

The Sacred Vedic Verse

Veda Jananī — The Mother of the Vedas

The Gāyatrī Mantra (also known as the Sāvitrī Mantra) is from the *Rg Veda* 3:62.10. The mantra is sometimes termed *Savitri*, i.e., dedicated to *Savit*, the sun god (Solar Logos in theosophical terminology), but it is also interpreted as referring to our own higher self (i.e., *paramatman*). *Savit* may, furthermore, be taken to refer to the creator, sustainer, and destroyer (or regenerator) of everything, i.e., Brahma, Vihsnu, and Siva. It is composed of 24 syllables on 3 lines of 8 syllables each, and is said to be given to the Rishi Viśvāmitra by the Supreme Being. It was written 2500 to 3500 years ago and is emphasized later in *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna praises the Gayatri, in chapter 10 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where he indicates his oneness with it. The word *gāyatrī* is from the verbal root *gā*, to sing. This mantra is a plea to Lord Sun for purifying, strengthening and illuminating us on all levels. We also appreciate the Solar God for his radiance and nurturing.

“First it [the light of the Logos] is the life, or the *Mahachaitanyam* of the cosmos; that is one aspect of it; secondly, it is force, and in this aspect it is the *Fohat* of the Buddhist philosophy; lastly, it is wisdom, in the sense that it is the Chichakti [Chichchakti] of the Hindu philosophers. All these three aspects are ... combined in our conception of the Gayatri.” — *Notes on the Bhagavad Gita*, by T. Subba Row, p. 90.

THE GĀYATRĪ

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

Oṃ bhūr bhuvah svaḥ!
Tat savitur vareṇyam
bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt.

Divine Light present in all realms!
Let us meditate on that most
excellent (splendor) light of the divine Sun,
that it may illuminate our (hearts) minds.

THE GĀYATRĪ

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः	Oṃ bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ!	Divine Light present in all realms!*
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं	Tat savitur vareṇyam	Let us meditate on that most
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।	bhargo devasya dhīmahi	excellent (splendor) light of the divine Sun,
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्॥	dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt.	that it may illuminate our (hearts) minds.

* Universal Consciousness in earth (physical), atmosphere (mental), and heaven (spiritual).

“Word meaning: **Oṃ**: The primeval sound; **Bhūr**: the physical body/physical realm; **Bhuvaḥ**: the life force/the mental realm **Svaḥ**: the soul/spiritual realm; **Tat**: That (God); **Savitur**: the Sun, Creator (source of all life); **Vareṇyam**: adore; **Bhargo**: effulgence (divine light); **Devasya**: supreme Lord; **Dhīmahi**: meditate; **Dhiyo**: the intellect; **Yo**: May this light; **Naḥ**: our; **Prachodayāt**: illumine/inspire.” — Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Translations of the Gāyatrī:

We meditate on the glorious light of the true divine Sun.
May that light nourish our minds and illumine our understanding.

We meditate on that desirable light of the divine Sāvitrī, who influences our pious rites.

Oh Divine Mother, we meditate on you, and your positive, radiant light.

Let us meditate on that excellent splendor of the divine sun; may it illumine (inspire) our hearts (minds).

The Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary

We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may She enlighten our minds.
Swami Vivekananda

Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine vivifying Sun, May he enlighten our understandings.
Monier Monier-Williams

May we attain that excellent glory of Savitar the god: So may He stimulate our prayers.
Ralph T. H. Griffith

We meditate on the effulgent glory of the divine Light; may he inspire our understanding.
S. Radhakrishnan 1947

We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; may She inspire our intelligence.
S. Radhakrishnan 1953

We choose the Supreme Light of the divine Sun; we aspire that it may impel our minds.
Sri Aurobindo

We meditate on that most adored Supreme Lord, the creator, whose effulgence (divine light) illumines all realms (physical, mental, spiritual). May this divine light illumine our intellect.
Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Paraphrases of the Gāyatrī:

I am bound by my word of honour never to repeat the whole of this prayer, but I may quote a few unconnected sentences: Om. . . . Earth. . . . Heaven. . . Let the adored light of. . . [here follows a name which must not be pronounced {Sāvitrī? as a substitute?}] shelter me. Let thy Sun, O thou only One, shelter me, the unworthy. . . I shut my eyes, I shut my ears, I do not breathe. . . in order to see, hear and breathe thee alone. Throw light upon our thoughts [again the secret name]. . .

H. P. Blavatsky

Aum,— the light of the Universe, the omniscient and omnipresent; the all-containing, in whose womb move all the orbs of heaven; the self-effulgent, from whom the sun and stars borrow their light; whose knowledge is perfect and immutable, whose glory is superlative; who is deathless, the life of life and dearer than life, who gives bliss to those who earnestly desire it, and saves from all calamities his genuine devotees, and gives them peace and comfort; the all-intelligent, who keeps in order and harmony all and each by permeating all things, on whom is dependent all that exist, the creator and giver of all glory, the illuminator of all souls and giver of every bliss, who is worthy to be embraced; the all-knowledge and all-holiness,— we contemplate and worship that He may enlighten our intellect and conscience.

The Path, August 1890

Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe,
from whom all proceed, to whom all return,
that face of the true Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light,
that we may see the truth and do our whole duty
on our journey to thy sacred seat.

William Q. Judge

O my Divinity! thou dost blend with the earth
and fashion for thyself temples of mighty power.
O my Divinity! thou livest in the heart-life of all things,
and dost radiate a golden light that shineth forever
and doth illumine even the darkest comers of the earth.
O my Divinity! blend thou with me
that from the corruptible I may become Incorruptible;
that from imperfection I may become Perfection;
that from darkness I may go forth in Light.

Katherine Tingley

Oh thou golden sun of most excellent splendor,
illumine our hearts and fill our minds,
so that we, recognizing our oneness with the Divinity
which is the heart of the universe,
may see the pathway before our feet,
and tread it to those distant goals of perfection,
stimulated by thine own radiant light.

G. de Purucker

As the sun we see is not the true sun,
so too the light of intellect is not the real sun of our moral being.
Only by untiring devotion to the welfare of humanity,
and unutterable aspiration to the Divine Self within,
we can move closer to the true sun who is the source and object of our being,
and the Light of Truth for All.

The Philalethians

That which giveth sustenance to the Universe and to ourselves, from which all doth proceed and unto which all must return — That Thou Art. In the golden vase of thine earthly body may the pure Light of the Spiritual Sun shine forth, that thou may'st know the Truth, and do thy whole duty, on the journey back to the Sacred Seat!

The Eternal Verities

AUM. In all three worlds — terrestrial, astral, and celestial — may we meditate upon the splendour of that Divine Sun who illuminates all. May its golden light nourish our understanding and guide us on our journey to its sacred seat. OM.

Raghavan Iyer

Om. Let us contemplate the wondrous spirit of the Divine Creator (*Savitri*)
of the earthly, atmospheric, and celestial spheres.
May He direct our minds (that is, 'towards' the attainment of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*), Om.

Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon)

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.

Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati (founder of Arya Samaj)

We meditate on the worshipable power and glory of Him
who has created the earth, the nether world and the heavens (i.e. the universe),
and who directs our understanding.

Sivanath Sastri (Brahmo Samaj)

Oh manifest and unmanifest,
wave and ray of breath,
red lotus of insight,
transfix us from eye to navel to throat,
under canopy of stars
spring from soil in an unbroken arc of light
that we might immerse ourselves
until lit from within like the sun itself.

Ravi Shankar

Om, the Brahm, the Universal Divine Energy,
vital spiritual energy (Pran), the essence of our life existence,
Positivity, destroyer of sufferings,
the happiness, that is bright, luminous like the Sun,
best, destroyer of evil thoughts,
the divinity who grants happiness
may imbibe its Divinity and Brilliance within us
which may purify us and guide
our righteous wisdom on the right path.

Pandit Shriram Sharma

Let us adore the supremacy of that divine sun,
the god-head who illuminates all, who recreates all,
from whom all proceed, to whom all must return,
whom we invoke to direct our understandings
right in our progress toward his holy seat.

Sir William Jones

Let us meditate on Isvara and His Glory
who has created the Universe,
who is fit to be worshipped,
who is the remover of all sins and ignorance.
May he enlighten our intellect.

Swami Sivananda

AUM. In all three worlds — terrestrial, astral, and celestial —
may we meditate upon the splendour of that Divine Sun who illuminates all.
May its golden light nourish our understanding
and guide us on our journey to its sacred seat. OM.

Raghavan Iyer

Feeling, while going about, that he is a wave of the ocean of Self: while sitting, that he is a bead strung on the thread of universal consciousness: while perceiving objects of sense, that he is realizing himself by perceiving the Self: and, while sleeping, that he is drowned in the ocean of bliss;— he who, inwardly constant, spends his whole life thus is, among all men, the real seeker of liberation.

All this world, consisting of name and form, is only the particular manifestation (*vashti*) of the universal Substance (*viraj*); it moves and knows all objects by virtue of the primal life (*mukhya-prana*) that inspires it. This Self like the sun, is neither the doer nor the enjoyer. Thus, directly realizing, does he that is full of knowledge and realization live his life, through incessant contemplation of the Supreme Self.

Just as the one sun, independent of other objects, yet, by virtue of reflection in several waters, becomes many and has the same stability or motion as the medium reflecting it; so does the Supreme Self seem to be affected by properties by virtue of its reflection of all beings, high and low, but, when clearly realized, shines unaffected by those properties.

The Supreme Self has three aspects, namely, the full, the self and the not-self, the first being the unconditioned Self, the second being that which is conditioned by the consciousness, and the third being a mere reflection, in the same way as space has three aspects in respect of water, namely, that which is inside and outside of the water, that which is conterminous with water, and that which is reflected therein. When the conditioned self is merged in the unconditioned, then the condition together with its consequences vanishes altogether.

Shankaracharya

A Commentary on the Gayatri

William Q. Judge

Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe,
from whom all proceed, to whom all return,
that face of the true Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light,
that we may see the truth and do our whole duty
on our journey to thy sacred seat.

The Gāyatrī *

I have adopted a translation as above, which is excellent in its giving of the meaning of this verse. What is the Gayatri? It is the sacred verse of the Hindus and begins with Om, their sacred word and letter. Its first words are: *Om, Bhur, Bhurvah!*

The first word contains in it a declaration of the three periods of a Manvantara and the three powers of that great Being who alone Is. Of a manvantara it is the beginning, the middle, and the end, and the three powers are Creation (or manifesting), Preservation (or carrying on), and Destruction. The three first words, Om, bhur, bhurvah, draw attention to and designate the three worlds. The whole verse is an aspiration in the highest sense. Every Brahman at his initiation is further instructed in this verse, but from giving that I am necessarily excused, as I cannot give it in a way in which I have not received it.

Unveil is the cry of the man who is determined to know the truth and who perceives that something hides it from him. It is hidden by his own Karmic effects, which have put him now where the brain and the desires are too strong for the higher self to pierce through so long as he remains careless and ignorant. The cry is not made to some man-made god with parts, passions, and attributes, but to the Self above who seeth in secret and bringeth out to light. It is directed to that on which the Universe is built and standeth,— no other than the Self which is in every man and which sitteth like a bird in a tree watching while another eats the fruit.

From this the whole Universe proceeds out into manifestation. The ancients held that all things whatsoever existed in fact solely in the idea, and therefore the practitioner of Yoga was taught — and soon discovered — that sun, moon, and stars were in himself, and until he learned this he could not proceed. This doctrine is very old, but today is adopted by many modern reasoners. For they perceive on reflection that no object enters the eye, and that whether we perceive through sight or feeling or any other sense whatever all objects are existing solely in idea. Of old this was demonstrated in two ways. First, by showing the disciple the actual interpenetration of one world by another. As that while we live here among those things called objective by us, other beings were likewise living in and among us and our objects and therein actually carrying on their avocations, perceiving the objects on their plane as objective, and wholly untouched by and insensible to us and the objects we think so material. This is no less true today than it was then. And if it were not true, modern hypnotism, clairvoyance, or clairaudience would be impossible. This was shown by a second method precisely similar to mesmeric and hypnotic experiments, only that to these was added the power to make the subject step aside from himself and with a dual consciousness note his own condition. For if a barrier of wood were erected in the sight of the subject which he clearly perceived and knew was wood, impervious to sight and an obstacle to movement, yet when hypnotised he saw it not, yet could perceive all objects behind it which were hidden in his normal state, and when he pressed against it thinking it to be empty air and feeling naught but force, he could not pass but wondered why the empty air restrained his body. This is modern and ancient. Clearly it demonstrates the illusionary nature of objectivity. The objectivity is only real relatively, for the mind sees no objects whatever but only their idea, and at present is conditioned through its own evolution until it shall have developed other powers and qualities.

The request made in the verse to *unveil the face of the True Sun* is that the Higher Self may shine down into us and do its work of illumination. This also spreads forth a natural fact unknown to moderns, which is that the sun we see is not the true sun, and signifies too that the light of intellect is not the true sun of our moral being. Our forefathers in the dim past knew how to draw forth through the visible Sun the forces from the True one. We have temporarily forgotten this because our evolution and descent into the hell of matter, in order to save the whole, have interposed a screen. They say in Christian lands that Jesus went into hell for three days. This is correct, but not peculiar to Jesus. Humanity is doing this for three days, which is merely the mystical way of saying that we must descend into matter for three periods so immense in time that the logarithm of one day is given to each period. Logarithms were not first known to Napier, but were taught in the pure form of the mysteries, because alone by their use could certain vast calculations be made.

Which is now hidden by a vase of Golden Light. That is, the light of the True Sun — the Higher Self — is hidden by the blood contained in the vase of the mortal body. The blood has two aspects — not here detailed — in one of which it is

a helper to perception, in the other a hindrance. But it signifies here the passions and desires, *Kama*, the personal self, the thirst for life. It is this that veils from us the true light. So long as desire and the personality remain strong, just so long will the light be blurred, so long will we mistake words for knowledge and knowledge for the thing we wish to know and to realize.

The object of this prayer is that we may carry out our whole duty, after becoming acquainted with the truth, while we are on our journey to thy Sacred Seat. This is our pilgrimage, not of one, not selfishly, not alone, but the whole of humanity. For the sacred seat is not the Brahmanical heaven of Indra, nor the Christian selfish heaven acquired without merit while the meritorious suffer the pains of hell. It is that place where all meet, where alone all are one. It is when and where the three great sounds of the first word of the prayer merge into one soundless sound. This is the only proper prayer, the sole saving aspiration.

The Path, January, 1893

An Obscure Brahman

* [These sacred verses, also called *Sāvitrī*, occur in the *Rig-Veda*, III, 62, 10. They are in Sanskrit: Om bhūr bhuvah svah! Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt. A more literal translation, following the invocation to the three worlds of earth (*bhūr*), sky (*bhuvah*), and heaven (*svah*): “Let us meditate on that excellent splendour of the divine sun; may it illumine our minds.” — *Dara Eklund*.] {In his article “The Allegorical Umbrella,” Judge writes: “In the Upanishads (*Isha Upanishad*, verse 15) we read the invocation: “Reveal (Unveil), O Pushan (one who nourishes life), that face of the true sun which is now hidden by (covered with) a golden lid (orb, disk).” *Pushan* is the deity (The Real, True, Spiritual, or Divine Sun) in the physical sun we see.}

Thoughts on the Gayatri

Elisabeth Prent

*Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi,
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.*

Brahmans recite this ancient Hindu hymn during both their morning and evening religious exercises. G. de Purucker paraphrases it thus:

Oh thou golden sun of most excellent splendor, illumine our hearts and fill our minds, so that we, recognizing our oneness with the Divinity which is the heart of the universe, may see the pathway before our feet, and tread it to those distant goals of perfection, stimulated by thine own radiant light.

Who or what is the sun in this invocation? Is it the golden star we see pouring its light and warmth over the earth? The answer is Yes and No. Like every other being, the sun uses a physical body to manifest its inner essence and come in contact with other beings — in short, to continue its peregrinations through boundless space and time. What we perceive is this outer garment which clothes the sun addressed in the hymn.

How is it that we can relate to the spiritual heart of the sun? In the core of every being resides a spark of the same essence as the sun. Our real self is potentially a sun — it is unfolding, through aeons upon aeons, its latent capacity to become a star.

The sun continuously sends forth infinite numbers of rays; and one knocks at the door of each human heart. If we are attentive enough, we can open the door and let this ray enter our being so that it can meet our own divine spark. In this process the sun does not create anything within us; it simply lends a helping hand to a fellow pilgrim on the path. It becomes a teacher who assists in bringing forth all the qualities sleeping within us.

The more we become aware that fundamentally we are identical with the sun, the more our hearts become illumined and that quality becomes a dominant factor in our lives. Then our minds are filled with the sun, and our thinking becomes increasingly attuned to the noblest in us. Lower tendencies lose their hold as we increasingly sense the divine presence within us. This is the *real* human task — although, as we all know, it is a challenging one. And yet, the more we reflect on these thoughts, the more the door will open. Every small victory over lower qualities enables us to climb another step toward the light, so that the solar ray within falls on “the pathway before our feet.” It is just here, close to us, that we need light: here are our duties and our work, here we meet fellow human beings who need help and light on their paths, too.

The sun travels its impartial course in more perfect spheres: its help reaches us regardless of what we choose to do with it. And yet, perfection does not lie far away beyond the horizon. There is no gap between us and the essence of the sun; the gap exists in our consciousness, in our lack of deeper understanding of who we really are. Daily practice in fulfilling the small things in life best sharpens our awareness and makes us feel this proximity. The “distant goals of perfection” lie dormant in our hearts, and help is just before us. And it lies within each of us to tread this path and become co-workers with nature’s noblest goals.