

Gayatri Mantra

G Em G Em D Em Em
 OM Bur Bu - va Su - ha OM OM Tat sa - vi - tur va -
 D G D Em B
 ren - yam Bhar - go de - vas - ya dhi - ma - hi Dhi -
 C Em B Em D Em
 yo yo nah pra - cho - da - yat OM OM OM

Music W&A van der Zwan
 Lyrics Traditional Indian (Rig Veda)

The Gayatri Mantra, also known as the Savitri Mantra, is the oldest still prayed prayer we know of. In the cafes in New Delhi, loudspeakers blast it out. We heard it in a Bollywood arrangement, as a pop song, in a heavy metal arrangement, as a New Age song, and in traditional Indian style. Yet, it is little more than a century ago that only the highest Indian caste, the Brahmins, were allowed to pray the Gayatri Mantra. Towards the end of the 19th century, Swami Vivekananda was the first to initiate non-Brahmins into this age-old prayer.

The Gayatri Mantra – an ode from the Rig Veda to Savitri (the Sun) – derives its name from the gayatri verse meter, a stanza of three 8-syllable lines. This ode to the sun is ‘the mantra for bringing the light of Truth into all the parts of the being’.¹

The Taittiriya Upanishad later added the invocation *OM bhur bhuvah svah* to this hymn to invoke the physical, the psychological and the spiritual world. This Upanishad contains a whole ode to these so-called *vhyaritis* (utterances, names of *lokas* or locations).² *Suvar* or *svah* means luminous and is also written as *suvah*, or *svah*, so is sometimes mistaken for *svaha*, the Sanskrit equivalent of the Semitic Amen. Nowadays, the Gayatri mantra is usually recited or chanted with this invocation:

*OM bhur bhuvah svah
 tat savitur varenyam
 bhargo devasya dhimahi
 dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*

From his Advaita Vedanta background, Swami Vivekananda reads Savitri as the One Being and translates the mantra with: *We meditate on the glory of that Being, who has produced this universe; may She enlighten our minds.*³

¹ *Glossary of Terms in Sri Aurobindo's writings*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1978, p. 219.

² See Easwaran p. 247 – 248. This invocation is the short form of the longer *vhyaritis*, invoking seven lokas. See *Unity and Diversity* for more of the Vedic notion of the three worlds or realms of living.

³ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Volume I, p. 189.