

**Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**  
**Sanskrit Prayers**

*Question*

Do you see any advantage in praying in Sanskrit? Since most of us do not know Sanskrit, would it not be better to pray in English during *ārati*?

*Answer*

Well, Sanskrit is Sanskrit and everything else is everything else. The beauty about Sanskrit is that it is a language that lends itself to compositions in metrical form, so that you can sing. There is a nice rhythm. The Vedic *mantras* are set to certain intonations. When the Vedic *mantras* are pronounced properly, then they are very effective. Therefore, they say that reciting the Vedic *mantras* properly, even without knowing their meaning, is very beneficial.

These Vedic *mantras* are to be chanted in the language in which they are written. It is a good idea to understand them. We have given transliteration and meaning of all these *mantras* in the Prayer Booklet. If you make a certain effort, it is not impossible to learn and understand these *mantras*. If you still do not understand the meaning of these *mantras*, you can always approach somebody in the Gurukulam and seek to know what they mean. Thus, it may require certain effort to learn and understand these *mantras*, and it may require effort for a length of time. But it is not impossible to learn or understand them.

The Indian languages do contain a lot of words of Sanskrit. If you are born in India, or you know an Indian language, then you already have the vocabulary. Every Indian language is derived from Sanskrit and therefore many of the words are either Sanskrit words or are derived from Sanskrit words. For people of Indian origin, it is not extremely difficult. And it is not that you have to learn everything. It is a good idea to make an effort to learn and understand a few passages that you like to chant. If however, despite your effort, you are not able to follow these *ārati mantras*, then you can definitely pray in English. Or just follow the English translation of the *mantras* given in the Prayer Booklet, so that you know what is being chanted.

Yes, if you have no background in any Indian language, then perhaps Sanskrit is like Greek and Latin to you. It is just sounds and we would recommend that you pray in a language that you understand. It is quite alright

to pray in English. Ideally, a prayer should be done in a language that you understand.

*Question*

Can one make up one's own *mantra*? Does one need to obtain a *mantra* from the *guru*?

*Answer*

We should not create a *mantra* by ourselves. There are standard *mantras* handed down to us by tradition and we should repeat one of them.

Regarding obtaining the *mantra* from a *guru*, the choice is yours. It is desirable that you go to a teacher in whom you have *śraddhā*, devotion and faith. A *mantra* received from a teacher in whom you have devotion and faith brings with it the grace of the teacher, because while you repeat the *mantra*, you remember your *guru*. Therefore, it is considered that a *mantra* given by a *guru* is more effective because it comes with the grace of the *guru*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj and KK Davey.