An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man
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The Vedic Experience

An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man

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THE VEDAS ARE MANKIND'S OLDEST SCRIPTURES, REVERED BY HINDUS as direct revelation from God. One of the finest translations to English was done by Professor Raimon Panikkar, a renowned theologian who now lives in a mountain village in Spain. Himalayan Academy has been commissioned to publish his 1,000-page anthology in a special edition in the West. Motilal Banarsidas has produced the Indian edition. This regular monthly column will feature excerpts from the volume.

OMtat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo na pracodayat

OM, We meditate upon the glorious splendor of the Vivifier divine.
May he himself illumine our minds!
Rig Veda III, 62, 10

There is nothing more exalted than the Gayatri. It is the most renowned mantra of the Vedas. It is addressed to the divine life-giver as supreme God, symbolized in Savitri, the Sun. For this reason this prayer is also called Savitri. It is recited daily at sunrise and at sunset, usually at the moment of the ritual bath. This mantra derives its name from the meter in which it is written, the gayatri being a Vedic poetic meter of twenty-four syllables, of which the author according to tradition was the sage Vishvamitra.

Savitri

I call first on Agni for our salvation;
on Mitra and Varuna, that they may help us,
on Night, who lays the world to rest,
and Savitri divine, that he may aid us.

God Savitri advances in his golden chariot,
wheeling toward us through the
pitch-black void,
conducting to their rest both men and Gods,
directing his gaze upon all created beings.

Worthy of worship, he pursues his path,
first up, then down, his horses resplendent.
From the ends of the world God Savitri comes,
repulsing all sorrow and every danger.

The God has now mounted his mighty chariot,

ornate, decked with pearls, with poles of gold.
Resplendent, adorable, he exercises
his powerful thrust, dispelling the darkness.

Drawing the chariot with the golden shaft,
his two steeds, white-hoofed,
have gazed on mankind.
All beings, men and creatures, abide
forever in the bosom of Savitri divine.

Three heavens there are:
two in the bosom
of Savitri, the third
the realm of Yama.
Immortality rests stable
as a chariot on its axle.
Let him who understands this now declare it!

The Bird in the heavens
keeps watchful eye,
the inspired God,
the perfect guide.
Where now is the sun?
Who knows his place?
As far as what heaven has his ray extended?

He has surveyed the earth's eight peaks,
its continents three, its tracts, its seven rivers.
Savitri, the golden-eyed God, has come,
bringing his worshiper wondrous blessings.

Savitri, the skillful, gold-handed God
is passing over between Earth and Heaven.
He conquers sickness, directing the sun,
and mounts up to heaven
through darksome space.

May our gracious God and kind leader,
the asura, skillful, gold-handed,
come now to our aid!
Who chases far both demons and sorcerers,
this God whom we hymn, abides here each evening.

Your ancient paths, O Savitri,
were dust free and well established
in the vaults of Heaven.
Come to us now by these paths so fair!
Protect us from harm and bless us, O God!
Rig Veda I, 35

His golden arms Godhead has extended in potent blessing
toward the sacrifice. Like a grave young priest,
he lets the chrism [consecrating oil]
drip from his hands onto the airy spaces.

May we enjoy the vitalizing force
of God, the radiant; may he grant us wealth!
He is the God who sends to rest and wakens
all life that moves on two feet or on four.

With kindly, never failing guardian powers
protect our house, O Savitri, today.
O gold-tongued God, preserve us in the right path.
Let no ill-wisher have us in his grasp.

God Savitri, friend of our homes, gold-handed,
has risen to meet the evening.
With iron cheeks and honey-sweet tongue
the God, worthy of praise,
imparts good gifts to every worshiper.

Like a mediating priest, the God has extended
his golden arms so lovely to behold.
The heights of Heaven and Earth he has
ascended and made each flying monster speed away.

Grant favor today, Savitri, and tomorrow.
O you who own an ample treasure store,
enrich us daily by your life-bringing power.
May this our song now set us in your grace.
Rig Veda VI, 71

See now, the shining Daughter of Heaven approaches,
dispelling gloom of night that we may see.
The friendly Lady ushers in the light.

The ascending Sun, refulgent star of heaven,
co-worker with the Dawn, pours down his beams.
O Dawn, at your arising and the Sun's, grant us,

we pray, our portion in your light.

O Dawn, glorious Daughter of high Heaven,
promptly we rise and come to welcome you.
Most generous one, granter of all desires,
to worshipers you give both joy and treasure.

O glorious Dawn, you bring the earth to view
and lighten up the lofty vault of heaven.
We yearn to be yours, partaking in your rewards.
Accept our love as that of mother's children.

Bring to us, Dawn, your grace most bountiful,
that shall be celebrated far and wide.
Give us what you possess as nourishment for men,
that we may rejoice therein, O Daughter of Heaven.

Give to our princes wealth and everlasting fame.
To us grant in the contests herds of kine.
O shining Dawn, you who inspire the generous and
are full of grace, drive from us all our foes.
Rig Veda VII, 81