

GĀYATRĪ

The Veda Mantrā Gāyatrī has sustained throughout the ages and generations. This Mantrā appears in all the four Vedās. This is one of the most venerable Vedic pieces. Long ago, the noble souls (Devās, Rṣis and Jnānis) realised its glory, efficacy and sacredness and adopted it as their daily ritual.

Every boy born of the couple of Dwija class (Brahmin, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas) is entitled to receive the Upanayanam ritual/ceremony (Sacred thread ceremony) at the age of eight. This practice has come from long and even today it is in vogue. A fringe percentage of parents may ignore/neglect. Perhaps they are yet to understand the importance of it. Still there is a small percentage of people who unduly delay this ceremony beyond the age of eight years. Those who delay or ignore deprive their sons of the benefits of Sandhyā-Vandana. Throughout India, people have shown reverence to both Upanayanam and Gāyatrī too. This ceremony entitles an individual for Veda/Vedānta studies; perform the rituals, various worships, Japa and Tapa.

‘स्वे स्वे कर्मण्त्तभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः’ ॥गीता॥

‘स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवाः’ ॥गीता॥

‘People have attained salvation by performing the duties prescribed to respective category’

The Sandhyā came into practice due to the initiative of four-headed Brahma. It is said –

यावन्तोऽस्यां विकर्मस्थाः पृथिव्यां बलिशा द्विजाः।

तेषां पावित्र्यसिद्ध्यर्थं सन्ध्या सृष्टा स्वयम्भुवा ॥सन्धाभाष्यम्॥

In Vedas, many daily duties/rituals are prescribed. By negligence of those, persons turn to be sinners. In order to overcome the lapse on one’s part and avoid sins, out of consideration, the four-headed Brahma initiated a simple procedure known as Sandhyā-Vandana. By adopting this daily and regularly, one will not be a sinner, on the other hand innumerable benefits are accrued. This simple procedure takes less than half an hour. Once this Sandhyā-Vandana is initiated during Upanayanam, the observation of this ritual thrice a day remains as a daily duty till the end of life. Thus the Upanayanam and Sandhyā-Vandana (in other words, Gāyatrī-Japa) for all male members of the Dwija class are considered mandatory.

THE WORD SANDHYĀ:

उपास्ति सन्धौ सूर्यस्य निशायां दिवसस्य च।

तामेव सन्ध्या तस्मात् प्रवदन्ति महर्षयः ॥व्यासः॥

Sandhi means junction. Sandhyā prayer is observed at three time junctions – morning, midday and evening. Since this prayer is observed at the time junctions (सन्धि) it is called Sandhyā. ‘सम्यग्ध्यायते वा सन्ध्या’ or ‘सूर्यान्तर्गत भगवध्यानमेव सन्ध्येत्युच्यते’ । The meditation on Bhagwān Nārāyaṇā dwelling in the sun is called Sandhyā ‘अहरहः

सन्ध्यमुपासीत'। Every day the Sandhyā should be performed. That is the command of the Vedās.

SALIENT FEATURES/ASPECTS OF SANDHYĀ:

Bathing, Ācamana, Sankalpa, Prānāyāma, Marjana- Mantrās, Arghya-Pradhan, Bhutoccatan, Āsana-Suddhi, praying mother earth, Karanyās, Anganyās, Meditation on Nārāyana in the sun, Āvahan, repeating Gāyatrī, salutation to deities on all directions, farewell to Gāyatrī, wishing well to all, pronounce Gotra and Pravara, dedicating total Sandhyā prayer to Lord Nārāyana.

CLEANLINESS (शुचि):

A person needs cleanliness at all times. From personal or social point of view it should be ensured. This aspect is generally achieved by regular bathing and wearing clean clothes. This is merely external cleanliness. This much of cleanliness is just not enough for the purpose of Sandhyā and subsequent Vedic rituals. A seven fold comprehensive internal and external cleanliness is prescribed for spiritual practices. It consists of (i) Primary cleaning (ii) Bathing with water (iii) Meditative bathing (ध्यानस्नानम्)(iv) First Marjana Mantra (v) Second Marjana Mantra (vi) Third Marjana Mantra (vii) Expelling sinful person (पापपुरुष विसर्जनम्).

Anything sacred or ritualistic starts only after bathing. Marjana is nothing but sprinkling water over the body of oneself repeating the Vedic Mārjana Mantrās. It is said that

संवत्सरकृतं पापं मार्जनान्ते विनश्यति

The sins accrued for one year will vanish by observing Mārjana.

THE RYTHMIC BREATHING: (प्राणायाम)

Pranāyāma means regulating or controlling the breathing cycle with reference to certain rules of Yogic system.

‘प्राणो वायुरिति प्रोक्तः आयामस्तन्निरोधकम्’ ॥

Prāna means the air we breathe and Ayama is to regulate it.

The Prānāyāma Mantra is as follows

प्रणवस्य परब्रह्मऋषिः परमात्मा देवता देवि गायत्री छन्दः प्राणायामे विनियोगः ॥

ॐ भूः ॐ भूवः ॐ सुवः ॐ महः ॐ जनः ॐ तपः ॐ सत्यं । (This is called Vyahriti)

ॐ तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गोदेवस्य धीमही धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् (This is called Gayathri)

ॐ आपोज्योति रसोमृतम् ब्रह्मभूर्भुवस्वरोम् (This is called Siras)

Pranayama consists of three parts viz., Inhalation, Retention and Exhalation. Carefully utilise Vyahriti, Gayathri and Siras for the three parts of the breathing respectively. These three actions form one cycle. If this is done with the Lord in the mind/reflection, it is said to be meditation.

Pranayama if done regularly produce profound influence on body and mind. There are amazing benefits.

OFFERING ABLATION:

Next important step is Arghya –Pradhan. This serves both as adoration and ablation; the latter is meant to transfer the Gayathri power to Sun God for vanquishing the demons like Mandeha etc. who pose impediments.

GĀYATRĪ JAPA:

Repetition of any Mantrā/Name of God or deity is known as JAPA. Before proceeding to Japa perform Karanyās and Anganyas. As mentioned in Upanishads and Puranas one has to meditate on Lord Nārāyana dwelling in the Sun. Sandhyā prayer describes Lord Nārāyana as follows:

ध्येयस्सदा सवितृमण्डलमध्यवर्ती नारायणः सरसिजासनसन्निविष्टः।

केयूरवान् मकरकुण्डलवान् किरीट हारी हिरण्मयवपुः धृतशङ्खचक्रः ॥

When repeating the Gāyathri Mantrā one has to meditate on Lord Nārāyana existing in the Sun God. Then think of Ṛṣi, Chandas, Deity and Utility.

अस्य श्रीगायत्रीमन्त्रस्य विश्वामित्रऋषिः गायत्रीछन्दः सवितृमण्डलमध्यवर्ती नारायणो देवता।

जपे विनियोगः ।

गायत्री जपः - ॐ। भूर्भुवस्वः। तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं। भर्गोदेवस्य धीमही । धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्॥

Om | Bhurbhuvasvah | Tatsaviturvareniyam | Bhargodevasya Dhimahi | Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat ||

The meaning of Gayathri as given by Vedavyasa is as follows:

यो देवः सवितास्मकं धियो धर्मादिगोचराः।

प्रेरयेत्तस्य भर्गस्य तद्वरेण्यमुपास्महे ॥ व्यासः ॥

We meditate upon that form of Lord Nārāyana dwelling in the Sun, who induces in us right wisdom and right action who is responsible for protection and activation, who is prayed and worshipped by worthy souls with the Vedic Hymn Gayathri.

The Mantra should not be repeated continuously. It should be stopped at five places as shown above by the vertical lines.

Bachelors and householders to use one OM in the beginning. After the Gayathri JAPA one should also perform the JAPA of eight syllabled ‘Nārāyana Astāksara’ thrice that of Gayathri.

WHY TO MEDITATE UPON LORD NĀRĀYANA DWELLING IN THE SUN?

The instructions to perform Sandhyā have come from Vedās. On whom to meditate and what is the form and what is the procedure also have to be gathered from Śr̥tis/Smritis.

‘आदित्यान्तर्गतं यच्च ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरुत्तमम्।

हृदये दर्वभूतानां जीवभूतं स तिष्ठति’ ॥

‘प्राणिनां हृदये जीवस्वरूपतया य एव भर्गस्तिष्ठति।

स एव आकाशे आदित्यमध्ये पुरुषरूपतया तिष्ठति’ ॥

Like this, there are a number of authoritative passages. These quotations convey to us that out of the luminous bodies, sun is the most popular in the universe. In Gīta, Lord Kṛṣṇa said that he has bestowed his special power to the sun. Not only that, but He also dwells in the Sun. This Jyoti called Nārāyana dwells in the heart of every being in the micro miniature form. Since the form of Sun is so easy to understand and also he is the best symbol to clear the darkness, the meditation is prescribed there.

NUMBER OF JAPA TO BE PERFORMED:

It is a common inquisitive question in the mind of every eligible candidate as to how many times the Gayathri Mantra is required to be repeated at each Sandhyā. It is said in Tantrasara that one thousand Japa is considered the best. One hundred and eight is next best and ten is the least number.

It is also said that ten Japa will destroy the sins of the current life. One hundred and eight destroys even sins of previous birth. A thousand Japa will destroy sins accrued for the past three lives.

Gayathri Japa does not restrict the devotee to any temporary limits but it is capable of taking an individual to eternal heaven (गायत्री मात्र निष्णातो द्विजो मोक्षमवाप्नुयात्)

THREE WAYS OF PRACTICING JAPA:

Japa can be practiced in three ways. The first way is to utter the Mantra loudly. This suits the young beginners. Second way is to restrict movement of lips alone, no sound. Third method is to repeat the Mantra clearly in the mind mentally. The third method is the best and effective.

EMPHASIS ON THE PRACTICE OF GAYATHRI:

यथा विकसिते पुष्पे मधुगृह्णन्ति षट्पदाः। एवं गृहिता सावित्री सर्व वेदे च पाण्डव ॥ इति भारते ॥

‘Just like the honey (nectar) is collected from the blossom flowers, similarly Gayatri is collected from all the Vedās. It is called ‘Veda Madhu’ says Bhagwan Sri Kṛṣṇa.

Gayathri enables one to establish direct contact with the Lord. The Gayathri Mantra is the media and the language of communication.

WHAT DOES GAYATHRI MEAN?

‘गायत्री त्रायती च गायत्री’ ॥

Gayathri protects him who practices this Mantra. The name is derived by its innate protective property. Gayathri is also the name of Veda-Mātā. Gayathri also means Chandas (Meter of a Vedic-Hymn). The reference of Gayathri appears in Brahma-Sutra, Bhāgavata, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata etc.

It is hailed that this is the single Mantra that is capable of nullifying the terrible sins, called Maha-Pātakās. It not only nullifies sins but also elevates a person in every noble aspects, and bestows him rare benefits.

Gayathri is not a mere Nāma Mantra, but it is both a mantra as well as a meaningful prayer. Sandhyā is a carefully planned total procedure and Gayathri is the nucleolus of Sandhyā Vandana.

The following quotations from Mahābhārata would bring home these points:

‘सायं प्रातस्तु यो सन्ध्यां सम्यग्नित्यमुपासते।

नावं वेदमयीं कृत्वा तरन्ते तारयन्ति च ‘ ॥

Those who have sincerely adhered to daily Sandhya, atleast twice, the Gayathri serves him as a boat to cross the ocean of Samsar. He not only helps himself but also can ferry others too to cross.

He who is subjected to misfortune due to adverse planetary configurations, even such person will have auspicious aspects of the planets by adhering to Sandhyā- Vandana. A person is blessed with long and useful life.

CONCLUSION:

We observe that in our daily transactions that our activities are accountable to our parents or teachers or employer or to somebody to whom we matter. Similarly life is accountable. Bhagavān who has sent us here with sound body and mind has also given us the code of conduct for worldly and other worldly discipline. Although we spend twenty-three hours in a day for our worldly struggle, an hour or even less than that could be dedicated to obey the Vedic Command. Veda insists performance of Sandhyā everyday. It is not just a meaningless routine. It has a twofold action – wiping out sins and gaining virtues. There are a number of

personalities in Puranās and throughout the period of history who have attained remarkable success in their lives by adopting Gayathri. When God can be pleased with a simple procedure like Sandhya, why should one miss the golden opportunity?

---- OM TAT SAT ----