

गायत्री मन्त्रः
Gāyatrī Mantraḥ

ॐ भूर् भुवः स्वः । तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

*Om, bhūr, bhuvah, svaḥ. Tat savitur vareṇyaṃ bhargo devasya dhīmahi. Dhiyo yo naḥ
pracodayāt.*

ॐ om – a sound symbol of the Lord; an auspicious utterance used in prayers

भूर् bhūr – (bhūh) the Earth

भुवः bhuvah – all beings

स्वः svaḥ – all that is beyond our comprehension¹

तत् tat – that (reality, Brahman)

सवितुर् savitur – of the Sun,² sāvitrī

वरेण्यं vareṇyaṃ – exalted, supreme, praiseworthy, incomparably great

भर्गो bhargo – (bhargah) effulgence, brilliance, illumination

देवस्य devasya – of the Lord

धीमहि dhīmahi – we dwell on, meditate upon, contemplate, pray to

धियो dhiyo – (dhiyah) intellects,³ thoughts (the mind)

यो yo – (yah) he who

नः naḥ – our

प्रचोदयात् pracodayāt – inspires, directs, activates, enlivens⁴ (all activities)

LITERAL TRANSLATION

We dwell upon the exalted, all-illuminating effulgence of the Lord, in the form of the Sun, who makes activity possible through enlivening the intellect.⁵

SUBLTLER TRANSLATION

May we contemplate our own real nature, consciousness, the truth of the whole – symbolised by the Sun's effulgence – which, through activating our minds, makes thought, speech and action possible.⁶

The effulgence of the Sun symbolises the power of knowing, which is the nature of consciousness. All-pervading consciousness, being the ultimate truth or reality of oneself, the Sun and the universe, activates the mind by its mere presence. Through activation of the mind, consciousness activates everything else: speech, sense powers, body – manifesting as life itself in every living being.

The Sun's effulgence can be taken as a symbol for meditation, *dhyānam*, upon the Lord, the whole. When, however, that effulgence is taken as a symbol for meditation upon one's own *svarūpam* (one's intrinsic nature) of consciousness – and meditation then takes place upon one's own *svarūpam* alone – that form of meditation is called contemplation, *nididhyāsanam*.

Gāyatrī is the name of a metre. Any *mantra* consisting of 24 syllables is in *gāyatrī* metre. The correct name of this famous *mantra* is in fact *Sāvitrī*; it is the *Sāvitrī Mantra*, in *gāyatrī* metre and yet somehow has come to be known as *Gāyatrī*.

The very word *gāyatrī* means: 'protector of the reciter'. It is said that the *Gāyatrī Mantra* is all four *Vedas* in condensed form, *bhūr bhuvah svaḥ* the *Gāyatrī* in condensed form and *Om* these three condensed.

One of the benefits of *Gāyatrī Mantra japa* is mental refinement, especially the brightening of the intellect; hence it is given to boys aged 7-9 at the sacred thread ceremony, *upanayanam*, which initiates the child into the study of the *Veda*. Hereafter the *mantra* is to be chanted 108 times thrice daily (dawn, noon and dusk) by the initiate until *sannyāsa āśrama*, the fourth stage of life, begins.

1. *Bhūr bhuvah, svaḥ* – these three words are not part of the *mantra*, but it is always begun with them. They stand for all the 14 worlds and together point to the all-pervading nature of *Om*, to all being *Om*.

2. Sun – a poetic reference to 'that from which all this is born'.

3. *Śaṅkara's* commentary on *dhiḥ* gives the meaning *karmāṇi* – all our actions – instead of the usual meaning 'intellects'.

4. *Pracodayāt* is to be understood as 'he who enlivens our intellect, making all three forms of action possible' (thought, speech and physical action).

5. *Śaṅkara* gives two meanings for the *mantra*, of which this is the first and more literal.

6. In this second, subtler meaning of the *mantra* the accent is turned from worship to meditation. When meditating on consciousness, one's own real nature, the meditator-meditated difference is not there due to the absence of any subject-object relationship in this form of meditation, a form known as contemplation, *nididhyāsanam*.