



# Reach

## SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

### Sri Ramakrishna on the Impersonal and Personal God

“There is no distinction between the Impersonal God (Brahman) on the one hand and the Personal God (Shakti) on the other. When the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive, He is styled God the Absolute (Shuddha Brahman); and when He is thought of as active—creating, sustaining, and destroying—He is styled Shakti or Personal God”.

Source: *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, 1998, p. 4

### Sri Sarada Devi on Forbearance

“My son, forbearance is a great virtue; there’s no other like it.”

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi*, Ramakrishna Math, Madras. p. 4

### Swami Vivekananda on the Soul or Spirit

“If there is one common doctrine that runs through all our apparently fighting and contradictory sects, it is that all glory, power and purity are within the soul already; only according to Ramanuja the soul contracts and expands at times, and according to Shankara, it comes under a delusion. Never mind these differences. All admit the truth that the power is there—potential or manifest, it is there—and the sooner you believe that, the better for you.”

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 2008, p. 2

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**W**e welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

# 1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 DECEMBER 2025 TO 10 MARCH 2026

## ADELAIDE

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### Daily Activities

- The Centre functioned from 7:30am-12.30pm and 4.00pm-8.00pm. Aratrikam was performed from 7:00-7:30 pm followed by bhajans, devotional reading and meditation.

### Regular Activities

- The Centre observed *Ekadasi* with *Ramanama Sankirtana* every lunar fortnight.
- All talks and discussions by Swami Manyananda were suspended from Tuesday, 9 December 2025 and resumed from Sunday, 15 February 2026.
- Swami Manyananda conducted a class on the *Vedanta Sara* or 'Fundamentals of Vedanta' every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon.
- Swami Manyananda also conducted a class on the *Bhagavad Gita* on Sundays from 11:00 am.
- Every Saturday, Swami Manyananda held a classes on the *Durga Saptashati* from 4:00 pm.
- On Sundays Swami Manyananda conducted classes on the *Vivekachudamani* from 5:30pm to 6:30 pm.
- The reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by a devotee and discussion lead by Swami Manyananda, on emerging points, was held on alternate Saturday evenings before aratrikam. Classes were suspended from Saturday, 6 December 2025 to Saturday, 7 March 2026.
- Bala Sangha or spiritual classes for children were held on Sundays from 4pm to 5 pm. Classes were suspended from 9 December 2025 to 22 February 2026. It is coordinated by Swami Manyananda and volunteers, and includes

mantra chanting, meditation, yoga, singing, reading from spiritual texts, value-based lessons and arts and crafts. The programme concludes with refreshments.

### Celebrations

- Sri Sarada Devi's (1853-1920) birth anniversary was celebrated on Thursday, 11 December 2025. The evening program started with aratrikam and was followed by *Sri Sarada Nama Sankirtanam*, reading from the life of Sri Sarada Devi, bhajans, and distribution of prasad.
- Christmas Eve was celebrated on Wednesday, 24 December 2025. This marks a significant day in the history of the Ramakrishna Order when Sri Ramakrishna's young disciples vowed in front of a sacred fire to lead the life of renunciation and service. This day also marks the celebration of the birth of Lord Jesus Christ—an incarnation of God. The evening program started with aratrikam followed by the singing of Christmas Carols, reading, and prasad distribution.
- Swami Vivekananda's (1863-1902) birth anniversary was celebrated on Saturday, 10 January 2026. The morning program started with special puja and Vedic chanting and bhajans. This was followed by homa, aratrikam, pushpanjali and lunch prasad. The evening program started with aratrikam and bhajans followed by a talk on *Swami Vivekananda* by



Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary in Adelaide

Swami Manyananda, bhajans, *pushpanjali* and dinner prasad.

- Shivaratri— a night of special prayers to Lord Shiva—was celebrated on Sunday, 15 February 2026. The program started with aratrikam and was followed by a special puja of Lord Shiva accompanied by chanting, bhajans, worship of Shiva Lingam by devotees (individually), and distribution of prasad.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was celebrated on Thursday, 19 February 2026. The morning program included puja with Vedic chanting, bhajans, homa, aratrikam, *pushpanjali* and lunch prasad. The evening program started with aratrikam that was followed by bhajans, a talk on *Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Manyananda, *pushpanjali* and dinner prasad.



*Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary in Adelaide*

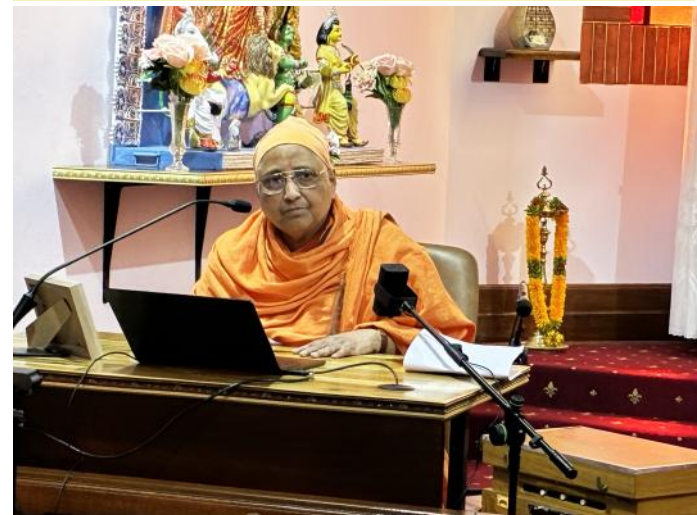
### Other Activities

- A memorial and Kalpataru day were held on 1 January 2026. The morning program included special puja with Vedic chanting, bhajans, 'A tribute to Swami Sridharananda' by Swami Manyananda, aratrikam, *pushpanjali* followed by the distribution of prasad.
- Pravrajika Gayatriprana Mataji (President, Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of New South Wales and South Australia) and Pravrajika Alokaprana Mataji (Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Matri Bhavan, Kolkata) visited the Vedanta Centre on Sunday, 8 February 2026. Pravrajika Alokaprana Mataji spoke on 'Swami Vivekananda and Practical Vedanta.' The program also included Vedic chanting, aratrikam, bhajans, and

a short meet and greet session with the visiting Matajis.



*Kalpataru Day and Sridharananda's Memorial in Adelaide*



*Pravrajika Alokaprana Mataji in Adelaide*

## BRISBANE

96 Vedanta Drive, (next to 2 Poppy Crescent),  
Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

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Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

### Daily Activities

- Meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6:30 am and 7:15 am.

- Aratrikam, bhajans, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 6:30 pm and 7:15 pm.

### Regular Activities

- Sundays: (a) Yoga classes were held from 8:30 am to 9:45 am. (b) Swami Mahabodhananda spoke on the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna from 10 am to 11 am. These talks were based on two books of Swami Chetanananda called *God Lived with Them* and *They Lived with God*. (c) Bala sangha and Yuva sangha (10:00 am—11:00 am) during school term as a 4 week-course).
- Tuesdays: (a) A class on the *Brahma Sutras* was conducted from 11 am to 12 noon, (b) In the evening, Yoga classes were conducted from 6:30pm to 7:45 pm.
- Mondays, Wednesdays or by appointment: Interviews with prospective applicants for 'No Interest Loans (NILS). People who were doing it tough, may avail themselves of loans of up-to \$2000 repayable through their government payments. This is an initiative of the Wesley Mission's Good Shepherd Organization.
- Fridays: (a) The Centre's volunteers cooked food for the needy. An average of 300 meals per week is packed into containers and frozen. They are distributed free of cost through the Westside Community Centre; Gail's Community Centre; Serving Our People (SOP), and HomeBeyondHome. Many needy people come to the Centre and avail themselves of the free meals. (b) The Centre's food bank distributed groceries to the needy. An average of 10 to 15 families per week received grocery hampers along with cooked food.
- Saturdays: (a) The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepared and sold food at a reasonable cost to people. An average of about 120 persons availed themselves of this service. The kitchen was efficiently managed by volunteers. (b) A Justice of the Peace (JP) was available at the Centre from 10 am to 11 am.
- The chanting of the *Ramanama Sankirtana* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days

(7:00 pm — 8:00 pm).

- A monthly satsang was held at the Centre on the 3rd Sunday of each month. The programme consisted of chanting, bhajans, a talk on a special subject and serving of lunch prasada.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes for the Vedanta Group at Too-woomba on the first Wednesday of every month (6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.) at the Too-woomba Council Library .
- A monthly class was held on Thursdays to study the *Vivekachudamani*, online, from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm. This was organized by Shakti Group, Gold Coast, Queensland.
- On the last Saturday of every month, the Vedanta group on the Gold Coast studied the *Bhagavad Gita* from 5.30pm to 6.30pm
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.

### Celebrations

- Sri Sarada Devi's (1853-1920) birth anniversary was observed with a simple puja on 11 December 2025 and more elaborately on 14 December 2025. The event began with chanting by Suresh Radhakrishnan. This was followed by bhajans led by various devotees intermixed with readings on the life of Holy Mother by Arpan Bhattacharya, Neil Kotha and Sampada Kotha. Dr. Asim Majumdar and Dr. Preethi Suraj spoke on the life of the Holy Mother. This was followed by aratrikam. All were treated to a sumptuous prasada in the lower hall at the end.
- Christmas Eve was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre in Springfield Lakes on 24 December 2025. The regular evening aratrikam began at 6:30 pm. This was followed by a prayer from St. Francis of Assisi. Arpan Bhattacharya provided a short snippet on the importance of Christmas Eve to the Ramakrishna Mission.

This was followed by the singing of Christmas Carols. Unni Nair read a short excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount. The evening was completed with a sharing of Christmas treats and prasad.

- Kalpataru day and Swami Sridharananda's memorial were observed at Springfield Lakes (Brisbane, QLD) on 1 January 2026. The puja was performed by Swami Bhadreshananda, the head of the Ramakrishna Mission Fiji. After this, there were talks by Swami Bhadreshananda, Dr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby, Dr. Asim Majumdar, and others. The talks were on the specialty of Kalpataru day in the Ramakrishna Movement and reminiscences of Swami Sridharananda, the former President of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. After the talks, everyone shared prasad.



*Arpan Bhattacharya on Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary in Brisbane*

Prasad was provided to all after the worship. Bhajans were sung during the puja by a famous musician from Delhi, India, Sri Jitender Singh Jamwal. He was accompanied by Binny Jaradi and Paramjeet Singh.

- Sri Ramakrishna's (1836-1886) birth anniversary was observed on 19 February 2026 with a simple puja and bhajans. The public celebration occurred on Sunday, 22 February 2026. Swami Atmeshananda performed the puja and homa. Neil Kotha and Swami Mahabodhananda spoke on Sri Ramakrishna. Devotees, including members of the Executive Committee, sang bhajans. Bhajans were also sung by Jitender Singh Jamwal with Paramjeet Singh on tabla. The Namdhari Sikh Sangat cooked and served delicious meals to all who attended.



*Kalpataru Day and Swami Sridharananda's Memorial in Brisbane*

- Swami Vivekananda's (1863-1902) birth anniversary was observed on 10 January 2026. The function included puja, talks and prasad distribution. Swami Atmeshananda performed the puja. Unni Krishnan Nair and three youth (Arpan Bhattacharya, Hiya Roy, and Mohnish Paluri) spoke on Swami Vivekananda.
- Shivaratri was observed at the Centre on 15 February 2006. After the worship of the Shiva Linga by Swami Atmeshananda, devotees took it in turns to worship Shiva with water, milk, yoghurt, ghee, honey, and Bilva (Bel) leaves.



*Shivaratri in Brisbane*



*Public Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary*

### Visiting Monks

- Swami Bhadreshananda, head of the Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi, Fiji, visited the Vedanta Centre at Springfield Lakes from 29 December 2025 to 4 January 2026. During this time, he performed the puja on the Kalpataru day and gave a talk on his memories of Swami Sri-dharananda at the memorial, held on the same day.

## CANBERRA

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### Daily Activities

- Evening aratrikam and prayers were conducted every evening at the Centre.

### Regular Activities

- Swami Dhyanananda will deliver a monthly public lecture on the *Mundaka Upanishad* at the ashram on the last Saturday of each month.

### Celebrations

- The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the ashram on 21 February 2026. The puja was performed in the morning by Swami Dhyanananda and was followed by a talk. This was followed by prasad distribution.

### Visiting Monks

- Swami Suhitananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission visited Canberra and the ashrama on 19 January 2026. He was accompanied by Swami Chandrakantananda and Swami Sevatmananda. From Australia, Swami At-meshananda, President, Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Swami Sunishthananda, Vice President, Vedanta Centre of Sydney and all the other Swamis and Brahmacharins of the Sydney Centre also travelled to Canberra. Swami Suhitananda briefly delivered a discourse and spent time interacting with the local devotees at the ashram. Swami Suhitananda and the others also visited the Australian Parliament and the War Memorial in Canberra.



*Visit of Swami Suhitananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission to Canberra*

## MELBOURNE

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URL <http://www.vedantamelbourne.org>

### Daily Activities

- Aratrikam, bhajans, readings from the Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda literature, and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

### Regular Activities

- A guided meditation session was conducted by Swami Sunishthananda on Sundays from 10:00 am to 10:30 am.
- A class was conducted on Sundays from 10:30 am to 11:30 am on the *Bhagavad Gita* by Swami Sunishthananda.
- A class on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was conducted on Tuesdays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm by Swami Sunishthananda.
- An introduction to the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* was conducted by Swami Sunishthananda on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.

### Celebrations

- On the morning of Thursday, 01 January 2026, the birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi (1853-1920) was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included special worship,



*Sri Sarada Devi's (1853-1920) Birth Anniversary in Melbourne*

homa, and bhajans. Devotees shared prasadam after the event.

- On Saturday, 10 January 2026, the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was celebrated at Mount Waverley Community Centre. The programme included special worship, a talk 'On the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda' and bhajans. Devotees shared prasadam after the event.
- In the evening of Sunday, 15 February 2026, Shivaratri was celebrated at Mount Waverly Community Centre. The programme included special worship, and bhajans. Devotees offered *abhisheka* to Lord Shiva and shared prasadam following the ceremony.



*Shivaratri in Melbourne*

- On the morning of Sunday, 22 February 2026, the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1936) was celebrated at Oakleigh Hall. The programme included special worship, a talk 'On the life of Sri Ramakrishna', and bhajans. Devotees shared prasadam after the event.



*Sri Ramakrishna's (1836-1886) Birth Anniversary in Melbourne*

## Other Activities

• On Sunday, 4 January 2026, a special worship and a memorial service in honour of Swami Sridharananda was held at the Mount Waverley Community Centre. Apart from the special worship, the programme also included reminiscences of Swami Sridharananda by devotees and Swami Sunishthananda. There were also bhajans. The event concluded with the distribution of prasad among the devotees.



*Swami Sridharananda's Memorial Service in Melbourne*

## PERTH

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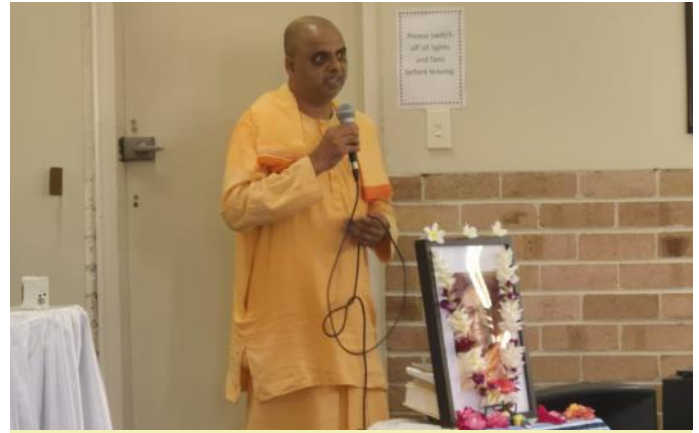
Contact: Sumita Chetty +61438928136

### Daily Activities:

- Aratrikam is conducted daily each night by a person or family taking responsibility for it.

### Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda visited the Perth Ashrama for the monthly Satsangs. He visited from 5 to 7 February 2026. While Swami Manyananda was in Perth, he conducted the aratrikam, sang bhajans and gave a series of talks. On 5 February 2026, Swami Manyananda spoke about his reminiscences on Swami Sridharananda. On 6 and 7 February he concluded his talks on the 'Mahishasura Mardini'



*Swami Manyananda presenting his Reminiscences in Perth*

Stotram. There was also the distribution of prasad.

### Celebrations

- Christmas Eve and Sri Sarada Devi's birth anniversary were celebrated on Wednesday, 24 December 2025. The function included Christmas Carols and bhajans. Prasad was later served.
- Kalpataru Day was observed on 1 January 2026. Devotees visited the ashram and paid their respects in the shrine.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary and a memorial for Swami Sridharananda were held on 7 March 2026. Swami Sunishthananda performed the puja. This was followed by Swamis Atmeshananda, Sunishthananda, Manyananda, Ramesh Amritalingam and Dr. Samir Chatterjee shared their memories of Swami Sridharananda. Mrs. Janet Waughray, read a poem she had composed in honour and memory of Swami Sridharananda. The programme concluded with the distribution of prasad.



*Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary and Swami Sridharananda's Memorial in Perth*

## SYDNEY

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URL: [www.vedantaaustralia.org](http://www.vedantaaustralia.org)

### Daily Activities

- The shrine was open from 7:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Aratrikam, bhajans, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

### Regular Activities

- Swami Dhyanananda conducted a class on the *Vivekachudamani* on Sunday mornings from 10:30 am to 11:30 am.
- *Ramanama Sankirtana* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the evening aratrikam.
- Devotees received spiritual counselling and guidance.
- Yoga Classes were conducted by Sudhir Mooray on Saturdays, from 9:30 am to 11:00 am, and Sundays, from 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm.
- A *Bala Sangha* (Children's Group) and a Vivekananda Youth Group met on Saturdays at 5 pm.
- Books on the Ramakrishna /Sarada/ Vivekananda literature were circulated via the

Vedanta Centre's bookstore and online via the Spiritual Bookstore website. (<https://spiritualbookstore.org.au/>)

### Celebrations

- Sri Sarada Devi's birth anniversary (1853–1920) was observed on 11 December 2025 at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. The morning programme included worship accompanied by homa, followed by the distribution of prasada. In the evening, after aratikam and Sri Sarada Nama Sankirtanam, Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk on Sri Sarada Devi. Prasada was distributed to all who came.



*Sri Sarada Devi's (1853-1920) Birth Anniversary*

- Christmas Eve and a memorial for Swami Sridharananda was observed on 24 December 2025. The programme included reminiscences of Swami Sridharananda, shared by Swamis Atmeshananda, Sunishthananda and others. Close devotees also shared their memories. The evening concluded with the distribution of prasada.
- Kalpataru Day was observed on 1 January 2026. The programme comprised bhajans, a talk by Swami Dhyanananda, and aratrikam. The function concluded with prasada. More than 200 people attended the programme.
- Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary (1863–1902) was observed on 10 January 2026. The morning programme included puja, followed

by homa, aratrikam, pushpanjali, followed by prasad distribution. In the evening, the observance continued with aratrikam, bhajans, and a talk on Swami Vivekananda delivered by Swami Dhyanananda. Prasad was later distributed. Approximately 135 devotees attended the morning function and more than 185 attended the evening celebration.

- Shivaratri was observed on 15 February 2026. The evening programme comprised of aratrikam, puja, bhajans, and the individual worship of Lord Shiva. Following the rituals, prasad was distributed. More than 140 devotees attended the celebration.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary (1836–1886) was observed on 19 February 2026 with programmes held both in the morning and evening. The morning celebrations included puja, homa, aratrikam, bhajans, and the distribution of prasad. In the evening, the programme included aratrikam, followed by a programme presented by the children of the Bala and Youth Sangha. Swami Atmeshananda delivered a talk on Sri Ramakrishna. More than 100 devotees attended the morning function and more than 200 attended the evening celebration.

### Other Activities

- Swami Suhitananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited Sydney from 16 January to 21 January 2026. During his stay, devotees and monastic members had the blessed opportunity to seek his guidance and to benefit spiritually. On 18 January, Swami Suhitananda initiated a group of spiritual aspirants in the morning. In the evening, he spoke to the devotees who had gathered to hear him.
- On 20 January 2026, the birth anniversary of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Suhitananda presided over the inauguration of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney's new bookstore. A large part of the work was carried out by the dedicated volunteers of the Centre. Later, he also

visited the Sarada Math (Vedanta Society of NSW).

- Volunteers assembled each Saturday to assist in the regular maintenance of the Centre. Their contributions encompassed a wide range of tasks, including gardening, painting, cleaning, carpentry, and other essential activities that ensured the Centre remained well cared for and welcoming.



*Group Photo of those who were initiated by Swami Suhitananda on 18 January 2026*

### Visiting Monks

- Revered Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney from 16 January to 21 January 2026. He was accompanied by his secretary Swami Chandrakantananda and his attendant Swami Sevatmananda.
- Swami Chandrashekharananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Portland, visited the Vedanta Centre from 24 December to 31 December, 2025.
- Swami Bhadreshananda, head of the Ramakrishna Mission of Fiji, visited the Vedanta Centre from 18 December 2026 to 28 December 2026.



*Inauguration of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney's new bookstore by Swami Suhitananda*

- Swami Atmeshananda, Swami Sunishthananda, Swami Mahabodhananda and Swami Manyananda also visited the Vedanta Centre.



*Swami Suhitananda at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 18 January 2026*

## 2. The Method and the Means

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

*(From Bhakti Yoga, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. 3)*

*In this issue of Reach we continue serializing Swami Vivekananda's Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti Yoga was included in the 3rd volume of 'The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda'. In this chapter, entitled 'The Method and the Means', Swami Vivekananda describes and discusses a quotation from Ramanuja. Sri Ramanuja was the founder of the school of Vishistadvaita. Swami Vivekananda quotes from Ramanuja's commentary on the Vedanta or Brahma Sutras. The topic being discussed by Ramanuja is how 'That' or God is attained. Ramanuja outlines 7 disciplines through which 'That is attained'. These are discrimination or discernment, controlling of the passions, practice, sacrificial work, purity, strength, and suppression of excessive joy.*

*With respect to discrimination or discernment, Ramanuja differs from Advaitins like Shankara or Vidyaranya to relate it to food. Food that is Sattvik is considered to be more important to developing our Sattvik nature, since we are all constituents of the three gunas, according to Sankhya. When Advaitins talk about Discrimination it is usually, demarcating the real or permanent from the unreal or impermanent or seeing the faults of things that attract us. Controlling the passions is next on Ramanuja's list and is very similar to sama and dama in Advaita Vedanta or pratyahara in Yoga. Next is practice. Swami Vivekananda quotes the Bhagavad Gita, from the 6th Chapter, when Sri Krishna says that the mind can be controlled by "vairagya and abhyasa" (renunciation and practice). Following this is sacrificial works. Swami Vivekananda presents the panchamahajagnas, which include the debts owed to one's ancestors, rishis, gods, guests and all creatures. Following this is purity. To explain purity Swamiji again quotes Ramanuja, who listed the following disciplines to be related to purity. These are satya or truthfulness; arjava or sincerity, dayā or doing good to others without any gain to one's self, ahimsā, which is not injuring others by thought, word, or deed; and anabhidhyā, not coveting others' goods, or thinking vain thoughts, and not brooding over injuries received from another. Among these Swami Vivekananda says that ahimsa, which he defines as absence of jealousy, to be the most important. After this is strength, both physical and mental, is briefly discussed. And finally the suppression of excessive joy. But this must not be at the expense of cheerfulness in spiritual life.*

**I**n regard to the method and the means of Bhakti Yoga we read in the commentary of Bhagavān Rāmānuja on the *Vedānta-Sutras*: "The attaining of That comes through discrimination, controlling the passions, practice, sacrificial work, purity, strength, and suppression of excessive joy."

*Viveka or Discrimination or Discernment with respect to Food according to Ramanuja*

*Viveka or discrimination is, according to Rāmānuja, discriminating, among other things, between pure food from impure food. According to him, food becomes impure from three causes: (1) by the nature of the food itself, as in the case of garlic etc.; (2) owing to its coming from wicked and accursed per-*

*sons; and (3) from physical impurities, such as dirt, or hair, etc. The Shrutis say, "When the food is pure, the Sattva element gets purified, and the memory becomes unwavering", and Rāmānuja quotes this from the Chhāndogya Upanishad.*

The question of food has always been one of the most vital with the Bhaktas. Apart from the extravagance into which some of the Bhakti sects have run, there

is a great truth underlying this question of food. We must remember that, according to the Sāṅkhya philosophy, the Sattva, Rājās, and Tamas, which in the state of homogeneous equilibrium form the Prakriti, and in the heterogeneous disturbed condition form the universe—are both the substance and the quality of Prakriti. As such they are the materials out of which every human form has been manufactured, and the predominance of the Sattva material is what is absolutely necessary for spiritual development. The materials which we receive through our food into our body-structure go a great way to determine our mental constitution; therefore the food we eat has to be particularly taken care of. However, in this matter, as in others, the fanaticism into which the disciples invariably fall is not to be laid at the door of the masters.

And this discrimination of food is, after all, of secondary importance. The very same passage quoted above is explained by Shankara in his Bhāshya on the Upanishads in a different way by giving an entirely different meaning to the word Āhāra, translated generally as

food. According to him, “That which is gathered in is Āhāra. The knowledge of the sensations, such as sound etc., is gathered in for the enjoyment of the enjoyer (self); the purification of the knowledge which gathers in the perception of the senses is the purifying of the food (Āhāra). The word ‘purification-of-food’ means the acquiring of the knowledge of sensations untouched by the defects of attachment, aversion, and delusion; such is the meaning. Therefore such knowledge or Āhāra being purified, the Sattva material of the possessor of it—the internal organ—will become purified, and the Sattva being purified, an unbroken memory of the Infinite One, who has been known in His real nature from scriptures, will result.”

These two explanations are apparently conflicting, yet both true and necessary. The manipulating and controlling of what may be called the finer body, viz the mind, are no doubt higher functions than the controlling of the grosser body of flesh. But the control of the grosser is absolutely necessary to enable one to arrive at the control of the finer. The begin-

ner, therefore, must pay particular attention to all such dietetic rules as have come down from the line of his accredited teachers; but the extravagant, meaningless fanaticism, which has driven religion entirely to the kitchen, as may be noticed in the case of many of our sects, without any hope of the noble truth of that religion ever coming out to the sunlight of spirituality, is a peculiar sort of pure and simple materialism. It is neither Jñāna, nor Bhakti, nor Karma; it is a special kind of lunacy, and those who pin their souls to it are more likely to go to lunatic asylums than to Brahmaloaka. So it stands to reason that discrimination in the choice of food is necessary for the attainment of this higher state of mental composition which cannot be easily obtained otherwise.

#### *Controlling of the Passions*

Controlling the passions is the next thing to be attended to. To restrain the Indriyas (organs) from going towards the objects of the senses, to control them and bring them under the guidance of the will, is the very central virtue in religious culture.

### *Practice of Self-restraint and Self-denial*

Then comes the practice of self-restraint and self-denial. All the immense possibilities of divine realisation in the soul cannot get actualised without struggle and without such practice on the part of the aspiring devotee. "The mind must always think of the Lord". It is very hard at first to compel the mind to think of the Lord always, but with every new effort the power to do so grows stronger in us. "By practice, O son of Kunti, and by non-attachment is it attained", says Shri Krishna in the *Gītā*.

### *Sacrificial Work*

And then as to sacrificial work, it is understood that the five great sacrificial (Panchamahāyajna) have to be performed as usual.

### *Purity*

Purity is absolutely the basic work, the bedrock upon which the whole Bhakti-building rests. Cleansing the external body and discriminating about food are both easy, but without internal cleanliness and purity, these

external observances are of no value whatsoever. In the list of qualities conducive to purity, as given by Rāmānuja, there are enumerated, Satya, truthfulness; Ārjava, sincerity; Dayā, doing good to others without any gain to one's self; Ahimsā, not injuring others by thought, word, or deed; Anabhidhyā, not coveting others' goods, not thinking vain thoughts, and not brooding over injuries received from another.

### *Ahimsa or non-injury to Others*

In this list, this one idea that deserves special notice is Ahimsā, non-injury to others. This duty of non-injury is, so to speak, obligatory on us in relation to all beings. As with some, it does not simply mean the non-injuring of human beings and mercilessness towards the lower animals; nor, as with some others, does it mean the protecting of cats and dogs and feeding of ants with sugar—with liberty to injure brother-man in every horrible way! It is remarkable that almost every good idea in this world can be carried to a disgusting extreme. A good practice carried to an extreme and worked in accord-

ance with the letter of the law becomes a positive evil. The stinking monks of certain religious sects, who do not bathe lest the vermin on their bodies should be killed, never think of the discomfort and disease they bring to their fellow human beings. They do not, however, belong to the religion of the Vedas!

The test of Ahimsā is absence of jealousy. Any man may do a good deed or make a good gift on the spur of the moment or under the pressure of some superstition or priestcraft; but the real lover of mankind is he who is jealous of none. The so-called great men of the world may all be seen to become jealous of each other for a small name, for a little fame, and for a few bits of gold. So long as this jealousy exists in a heart, it is far away from the perfection of Ahimsā. The cow does not eat meat, nor does the sheep. Are they great Yogis, great non-injurers (Ahimsakas?) Any fool may abstain from eating this or that; surely that gives him no more distinction than to herbivorous animals. The man who will mercilessly cheat widows and orphans and do the vilest deed

for money is worse than any brute even if he lives entirely on grass. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the Bhakta, he is the Yogi, he is the Guru of all, even though he lives every day of his life on the flesh of swine. Therefore we must always remember that external practices have value only as helps to develop internal purity. It is better to have internal purity alone when minute attention to external observances is not practicable. But woe unto the man and woe unto the nation that forgets the real, internal, spiritual essentials of religion and mechanically clutches with death-like grasp at all external forms and never lets them go. The forms have value only so far as they are expressions of the life within. If they have ceased to express life, crush them out without mercy.

#### *Strength or Anavasāda*

The next means to the attainment of Bhakti-Yoga is strength (Anavasāda). "This Ātman is not to be attained by the weak", says the Shruti. Both physical

weakness and mental weakness are meant here. "The strong, the hardy" are the only fit students. What can puny, little, decrepit things do? They will break to pieces whenever the mysterious forces of the body and mind are even slightly awakened by the practice of any of the Yogas. It is "the young, the healthy, the strong" that can score success. Physical strength, therefore, is absolutely necessary. It is the strong body alone that can bear the shock of reaction resulting from the attempt to control the organs. He who wants to become a Bhakta must be strong, must be healthy. When the miserably weak attempt any of the Yogas, they are likely to get some incurable malady, or they weaken their minds. Voluntarily weakening the body is really no prescription for spiritual enlightenment. The mentally weak also cannot succeed in attaining the Ātman.

#### *Suppression of Excessive Joy or Anuddharsha*

The person who aspires to be a Bhakta must be cheerful. In the Western world the idea of a religious man or woman is that he or she never smiles, that a dark

cloud must always hang over his face, which, again, must be long-drawn with the jaws almost collapsed. People with emaciated bodies and long faces are fit subjects for the physician, they are not Yogis. It is the cheerful mind that is persevering. It is the strong mind that hews its way through a thousand difficulties. And this, the hardest task of all, the cutting of our way out of the net of Māyā, is the work reserved only for giant wills.

Yet at the same time excessive mirth should be avoided (*Anuddharsha*). Excessive mirth makes us unfit for serious thought. It also fritters away the energies of the mind in vain. The stronger the will, the less the yielding to the sway of the emotions. Excessive hilarity is quite as objectionable as too much of sad seriousness, and all religious realisation is possible only when the mind is in a steady, peaceful condition of harmonious equilibrium.

It is thus that one may begin to learn how to love the Lord.

### 3. Announcement

Dear devotees and friends,

With deep love and reverence, we remember Swami Sridharananda, the late President of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, who passed away on 13 December 2025. His life of dedication and spiritual guidance touched many hearts, and his absence is deeply felt within our community.

On Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary, which occurred on 19 February 2026, Swami Atmeshananda, who previously served as Vice President of the Centre, graciously accepted the responsibility of President of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney at the request of the Headquarters in India. This decision was lovingly encouraged by Swami Suhitananda, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

We are also pleased to share that Swami Sunishthananda, currently the resident monk at the Vedanta Centre in Melbourne, has been appointed the Vice President of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney.

We warmly invite all devotees and friends to continue your cherished association with the Centre and to support its activities in the spirit of harmony and service.

With sincere regards and prayers.

Yours sincerely,

Monastic brothers of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney

