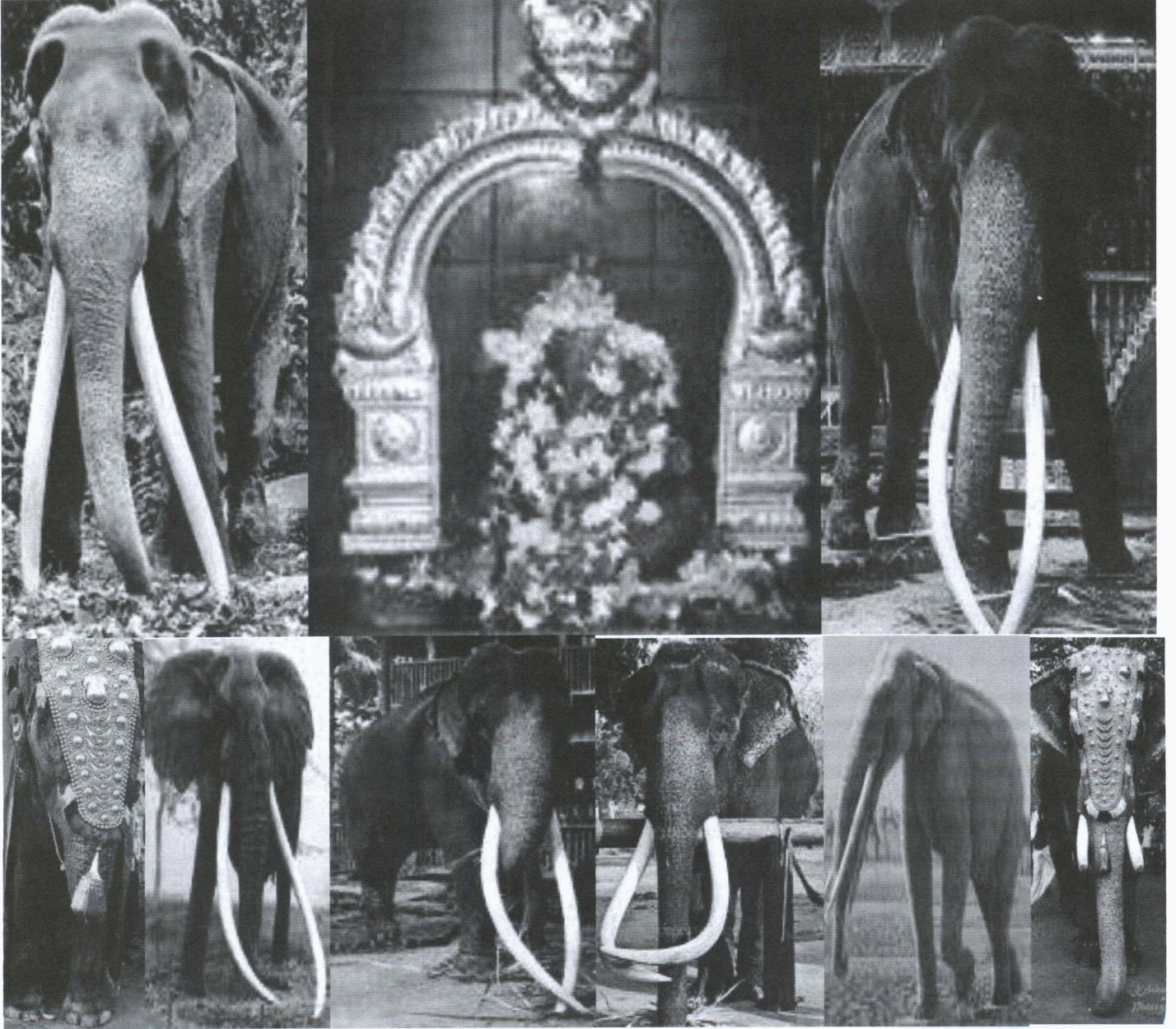


Path to Dharma

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Editorial.

'Path to Dharma' the monthly magazine, published by Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, is presenting the 55th issue this month. The main intention of this magazine is to converse the perceptions linked to Hinduism and its ceremonial rituals, customs and dharma, to the anxious readers.

The elucidation and investigation from the readers are appreciated.

B.S.Sarma,

Kshethra Vinayaka Temple,

Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka. July, 2013

Quatations

"All that god does shall win our praise. We magnify His name with hymns, seeking boons from the Mighty".
-Rig Veda

"I'll not sell you not for a thousand or ten thousand pieces! Oh Indra, you are more to me than a father. I count a brother naught compared to you. You and a mother, Oh Bountiful, vie with each other in generous giving and in bestowal of joy".

-Rig Veda

"A part of Infinite Consciousness becomes our own finite consciousness, with powers of discrimination and definition and with false conceptions. He is, in truth, Prajapathi and Visva, the Source of Creation and the Universal in us all. This Spirit is consciousness and gives consciousness to the body. He is the driver of the chariot".

-Yajur Veda

"He who dwells in the light, yet is other than the light, whom the light does not know, whose body is the light, who controls the light from within-He is the atman within you".

-Yajur Veda

"As hungry children here below sit round about their mother, even so all beings expectantly sit around agnihotra".

-Sama Veda

"Now, that golden Person who is seen within the sun has a golden beard and golden hair. He is exceedingly brilliant all, even to the fingernail tips. His eyes are even as a Kapyasa lotus flower. His name is high. He is raised high above all evils. Verily, he who knows this rises high above all evils".

-Sama Veda

"The rites of oblation, O lovers of truth, which the sages divined from the sacred verses, were variously expounded in the threefold Veda. Perform them with constant care. This is your path to the world of holy action".

-Atharva Veda

"In whose one limb all the Gods three and thirty in number, are affixed-tell me of that Support-who may He be?"

-Atharva Veda

"He (Atman) is myself within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice or a barley corn, or a grain of millet: this is myself within my heart, greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than all these worlds".

-Chandogya Upanishad

Temple Worship

Pujas, at the temples follow the traditions and rules established in the Agamas and in Bhakthi form of the religion. The temples are established as the palace of a manifestation of God in a form of the incarnation that is represented at the temple. Most temples will have sanctums for several forms of God, though it may have only one form as the main deity. The temple worship has evolved over the years. Here, an image of a likeness of a manifestation of God is consecrated after several days of holy rituals. Without these consecration rituals, the image does not get the divine powers. Once so sanctified, all the necessary rituals are performed. Often the services performed in a temple are for a mass of congregation.

In the normal temple services, the deity in the temple is woken up every morning with a morning puja with ceremonial bath with water, milk and other perfumed substances, dressing up with cloths and jewelry. The pujas are performed four to six times or more every day, with offering of food as "*prasadam*" and singing prayers and songs in praise of the deity and reading of the scriptures from Vedas. After this, "*Aarthi*" of lighted camphor is performed for every one to see the deity in a "*Dharshan*." The service puja ends with the offering of "*prasadam*s" of fruits, flowers and food to the devotees attending the prayer services. The devotees take what is given back to them as "*Prasadam*s", let it be holy water, ashes, kumkumam, a flower, a fruit or a full meal. Here the prayer services are for the welfare of the community as a whole.

The prayer services at home are also very similar in practice. Often there is a prayer room or a special area is arranged to perform the home prayer services. Prayer services are offered to a picture, small icon (*vigraha*) or a lamp which is sanctified by rituals for the occasion. The divine powers of the form of God offered prayer on that occasion is represented in this. The rituals are simple and they first invite God as a guest to the house. Then, there will be prayers and singing of songs and offering of food which is then offered to members of the family and friends.

Principles of the Practice of Prayers.

Major part of Hindu religious practice among the common people consists of ritualistic form of worship for God in the various forms of deities of Saguna Brahman, called avathara. It follows prayers offered to God in the devotional path as worship to a Pratika (*picture*), Prathima or Vighraha (*statue*), Yanthra (*a geometric drawing*) or a Linga, following the rules and traditions established in the Agamas and Sasthras. Sri Adhi Sankara, in addition to the Advaita philosophy explains that the self as part of the divine Nirguna Brahman, established a school for prayers to the Saguna Brahman in his six forms called the Shanmatha sthapanam (six branches of Hindu religion). He established the rules for the six types of prayers to God at home as 1. Ganesha, 2. Kumara (Karthikeya), 3. Surya (Sun), 4. Siva, 5. Vishnu, 6. Sakthi. The main tenet of the practice is by prayers to "Ishta Devatha."

Special prayer rituals are usually taught and given specially to persons following certain tradition as a form of initiation to that form of worship practice. One is not authorized to perform rituals of their choice unless trained and initiated in the same by a properly qualified teacher (guru). Accordingly, there are special rules and restrictions for puja for Lord Siva, Sakthi and Lord Vishnu in their various forms. Only a person who has received the religious teaching from a Sivacharya guru shall perform puja for Sivalinga. Similarly, only a guru who has understood the manthra of "*Sri Viddhai*" can teach the puja methods of Sri Chakram to his devotees.

One of the important forms of worship is prayer to a lamp, to the flame (Jyothi), instead of a vigraha or a picture, worshipping it as a form of the deity of their choice (Ishta Devatha). As we believe, God as Nirguna Brahman, comes to take the forms of various avatharas as Saguna Brahman and also manifests Himself in the phenomenal universe as its five elements "Pancha Bootha." Vedas say that God exists in the five elements. Agama Sasthra and Bhootha Suddhi manthra say that God manifests in sky (space) as sound, in air as sound and sense of touch, in fire as sound, sense and shape of things, in water as sound, sense, shape and taste of objects, in earth as sound, sense, shape, taste and smell. "*Thvam, Bhoomi, Aapo, Anilo, Analo Napaha*" a verse from Ganapathy Adharva Sheerisha Upanishad, which means that God is in earth, water, air, fire and

sky. Hence, people worship the Lord as the various elements and receive the divine blessings. As light or fire, (deepa jyothi) represents one of the five elements as a manifestation of God.

Many people perform prayer rituals to the lamp, (deepa jyothi) as an alternative to the traditional vigraha worship of the devotional path. There is a practice of offering prayers to Sri Ganesha, Durga, Devi, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Ayyappan and many other forms of deities in the form of jyothi in a deepa puja. It is widely believed that God accepts the prayers through this deepa puja very easily. There are no major restrictions or rules of the doctrine (Adhikara) for this deepa puja.

The temple is a consecrated place, and the idols are specially consecrated murthis (idols). The atmosphere and spiritual ambiance in a temple are more effective for any rituals in the temple are likely to be more powerful. The energy of this consecration is often felt by temple visitors. The absolute necessity of the temple worship is stressed throughout by the great saints of the religion. This plays an important role in cultivating the spiritualism of the devotees. It is the place for collective worship. Hence it is required to have some discipline to be followed in the temples. Here are a few one can follow to set that harmony.

01. Going to the temple with a clean body.
02. Going to the temple adorned with holy symbols like the Holy Ash, Rudraksha.
03. Taking something to offer to the Lord. It is an offering out of devotion.
04. Prostrating in front of the flag column (*dwajastambham*) on entering the temple.
05. Taking the permission of *nandi devar* mentally before entering His abode.
06. Saluting Lord Ganesha when entering the Lord's abode.
07. In Lord Siva's abode, engage the mind in the thinking of the God, without gossiping.
08. The Holy ash given as the blessings should be worn saying "Sivaya namaha" without spilling.
09. Circumambulating the Lord saluting the Goddess and the deities in the temple. On special occasions like *pradosham* which are special circumambulation methods like *soma sukta pradhaxinam* are followed.
10. Holy five letters or any praise could be chanted, while in the temple.
11. Before coming out of the temple go to the place of *chandeshwarar* and take permission for the materials which after worship are taken out of the temple as blessings. One must not take anything out in excess and things taken from the temple should be only as the mark of blessings.
12. Always something should be done in the promotion of the temple physically or materially.
13. On coming out of the temple, again prostrate in front of the flag column towards the north. Sit facing the north and meditate for a few minutes on the God chanting the Holy five letters.

'Abhishekam'-the sacred bath

'Abhishekam', the sacred bath at any hindu temple to the idols is ritual of Hindu worship. The procedure of this ritual is done using milk, curd, honey, fruit mixed with jaggery, sandal paste, vibhuti etc. The positive charge that is stored in the material with which the idol is made of. These tremendous positive charges have been accumulated through the prayers of great saints and mystics, over several centuries. In addition to this, the 'chakras' (yantras) that have been installed in the precincts of the sanctum exude vibrations of an exalted nature. When water, milk or any other liquid or semi-solid material comes into contact with such an idol with power, the liquid absorbs some of the charge. When even a drop of this liquid is consumed after the sacred bath (Abhishekam), it would contain properties of the charge that the idol possesses.

The ancient temples where idols have been made of radioactive material, consecrated by yogies with a pure, spiritual mind, and where 'chakras'(yantras) are installed by mystics who are adept at it. Temples which are recently consecrated also generate positive charges depending on the type of the materials with which the idol is made, the intensity of prayers offered and the manner in which the 'chakras'(yantras) are installed by the officiating priests. All these determinants of the intensive power of the effects. The psychological aspect of the ritual of sacred bath, 'Vishishtadvaita' (the practice of worshipping the formless which is the divine force as one with a definite form) looks upon the supreme force as one with the perfect form. The devotee takes much pleasure in visualizing this form, and doing service to the deity of his choice.

Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages are considered quite important in the ritualistic follower of sanathana dharma. There are a few centers of sacredness which are held at high esteem by the ardent devotees. Most importantly crossing all the hurdles on the way when one moves ahead with the only focus of worshipping the God at these sacred abodes, this becomes a form of yoga and the benefit got is quite marvelous.

Visiting a Hindu Temple

The Hindu temple is a sacred place where man and God commune. It is the home of God and the Gods. Within these sacred abodes, priests conduct puja rites by presenting flowers, water, incense, lights, food and other choice offerings, to honor God and invoke the presence and blessings.

In all temples, the alters are inhabited by the devas and the great Gods send their sanctity could be sensed. The presence of these divine beings can be felt. This type of radiation from them is known as darshan. The reality of the Mahadevas and their darshan can be experienced by the devotee through his awakened ajna vision, or more often as the physical sight of the image in the sanctum coupled with the inner knowing that He is there within the microcosm. This darshan can be felt by all devotees, and this darshan, messages can be channeled along the vibratory emanations that radiate out from the Mahadevas, as well as from their representatives, the second world devas who carry out their work for them in shrines and altars.

Darshanam is a type of vibration, experienced in the simple physical glimpse of the form of the deity in the sanctum. Later, that physical sight gives way to a clairvoyant vision or to a refined cognition received through the sensitive ganglia within the nerve system, the chakras. Through these receptors, a subtle message is received, often not consciously. Perhaps not immediately, but the message that the darshan carries, direct from the Mahadeva, direct from Lord Ganesha, direct from Lord Murugan, direct from Lord Siva Himself. This is the way the Gods converse. It is a communication more real than the communication of language. It is not necessary to understand the communication immediately. The devotee may go away from the temple outwardly feeling that there was no particular message, or not knowing in his intellectual mind exactly what the darshan meant. Visiting a Hindu temple, receiving darshan from the majestic Gods, flow of the pranas, or life currents, within his body. It draws his awareness into the deeper chakras. It adjusts his beliefs and the attitudes that are the natural consequence of those beliefs.

Darshan coming from the great ancient historical temples of our Gods can change the patterns of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. Through the grace of the Gods, those seeds can be removed if the manifestation in the future would not enhance the evolution of the soul.

In order to prepare ourselves to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, the great mandapam inside, we walk clockwise around the temple very slowly. In this way we, consciously drop off worldliness, letting the sufferings go, letting all disturbances leave our mind the best we can, and trying to reach deep inside of ourselves where peace exists eternally. We become as celestial as we can during the time we are walking around the temple, so that we can communicate with the celestial beings within the temple.

Temple Manners

Devotees will like to feel at best when they go to the temple, God's home. Prepare themselves by bathing and putting on clean clothing. Ardent worship takes many forms in a temple. Devotees can be immersed in full of devotion, in prayerful communion, seeking solace for a loss, singing hymns, chanting mantras or celebrating a rite of passage. Meditation is appropriate, especially after the puja. God will receive one's devotion, however it is offered.

Attending the Puja Ceremony

In a Hindu temple religious ritual or puja, (adoration) can last from few minutes to several hours, but all the procedure follows one basic pattern. First, the priest purifies himself, the sacred implements and the place of worship. He chants the relevant mantras indicating the time, place and nature of this particular puja. Through hand gestures (mudras) and chants, he beseeches the deity to come and dwell in the image. Ringing a bell and chanting mantras and hymns from the ancient Vedas and Agamas, the priest then offers precious substances

like, water, uncooked rice with turmeric powder, holy ash, sandalwood paste and kumkumam to the deity. Sometimes water, sesame oil, turmeric water, saffron, milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, lime juice, vibhuti, sandalwood paste, panchamritam (mixture of five fruits), coconut water and rosewater are used in a ritual bath called abhishekam.

Devotees are seated during the puja. After the abhishekam is over the deity is dressed in new clothes and decorated. At this stage, devotees sing devotional songs. Later the priest offers incense, oil lamps and food. He offers flowers while chanting 108 names of the God. Finally a sacred lamp is waved before the deity and the temple bells are rung loudly as God sends His power through the holy image of Himself. Finally, sacraments such as holy ash, holy water, sandalwood paste, kumkum, fruit, sweets and flowers are passed out to bless all present.

The sacramental lamp which has just been offered at the puja is passed among the devotees. The devas can see and bless the devotees through this flame as it lights up on to faces of the devotees. At the shrine of Lord Vishnu, the priest may bring out the silver or gold crown of the Deity and lightly touch it to the head of each devotee as a personal blessing.

A sacrament offered in many temples is the holy ash (the vibhuti), symbolizes the purity we attain by burning the bonds of ego, karma and maya to reveal the soul's natural goodness. The priest will distribute a pinch of ash into the right palm. The devotees transfer the vibhuti into their left palm, and then apply it to their forehead using their right hand. Next, a small spoonful of holy water, or tirtham, is placed into the cupped right hand, which the devotees sip.

Chandanam, or sandalwood paste, precious substances which are distributed, as small dab. This is applied as a small circular motion between the eyebrows. Kumkum, a red powder, this is applied on top of the sandalwood.

The bhakti of uncompromising surrender, prapatti, to the God during a temple puja awakens the amrita. The amrita is the sweet essence from the sahasrara chakra. It is the binding yoke to the Divine. Devotees sit down in the lotus posture after the puja and internalize all the feeling that they had for the God during the worship. Then devotees draw those energies up the spine into the head. This is done with the mind and with the breath. An archana is a short puja for an individual, usually done after the main puja.

The Gayatri mantra

The Gayatri is the impregnable spiritual armour, the veritable fortress, that guards and protects its votary. The Gayatri is the divine power that transforms the human into the Divine and blesses man with spiritual illumination. The regular repetition of Gayatri mantra (Japa) every day will shower upon one incalculable benefits and blessings. The Gayatri Mantra is the most important of all Mantras. The Brahmachari (celibate), the Grihastha (householder), and the Vanaprastha (retired person), must repeat this Mantra daily; the Sannyasin or renunciate is asked to repeat 'AUM' instead of this Mantra. Gayatri is generally conceived of as a female Deity by many. There is no mention at all in the entire Gayatri Mantra, which speaks of a female. Some consider that the Gayatri Mantra is presided over by the sun. The sun that it speaks of is not that which shines over this earth before our physical eyes, but *tat savituh* or "that Sun", the great Sun which this sun or moon does not illumine, and which is the impersonal, absolute Brahman. Hence, this Mantra refers to its presiding Deity is obviously Para Brahman Himself.

There is a famous quotation "Na gayatryah paro mantra" which means that there is no Mantra greater than the Gayatri mantra.

Each word, each letter of the Gayatri bears on its head the highest Vedantic concept of the absolute, supreme Truth.

The The vedic form of Gayatri Mantra is as follows:

*“Aum bhur bhuvah svah Tat savitur varenyam
Bhargo devasya dheemahiDhiyo yo nah prachodayaat” .*

Aum: symbol of Para Brahman / Almighty God.

Bhuh: Bhu Loka (Embodiment of vital or spiritual energy /the physical plane).

Bhuvah: Buvar Loka (Destroyer of suffering/the astral plane).

Svah: Svah Loka (the celestial plane / Embodiment of happiness).

Tat: That; the transcendental Paramatma; God.

Savituh: the Creator.

Varenyam: fit to be worshipped / Supreme.

Bhargah: remover of sins and ignorance; glory, effulgence.

Devasya: resplendent, shining./ Divine

Dheemahi: we meditate.

Dhiyah: the intellect, understanding.

Yo: who.

Nah: our.

Prachodayaat: enlighten, guide, impel.

Meaning of The Gayatri Mantra is as follows,“May we meditate on the Glory of the Lord, the Remover of pains and sorrows, the Bestower of happiness, Who has created the universe, and Who is the embodiment of knowledge and light. May the Lord, enlighten our intellect in the right direction by destroying all our sins and ignorance”.

Herein there are five parts:

1. Aum is the first part.
2. *Bhur bhuvah svah* is the second.
3. *Tat savitur varenyam* is the third.
4. *Bhargo devasya dheemahi* is the fourth.
5. *Dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat* is the fifth and the last.

This rare and most precious divine treasure of the Gayatri Mantra should be repeat it at least 108 times daily and must realise the inner Truth of the Gayatri Mantra.

The Gayatri mantra consists of 24 letters and each of them is related with a specific deity. It begins with the word 'agni' and ends with 'swaha'.

The mantra is as follows---AUM agnervakpunsi yajurvedin jushta somam piba swaha.

The various deities related with the twenty-four letters of Gayatri Mantra is follows.

Deity

- 1st letter ---- Agni
- 2nd letter ---- Vayu
- 3rd letter ---- Surya
- 4th letter ---- Aakash
- 5th letter ---- Yamraj
- 6th letter ---- Varun
- 7th letter ---- Vrihaspati
- 8th letter ---- Parjanya
- 9th letter ---- Indra
- 10th letter ---- Gandharva
- 11th letter ---- Poosha
- 12th letter ---- Mitra
- 13th letter ---- Twashta
- 14th letter ---- Vasu
- 15th letter ---- Marudganas
- 16th letter ---- Soma
- 17th letter ---- Angira
- 18th letter ---- Vishwadeva
- 19th letter ---- Ashwini kumar
- 20th letter ---- Prajapati

21st letter ---- All the deities

22nd letter ---- Rudra

23rd letter ---- Brahma

24th letter ---- Vishnu

The ritual called 'nyas' is performed mentally establishing different words of the Gayatri mantra in the various parts of his body as follows,

AUM bhuh --- in the heart,

AUM bhuvah --- in the head,

AUM swah --- in the top-knot (shikha),

AUM tatsaviturvarenyam --- in the whole body,

AUM bhargodevasya dhimahi --- in both the eyes

AUM dhiyo yo nah prachodayat --- in both the hands.

The Gayatri Mantra is the form of eternal truth. It is the heart of all beings and the eternal Ved Mantra. All the four Vedas have originated from this mantra.

AUM consists following,

Bhur is existence,

Bhuvah is the elements,

Svah is the Atma of everything, Maha is greatness and light,

Tat is Brahman (the absolute). Tapah is all knowledge, Satyam is supremacy and internal wisdom. This tantra connects the three letters of Aum to the seven worlds. Tat, refers to the first cause of all substance, as fire in the circle of the sun and is supreme Brahman.

Savituhu is the source of all living beings.

Varenyam is the excellent one who receives adoration.

Bharga destroys sin.

Devasya means it is full of light, while

Dheemahi refers to knowledge being golden and always within the sun.

Dhiyo means Buddhi.

Yo stands for energy (tejas).

The meaning of the Gayatri Mantra is as follows,

TAT	SUCCESS
SA	BRAVERY
VI	MAINTENANCE
TUR	WELFARE
VA	MARYADA
RE	SELF RESTRAINT
NI	SFUTA
YAM	TAP
BHAR	MEDHA
GO	FOR SIGHT
DE	YOGMAYA
VA	AWAKENING
SYA	YOGINI
DHEE	CREATION
MA	DHARINI
HI	SWEETNESS
DHI	PRABHAVA
YO	IDEAL
YO	OOSHMA
NAHA	COURAGE
PRA	DRASHYA
CHO	WISDOM
DA	NIRANJAN
YAT	SERVICE