**, not just from anyone, or from a book, recording or video. One will only experience the true power of the mantra if it has been received in the proper manner from a proper teacher.

After the proper initiation, it is recommended that the Gayatri mantra be chanted during three transition times every day: the transition from night to day (sunrise), morning to afternoon (noon), and evening to night (sunset). The chanting of Gayatri has the effect of liberating one from the fruits of **Karma**, the natural law of cause and effect, which controls the cycle of birth and death. The chanter of Gayatri is also said to be blessed with various qualities like longevity, courage, physical strength, awareness, healing of ailments, sweetness of speech, and celibacy for spiritual practices. Some scriptures even state that those who practice the **Japa** or **'meditative repetition'** of the Gayatri mantra in the proper manner, after having been initiated in the correct way, gain the power to bless or to curse.

The Gayatri mantra is also said to bestow different benefits during different phases of one's life. Thus, it was said that the **Tejas**, or **'radiance'**, of a **Brahmachari** (student), lies in his **Gayatri Japa** (the repetition of the Gayatri mantra); the support and prosperity of a **Grihastha** (householder), lies in his **Gayatri Japa**; and the strength and solace of a **Vanaprastha** (someone who has handed over the responsibilities of the household to his children, and lives a more solitary and service-oriented life), lies in his **Gayatri Japa**.



Meaning and Deeper Significance of Gayatri Mantra

The Gayatri mantra is one of the most powerful and profound Vedic mantras. It is said to be the expansion of the primordial sound AUM and it is also said to contain the essence of all the Vedas. It is the mother of all mantras and therefore it is difficult to really do justice with any translation into another language. The true meaning of Gayatri cannot be understood intellectually, as the experience (of the consciousness) it conveys transcends the intellect – it can only be experienced or 'realized'. However, some basic translations and explanations have been given here to get at least some understanding of the meaning of the mantra – may it help sincere seekers to do their Gayatri Japa with sincerity, feeling and devotion.

The Gayatri mantra appears in its basic form in the third mandala of the *Rig Veda (3:62:11)*. It is given as:

Om tatsavitur varenyam bhargo devasya dheemahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat

The same mantra, along with the prefixes called *Vyaahritis* is given in the *Yajur Veda (36:3)* as well:

Om bhur bhuvah svah tatsavitur varenyam bhargo devasya dheemahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat

This could be translated as:

We meditate (dheemahi) on the spiritual effulgence (bhargo) of that divinity (devasya) that is worthy of worship (varenyam), that Light of Consciousness (savitur) that is the source of the three planes of existence, the gross (bhur), the subtle (bhuvah) and the causal (svah). May that (tat) divine Light of Consciousness illuminate and inspire (prachodayaat) our (nah) intellects (dhiyo).



It is therefore a prayer to the universal consciousness or the supreme divinity to enlighten our intellect, so that we may realize our true nature. It is our intellect that is often preventing us from fully expressing the divinity within in life. It is a prayer that our individual consciousness may be aligned with the universal consciousness.

The Gayatri, however, is not just a prayer or a combination of words. Throughout the Vedas and Upanishads it has been stated that '**AUM is nada (sound vibration), and Gayatri is prana (subtle life force)**'. This means that the Gayatri mantra arose from AUM. At the time of creation of this universe, AUM was the primordial sound, and as creation manifested and expanded, AUM kept expanding until it finally became the Gayatri mantra. AUM is like the seed, and Gayatri is like the fully blossomed tree or the fruit. Even though the seed has the potential of the fruit, one cannot eat the seed; and this is why the scriptures emphasize the importance of the **Japa** of Gayatri, as it can give you the fruit of any mantra.

The Gayatri is chanted during the three **Sandhyas** or transition times of the day: the transition from night to day (sunrise), the transition from morning to afternoon (noon), and the transition from day to night (sunset). As per the Vedas, these timings are also connected to the three forms of the subtle life-force energy or **Prana**, and its presiding deity Gayatri: **Prana** is said to resemble a little innocent girl in the morning, a charming young woman at noon, and a wise old woman in the evening. Doing the **Gayatri Japa** at these different times therefore allows one to worship Gayatri in all her three forms and aspects. **Gayatri Japa** is therefore also a practice that strengthens and harmonizes the subtle body or **Pranamaya Kosha** of the practitioner.

Sometimes people take the Gayatri mantra as a prayer to the external sun, and say that **Gayatri Japa** or **Sandhya Vandana** is Sun worship, but this is not fully correct. The sun, here, is symbolic for the internal sun, the brilliant effulgence of the light of the Self or consciousness. It is therefore a prayer to the supreme consciousness or divinity to remove the darkness of **Avidya** (ignorance) so that we may realize our true nature that is pure consciousness, and that lies beyond the three states of waking, sleeping and dreaming.

The 24 syllables of the Gayatri mantra are said to be connected to the 24 basic **Tattvas** or '**elements in this creation**', and Gayatri therefore encompasses all aspects of creation. It is also said that they contain the 24 different subtle energies or shaktis of this creation, and these 24 syllables are also connected to the 24 vertebrae of our spine. The vibrations of the mantra thus affect our gross body (**Sthula Sharira**), subtle body (**Sukshma Sharira**) and causal body (**Karana Sharira**). The regular chanting of Gayatri removes negative impressions from our consciousness and energizes our mind, so that it can transcend.



The world-renowned saint **Adi Shankaracharya** also described the intellect as a manifestation of **Devi**, the universal energy or **Shakti**, and depending on whether **Tamas, Rajas or Sattva** is predominant, she manifests as **Kali** (an intellect more destructive in nature), **Lakshmi** (an intellect more focused on wealth and comfort), or **Saraswati** (an intellect more oriented towards knowledge and wisdom). Gayatri mantra thus helps us to maintain a **Sattvik** intellect, subduing the **Rajas** and **Tamas** that keep trying to come up and overpower our mind.

All our actions are based on our thoughts, and before thoughts arise in our mind, they are nothing but subtle vibrations in our consciousness. By changing the quality of our consciousness, we change the quality of our thoughts, and in turn the quality of our actions. Gayatri can therefore energize our mind, and give us more clarity, stability, peace, awareness, enthusiasm and creativity. And with devoted and proper practice, Gayatri bestows self-realization, and the experience of oneness with universal consciousness.



How To Learn Gayatri Mantra

The Gayatri mantra is to be received and practiced in the proper manner. This will make it powerful. This initiation process is called 'Upanayanam'. Upanayanam is one of the traditional Samskaras, or 'purificatory rites', that are prescribed in the Vedic way of life. These Samskaras, sixteen of which are considered as the main ones, mark the turning points where we enter a new stage of our life. The Samskaras are said to make us eligible for attaining the highest good, in two ways: they remove the impurities we have acquired, and they bestow on us beneficial qualities. Most of these Samskaras are not practiced regularly anymore these days, but some of them – even if not always in the traditional and proper manner – are still part of the daily lives of many, such as the Vedic ceremonies for birth, marriage and the death rites.

Upanayanam is a Sanskrit word, that literally means '**moving closer**'. Moving closer to what? To the knowledge, to the Master. The **Upanayanam Samskara** marked the end of childhood, and the beginning of studies (the **Brahmacharya** stage of life) for a child. As a child, there are no rules, and you can do whatever you want. However, **Upanayanam** meant taking certain vows, following certain rules, and taking responsibility. The **Upanayanam** ceremony is traditionally best done between the ages of six to eight years for boys although many perform it at a later age. Traditionally **Upanayanam** was done for women also but it was discontinued a few centuries ago due to social conditions.

The **Upanayanam** is also called **Gayatri Upadesha** or **Brahmopadesha**, which mean '**initiation into the Gayatri mantra**' and '**initiation into the Brahman**' respectively. This refers to one part of the ceremony, where the young child receives the Gayatri mantra from the Guru. This mantra is said to be the essence of the Vedas, and to lead a faithful practitioner to realize the supreme consciousness (Brahman). The teaching of the Gayatri mantra to the child in this ceremony, signifies the beginning of the Vedic studies that were to continue in the following years that the child would spend in the **Gurukula** or the '**house or Ashrama of the Guru**'.

The **Upanayanam** ceremony is performed with an ancient Vedic fire ceremony or **Homa (Havana)**, along with the chanting of mantras. The student bathes and wears new clothes after his hair is shaved (except for the tuft of hair at the back called a **Shikha**). The student is then invested with the sacred thread and initiated into the Gayatri. He is taught the **Sandhya Vandanam** ritual which is to be performed thrice every day. The **Yagnopavitam** or '**sacred thread**' is worn for the entire lifetime and changed once a year or on special occasions.



In the ***Upanayanam Samskara***, the boy takes certain vows – to serve the Guru, study the Vedas, lead a pure and disciplined life, perform the ***Sandhya Vandanam*** thrice everyday etc. Doing this develops excellent character, brings radiance, intelligence and vitality, and makes one eligible to realize the transcendental reality.

Those that have completed the ***Upanayanam Samskara***, are traditionally referred to as ***Dvija***, or ***'twice-born'***. This is because the ***Upanayanam*** is considered as a second birth for the child. The first birth being through the mother and the father, and the second being through the Gayatri mantra (mother) and the Master or Guru (father). The child is born again through the knowledge, and is now eligible to study the Vedas and to participate in the various rituals and ceremonies that are part of the Vedic life. This thread became one of the main characteristics by which the 'twice-borns' could be recognized.

The ***Yajnopavitam***, also called the ***'sacred thread'***, is made up of three strands of thread, which are said to symbolize different things. One explanation given is that they stand for the three responsibilities that the child takes upon itself: responsibility towards the parents, responsibility towards the knowledge or the Master, and responsibility towards the society. This is because each of these allows the child to undertake the studies. The parents have given birth to the child, raised it, and sent it to the ***Gurukula***. The Master takes the child in, and gives it a complete education, that will allow it to live a successful life as a worthy member of the society. The society feeds the child, whenever it goes on its begging rounds, and thus provides for its needs, while the child is studying. The three threads also indicate three kinds of purity that the student strives for: purity of thought, speech and action.





After completing their studies in this manner, children were ready to become a member of the society, fit to take up responsibilities and having the knowledge to lead a happy, healthy and successful life.





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