

**Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300**source: <https://bird-spots.com/2024/11/07/springfield-lakes/>

**W**E welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, which is inspired by the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. We invite your active participation as we together learn, assimilate, and share the Universal Message of Vedanta.

**In this Issue**

Pearls of Wisdom . . . . .	1
News from Australian Centres . . . . .	2
Adelaide . . . . .	2
Brisbane . . . . .	3
Canberra . . . . .	6
Melbourne . . . . .	6
Perth . . . . .	7
Sydney . . . . .	8
Parables of Sri Ramakrishna . . . . .	10
The Preparatory Renunciation . . . . .	12
A Thought-Provoking Speech on Harmony Day at the Vedanta Centre Brisbane . . . . .	15

**Pearls of Wisdom**

God is our Inner Controller. Pray to Him with a pure and guileless heart. He will explain everything to you. Give up egotism and take refuge in Him. You will realize everything.

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. p.636*

No one will suffer for all time. No one will spend all his days on this earth in suffering. Every action brings its own result, and one gets one's opportunities accordingly.

*The Gospel of the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. p.174*

As long as you are in the network of time, space, and causation, to say you are free is nonsense, because in that network all is under rigorous law, sequence, and consequence.

*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Vol.3, p.14*

## News from Australian Centres

Period: 11 March, 2026 to 10 June, 2026

### Adelaide

16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens, SA 5068

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contacts: Swami Manyananda +61425762436

Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

### Daily Activities

- The Centre was open for devotees from 7:30 am – 12:30 pm and 4:00 – 8:00 pm. The evening Aratrikam (vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna) was performed from 7:00 – 7:30 pm followed by bhajans, devotional reading and a short meditation.

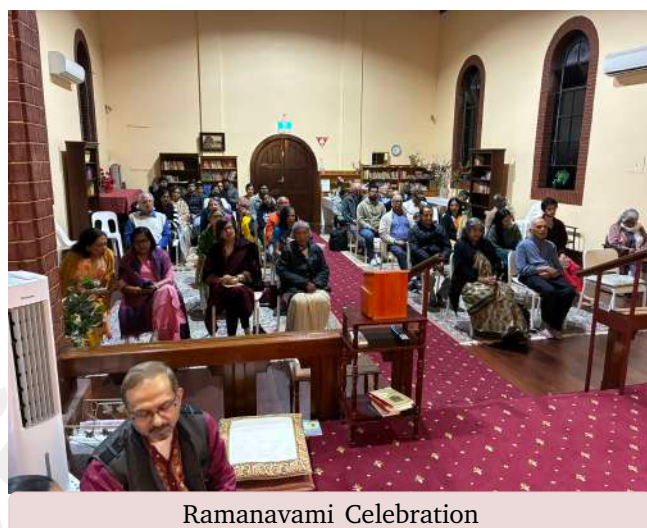
### Regular Activities

- The Centre observed Ekadasi with Ramanama Sankirtanam every lunar fortnight.
- Discussions were held on the Upanishads (Wednesday 11:00 am), Durga Saptashati (Saturday 4:00 pm), Bhagavad Gita (Sunday 11:00 am) and Vivekachudamani (Sunday 5:30 pm) by Swami Manyananda were held every week.
- Bala Sangha, spiritual classes for children, were held from 4:00 – 5:00 pm every Sunday. The classes are coordinated by Swami Manyananda and volunteers, and include mantra chanting, meditation, yoga, singing, reading from spiritual texts, value-based lessons and arts and crafts. The programme concludes with light refreshments.

- The reading of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by a devotee and discussions led by Swami Manyananda on emerging points was held on alternate Saturday evening before Aratrikam.

### Celebrations

- Ramanavami – marking the birth of Lord Rama – was celebrated on Friday 27th March 2026. The evening programme following the daily Aratrikam included a short puja, Ramanama Sankirtanam, bhajans, aarti, pushpanjali and prasada distribution.



Ramanavami Celebration

## Other Activities

- Vedanta Shravana programme was conducted by Vidwan Dr Vishwanath MV of Sri Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri (India) on Sunday 3rd May 2026. The programme included prayer and introduction, talks on Guru Mahima and Sadhana Panchakam, and concluded with a short Q & A session. It was attended by over 50 devotees.



Vedanta Shravana Programme

## Brisbane

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

Email: [info@vedantabrisbane.org](mailto:info@vedantabrisbane.org)  
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

- **Sunday mornings:-** a) Yoga class (from 8.30 am to 9.45 am) b) Talk on the Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (10:00 am – 11:00 am). (c) Bala Sangha and Yuva Sangha (moral and religious education for children) classes (10:00 am – 11:00 am during school term as a 5-week course)
- **Tuesdays:-** Class on Brahma Sutras (from 11 am. to 12 noon); Yoga Classes (6.30 to 7.45 pm.)
- **Wednesdays:-** Interviews with applicants for prospective lending through NILS (No Interest Loan Scheme) at the Centre by appointment. People who are doing it hard avail of loans up to \$2000 repayable through their government payments. This is an initiative of the Wesley Mission's Good Shepherd organisation.
- **Fridays:-** On Fridays, the Centre's volunteers cooked food at the Centre's soup kitchen for the benefit of 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, the Gailies Community Centre and YMCA, Springfield Lakes. Every Friday, the Centre's Food bank distributed groceries to the needy. Hampers, along with cooked food, fruits, vegetables and bread were distributed to the needy. On an average, 14 food hampers are distributed.
- **Saturdays (monthly)** Study of Srimad Bhagavad Gita (5.30 pm. to 6.30 pm.) organized by Gold Coast Vedanta group on the last Saturday of every month.
- Chanting of the Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam was held fortnightly at the Centre on Ekadashi days (7:00 pm – 8:00 pm).

- **Monthly Class** on Vivekachudamani on the first Wednesday of every month (6.30 pm. to 7.30 pm.) at the Toowoomba council Library.
- **Monthly Class** on 'Ashtavakra Gita' 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 Vinayagar temple, South Maclean.
- The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepared and sold food at a reasonable cost to people. On an average, about 120 persons avail themselves of this service. The kitchen is managed efficiently by volunteers.
- On demand, a Justice of Peace (JP) renders service at the Centre on Saturdays.

## Other Activities

- During Harmony Week in March, the Centre organised **Harmony Day celebrations** with the theme 'One and All' - Harmony Day Festival. The programme started at 10.30 am. with a Live Music Performance by JADE Ensemble. Keynote Address was delivered by Giridharan Sivaraman, Race Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission. He chose the subject 'Racial Harmony' for the event. His talk was followed by an address by Hon Fiona Simpson MP, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Multiculturalism who lauded the efforts of Vedanta Centre in maintaining harmony in the community.



Vedanta Community members with Hon. Minister Fiona Simpson MP

A panel discussion followed her address. It was Chaired by Jim Varghese OAM.

## Celebrations

- Buddha Purnima was celebrated on 1st May 2026 at the Centre. Worship, chanting from the Dhammapada, Prajnaparamita stotra and devotional singing, Reading from the Life of Buddha constituted the evening programme.



Buddha Purnima Celebration

Hon Shayne Neumann MP, Hon Senator Paul Scarr, Hon Charis Mullen MP, Councillor Pye Augustine, and Councillor Paul Tully put forth their views and answered questions from the audience.



Various programmes held during the Harmony Day Celebration

Multifaith members from the Queensland Faith Communities Council also participated in the event. Aunty Heather and Aunty Leanne ("Black Angel Aunties") from the Indigenous Tradition regaled the audience with stories and songs.

In addition, cultural programmes consisting of Mohiniattam dance by Bindu Rajendran's troupe, folk dance by Vaani and Vrinda, Kathak Dance by Neelophar and troupe and Bansuri recital by Pranav. Variety stalls were set up at the Centre's car park selling their wares. A petting zoo (with animals) specially organised by the Centre attracted a large number of children and parents. Face painting and balloon twisting added fun to the programme. The Ma Sarada's kitchen served delicious meals on the occasion.

- Swami Atmeshananda was invited to participate and give a prayer and message at the Annual Faith Service for the Legal Profession and the Judiciary on 23rd April 2026. It was held at St. Andrew's Uniting church, Brisbane. The Chief Justice of Queensland Hon H. Bowskill, Ms Kym Korbe, Executive Officer of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, Members of the Legal Fraternity and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.
- Aham Brahmaasmi Foundation – a unit of Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri, in collaboration with the Centre, held a day of study on the subject 'Guru Mahima and Sadhana Panchakam' at the Ashram on 4th May 2026, which was attended by a large number of sincere seekers.
- The Australian Hindu Conference organisers invited Swami Atmeshananda as special guest of honour to the 9th Australian National Hindu Conference – 'Building Communities, Powering Australia' to address their delegates held at the Voco Hotel, Brisbane, on 9th May 2026.

- Swami Atmeshananda attended a Webinar on Hiring Overseas Religious Workers on Wednesday, 20th May 2026, organised by the Department of Home Affairs, Australia.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated in a Faith Leaders meeting organised jointly by **Multicultural Australia** & the **Brisbane Lions** on 9th June 2026. He also participated in Greater Springfield Regional Connect meeting on 10th June 2026. This was organised by Charis Mullen MP to provide an opportunity to share updates, highlight upcoming initiatives, and identify opportunities to collaborate amongst the organisations working for the welfare of people in the Ipswich region.



Multicultural Australia Meet

### Upcoming events

- International Yoga Day celebrations on 20th June 2026.
- Instrumental Music - Sarangi - by Sangeet Mishra followed by a prayer meeting in remembrance of Jayshree Kapadia on 21st June 2026.
- Guru Purnima on 29th July 2026.
- Sri Krishna Janmashtami on 4th August 2026.

### Canberra

4 Brigalow Street, O'Connor, ACT 2602

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman

Tel: 62587612 / 0433 59 3860

### Daily Activities

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

### Regular Activities

- Swami Dhyanananda continued his monthly lecture series on the Mundaka Upanisad. Lectures were held on 18 April and 23 May 2026.

### Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda of the Melbourne Vedanta Centre visited the Canberra Ashram in May 2026. During his visit, he conducted the evening arati at the Centre on Friday, 29 May 2026, and delivered a spiritual talk the following day at the nearby Quaker's Hall in Turner, ACT. There was a good attendance, and Swamiji spent time conversing with the devotees after the talk.

### Melbourne

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda +61426864750

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

### Daily Activities

- Evening Vesper Services (including aratrikam, bhajans, readings from the Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Vivekananda lit-

erature, and meditation) were held daily from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

### Regular Activities

Weekly Scriptural Classes and Guided Meditation Sessions were conducted as follows:

- **Isha Upanisad** – 1st, 2nd and 3rd Tuesdays: 7.30 pm – 8.30 pm.
- **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna** – 4th and 5th (if any) Tuesdays: 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- **Narada Bhakti Sutras** – Thursdays: 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- **Guided Meditation** – Sundays: 10:00 am to 10:30 am.
- **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita** – Sundays: 10:30 am to 11:30 am.

### Celebrations

- Ramanavami was celebrated on Friday, 27 March 2026 at Mount Waverley Community Centre. The programme included special worship, Ramanama Sankirtanam, and bhajans by devotees. The event concluded with the sharing of prasadam.



Ramanavami Puja Celebration

### Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda visited Canberra Chapter of Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 29th and 30th May 2026. He met the devotees of Canberra and delivered a spiritual discourse on the morning of 30th May 2026.

### Perth

51 Golf View Street, Yorkine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty +61438928136

URL: www.vedantaperth.org/

### Daily Activities

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



Sandhya Arati

### Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda of the Adelaide Centre conducted the monthly satsangs at the Centre. He visited the Centre from April 9th to 11th, and again from May 21st to 23rd. While there, he conducted the evening aarati and gave a talk on the Mahishasura Mardini Stotram. Each day concluded with the distribution of prasadam.



Monthly Satsang

## Other Activities

- On the 17th of May, a few devotees got together for a “working bee” to clean up the garden and the Centre.



## Sydney

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, 2115

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: (02) 8197 7351

URL: 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

- 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.
- Bala sangha classes, which include moral and spiritual lessons, drama and movement were resumed and it now happens on Sundays between 10:30 am and 11:30 am.
- The Vivekananda Youth Group conducted online classes on Sunday evenings, from 5:30 to 6:30 pm. The group is designed for young people between the ages of 12 and 25. The classes are fully online, interactive, and participants are encouraged to ask questions.
- Books of the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda literature were circulated via the Vedanta

Centre’s bookstore and online via the Spiritual Bookstore website.

- Swami Dhyanananda conducted the teaching of the Vivekachudamani on Sunday mornings from 10:30 to 11:30 am.
- Ramanama Sankirtanam was conducted on ekadashi days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

## Celebrations

- Ramanavami was observed at the Centre on 27th March 2026. The programme included worship, singing of Ramanama Sankirtanam, bhajans and the distribution of prasada.



Singing of Ram bhajans



The devotees’ kitchen team & prasada distribution during the Ramanavami Celebration

## Other Activities

- Sri Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri, India, conducted a two-day (16th and 17th of May, 2026) Vedanta Shravana programme at the Vedanta Centre in Sydney. The theme was Sri Shankaracharya’s

text Bhaja Govindam. The programme featured speakers Vidwan Sri Vishwanath M V and Vidwan Sri Arjun Bharadwaj.

- **Working Bee:** 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.



Saturdays' Working Bee activities

### Visiting Swamis

- Swami Atmeshananda visited the Centre from 25 April to 30 April, 2026.
- Swami Manyananda visited the Centre from 11 May to 15 May, 2026.

### New Monastic Member

Swami Punyeshwarananda has been posted as a monastic assistant to Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Australia. He arrived on 16 April, 2026 and is currently serving at the Sydney Centre.

## Parables of Sri Ramakrishna

(From the book *Tales and Parables Of Sri Ramakrishna*)

*Sri Ramakrishna was a masterful storyteller who used simple, everyday examples and observations to convey profound spiritual truths. His parables offer practical guidance for leading a noble life and striving for God-realisation; merely reflecting on these parables provides immense clarity and illuminates these timeless principles*

### The Root Of All Troubles

In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish, about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed it.



The kite flew to the south and the crows followed it there. The kite flew to the north and still the crows followed after it. The kite went east and west, but with the same result. As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: 'That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace.'

As long as a man has the fish, that is, worldly desires, he must perform actions and consequently suffer from worry, anxiety, and restlessness. No sooner does he renounce these desires

than his activities fall away and he enjoys peace of soul.

### The Simple Secret

GOD can be realised through child-like faith and guilelessness.

A certain person, on coming across a sadhu, humbly begged him for instruction. The sadhu's advice was, "Love God with all your heart and soul." The enquirer replied, "I have never seen God, nor do I know anything about Him; how is it possible that I should love Him?" The holy man enquired whom the other loved most. The answer was, "I have nobody to care for. I have a sheep and that is the only creature I love." The sadhu said: "Then tend the creature and love it with all your heart and soul, and always remember that the Lord abides in it."



Having given this advice the sadhu left the place. The enquirer now began to tend the sheep with loving care, fully believing that the Lord abode in the creature. After a long time the sadhu, during his return journey, sought out the person he had advised and enquired how he was

getting on. The latter saluted the sadhu and said, “Master, I am all right, thanks to your kind instructions. Much good has come to me by follow-

ing the line of thought prescribed by you. Time and again I see a beautiful figure with four hands within my sheep and I find supreme bliss in that.”



# The Preparatory Renunciation

Swami Vivekananda

(From PARA-BHAKTI OR SUPREME DEVOTION, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 3)

*In this issue of Reach, we commence serializing Swami Vivekananda's Para-Bhakti or Supreme Devotion, which is included in the third volume of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. In this section, entitled "The Preparatory Renunciation", Swami Vivekananda states that transitioning from preparatory practices to Para-Bhakti requires soul purification through renunciation, which serves as the essential stepping stone and true heart of all spiritual culture. Swamiji further compares and contrasts the nature of renunciation expected in the four yogas: Karma, Raja, Jnana, and Bhakti. While the Karma-Yogi gives up the fruits of action, the Raja-Yogi realizes the soul's eternal separateness from nature, and the Jnana-Yogi forcefully tears away from cosmic illusion. In contrast, the Bhakta's renunciation involves no harshness or violent suppression, flowing as smoothly and naturally as a dim light fading away in the presence of a brighter sun. As the love of God intensifies and grows into supreme devotion, lower pleasures of the senses and the intellect simply become dim, cast into the shade, and entirely forgotten. Ultimately, this divine grace loosens the binding bolts of the soul, causing external forms, rituals, temples, and sectarian limitations to drop away of their own nature. He concludes the topic by saying that by redirecting and elevating all human emotions toward God rather than crushing them, the bound soul effortlessly achieves complete spiritual freedom.*

We have now finished the consideration of what may be called the preparatory Bhakti, and are entering on the study of the Para-Bhakti or supreme devotion. We have to speak of a preparation to the practice of this Para-Bhakti. All such preparations are intended only for the purification of the soul. The repetition of names, the rituals, the forms, and the symbols, all these various things are for the purification of the soul. The greatest purifier among all such things, a purifier without which no one can enter the regions of this

higher devotion (Para-Bhakti), is renunciation. This frightens many; yet, without it, there cannot be any spiritual growth. In all our Yogas this renunciation is necessary. This is the stepping-stone and the real centre and the real heart of all spiritual culture – renunciation. This is religion – renunciation.

*[The dawn of renunciation, and its nature in the paths of Karma, Raja and Jnana Yoga]*

When the human soul draws back from the things of the world and tries to go into deeper things; when man, the

spirit which has here somehow become concretised and materialised, understands that he is thereby going to be destroyed and to be reduced almost into mere matter, and turns his face away from matter – then begins renunciation, then begins real spiritual growth. The Karma-Yogis renunciation is in the shape of giving up all the fruits of his action; he is not attached to the results of his labour; he does not care for any reward here or hereafter. The Raja-Yogi knows that the whole of nature is intended for the soul to acquire experience,

and that the result of all the experiences of the soul is for it to become aware of its eternal separateness from nature. The human soul has to understand and realise that it has been spirit, and not matter, through eternity, and that this conjunction of it with matter is and can be only for a time. The Raja-Yogi learns the lesson of renunciation through his own experience of nature. The Jnana-Yogi has the harshest of all renunciations to go through, as he has to realise from the very first that the whole of this solid-looking nature is all an illusion. He has to understand that all that is any kind of manifestation of power in nature belongs to the soul, and not to nature. He has to know from the very start that all knowledge and all experience are in the soul and not in nature; so he has at once and by the sheer force of rational conviction to tear himself away from all bondage to nature. He lets nature and all that belongs to her go, he lets them vanish and tries to stand alone!

*[The contrasting nature of renunciation in the path of Bhakti Yoga]*

Of all renunciations, the most natural, so to say, is that of the Bhakti-Yogi. Here there

is no violence, nothing to give up, nothing to tear off, as it were, from ourselves, nothing from which we have violently to separate ourselves. The Bhaktas renunciation is easy, smooth flowing, and as natural as the things around us. We see the manifestation of this sort of renunciation, although more or less in the form of caricatures, every day around us. A man begins to love a woman; after a while he loves another, and the first woman he lets go. She drops out of his mind smoothly, gently, without his feeling the want of her at all. A woman loves a man; she then begins to love another man, and the first one drops off from her mind quite naturally. A man loves his own city, then he begins to love his country, and the intense love for his little city drops off smoothly, naturally. Again, a man learns to love the whole world; his love for his country, his intense, fanatical patriotism drops off without hurting him, without any manifestation of violence.

*[The three types of happiness]*

An uncultured man loves the pleasures of the sense intensely; as he becomes cultured, he begins to love intellectual pleasures, and his sense-

enjoyments become less and less. No man can enjoy a meal with the same gusto or pleasure as a dog or a wolf, but those pleasures which a man gets from intellectual experiences and achievements, the dog can never enjoy. At first, pleasure is in association with the lowest senses; but as soon as an animal reaches a higher plane of existence, the lower kind of pleasures becomes less intense. In human society, the nearer the man is to the animal, the stronger is his pleasure in the senses; and the higher and the more cultured the man is, the greater is his pleasure in intellectual and such other finer pursuits. So when a man gets even higher than the plane of the intellect, higher than that of mere thought, when he gets to the plane of spirituality and of divine inspiration, he finds there a state of bliss, compared with which all the pleasures of the senses, or even of the intellect, are as nothing. When the moon shines brightly, all the stars become dim; and when the sun shines, the moon herself becomes dim. The renunciation necessary for the attainment of Bhakti is not obtained by killing anything, but just comes in as naturally as

---

in the presence of an increasingly stronger light, the less intense ones become dimmer and dimmer until they vanish away completely. So this love of the pleasures of the senses and of the intellect is all made dim and thrown aside and cast into the shade by the love of God Himself.

*[On attainment of supreme devotion]*

That love of God grows and assumes a form which is called

Para-Bhakti or supreme devotion. Forms vanish, rituals fly away, books are superseded; images, temples, churches, religions and sects, countries and nationalities – all these little limitations and bondages fall off by their own nature from him who knows this love of God. Nothing remains to bind him or fetter his freedom. A ship, all of a sudden, comes near a magnetic rock, and its iron bolts and bars are all at-

tracted and drawn out, and the planks get loosened and freely float on the water. Divine grace thus loosens the binding bolts and bars of the soul, and it becomes free. So in this renunciation auxiliary to devotion, there is no harshness, no dryness, no struggle, nor repression nor suppression. The Bhakta has not to suppress any single one of his emotions, he only strives to intensify them and direct them to God.



## A Thought-Provoking Speech on Harmony Day at the Vedanta Centre Brisbane

Here is a transcript of the speech delivered by Giridharan Sivaraman on Harmony Day, 21 March 2026, at the Vedanta Centre Brisbane. He is Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner, having been appointed to the Australian Human Rights Commission in March 2024. A former principal lawyer at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, his work centres on advocating for structural change, racial equity, and the implementation of a 10-year National Anti-Racism Strategy.

### Introduction

My name is Giridharan Sivaraman and I'm the Commonwealth Race Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today at the Brisbane Vedanta Centre.

I wish to acknowledge the Juggra and Turrbal peoples as traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of this region.

I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Acknowledging that I'm on country is important. For me, as a non-First Nations person,

but who has lived experience of racism and is leading anti-racism work, it's important to understand the difference between the racism targeting non-indigenous people, and that which has targeted First Peoples for 238 years. Racism targeting non-indigenous people results in a denial of equality, dignity and respect. The racism First peoples experience is also a denial of equality, dignity and respect.

But in addition, it is a denial of self determination and sovereignty which included the taking of their land by settlers before me. And I, as a settler, have benefited from that denial of sovereignty. I have benefited from the taking of their land. Therefore, it is a small but important step for me to acknowledge I'm on country.

It's a privilege to speak at the Brisbane Vedanta Centre. The Vedanta Centre holds a special place in my heart. It's a

place of shelter, of peace, of understanding. That's not just theoretical. My grandmother Balam Lakshmanan, who lives in Sydney, has been involved with Vedanta Centres all over the world for 60 years. She was involved with the centre in Colombo, and with the centre demanded better conditions for children jailed in prison. And during the terrifying 1983 Black July attacks on Tamils in Sri Lanka, when the family home was set alight, families dispersed, it was the Vedanta Centre that gave my grandmother, who is Tamil, shelter for 15 days. So not a theoretical place of shelter, a real one.

### IDERD vs Harmony Day

As many of you know, this week has been traditionally celebrated as Harmony Week in Australia, and the 21st of March as Harmony Day. This is the context in which I've been invited here to speak today.

The 21st of March has been a

---

date globally recognised as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD). It was designated as such by the UN in 1966 and began as a day of mourning.

It is a day set aside to annually observe and reflect on the mass murder of over 70 Africans, by white police, at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid in Sharpeville, South Africa. The United Nations frames the day as one in which we should be "building solidarity with the peoples struggling against racism and racial discrimination".

It was a deliberate decision in Australia to rename IDERD to Harmony Day. The change was made in 1999 under former Prime Minister John Howard, to celebrate diversity and multiculturalism, instead of focusing on racism and discrimination.

Celebrating the diversity within our communities has value. However, in Australia, the refusal to name and confront racism has prevented meaningful progress on eliminating it. In our work at the AHRC we have found that approaches to anti-racism across all levels of government is ad-hoc, disjointed and piece

meal. Many areas of government don't even want to use the word racism. They would rather use terms like social cohesion, or harmony. Racism isn't Beetlejuice. Naming it doesn't make a demon appear, the demon is already amongst us. Anyone who's watched a horror movie knows that closing your eyes and pretending the monster isn't there doesn't make it go away. It'll still get you.

And the monster of racism has surfaced in the most violent of ways just in the last few months. The horrific anti-semitic massacre in Bondi. The attempted bomb attacks at an Invasion day rally in Boorloo. The thwarting of a potential terrorist attack on mosques in Western Australia. The target keeps changing, but the problem remains.

Australia is often eager to promote itself as a successful multicultural nation. But are we genuinely pluralistic or are you forced to express your culture in the shadows? I think of my own life and journey into the world of law. I was brought up in a Tamil speaking, Hindu, teetotaling, vegetarian household. I was acutely conscious of fitting into the world

of law. It rewarded conformity not difference. I let go of Tamil so as to not sound different. It's a beautiful language, of poetry and literature but it had no place anywhere outside private spaces. I remember my ceremony to be admitted as a lawyer. I was given a choice of an oath on a bible or a secular affirmation. No room for Hindu beliefs there. I remember attending events started with a Christian prayer. Even now the only religious public holidays recognised by law are Christian ones. Alcohol was the key to mingling with clients or other lawyers, otherwise you were left out. So all I maintained was my vegetarianism. For a while there veganism was in vogue which meant I was cool for a bit but that quickly passed. I'm part of the multicultural success story. Yet my culture, language and religion were all obstacles to my success.

When it comes to calling the 21st of March IDERD or Harmony Day, it can be easy to say that it's just a choice of words. But words are never neutral.

Throughout history, language has been used to label people, to erase struggles and to strategically shape political

narratives. In Australia’s own history, racist policies enacted towards First Nations communities were called protection policies’. Yet these policies involved abhorrent racial segregation, dispossession, and the tragedies that we now refer to as the Stolen Generations.

Language is powerful. It can empower people, or silence them. It can expose or obscure the truth. It can challenge or reinforce injustice. In this case, replacing acknowledgement of racism with words of harmony risks contributing to the notion that racism is not a significant problem in Australia – one that requires urgent attention and policy change.

## Moving forward

### 1. Racial literacy and intro to Framework

Before we can tackle racism, it is necessary to first meaningfully acknowledge the issue. We must call out racism for what it is and recognise its ongoing harms, instead of allowing it to be obscured under words like harmony or social cohesion. But there is still cause for optimism. That’s because we have a roadmap for the fu-

ture. In November 2024, the Commission released the National Anti-Racism Framework. It contains 63 recommendations for a whole of society approach, with proposed reforms across Australia’s legal, justice, health, education, media and arts sectors as well as workplaces and data collection.

In the Framework, a key theme is the need to build racial literacy. Understanding the relationship between Chennai and me is racial literacy. The next step is understanding how our institutions and systems disadvantage some people based on race. That is building our racial literacy in a way that allows us to improve our institutions and systems. Stronger racial literacy across society is essential for initiatives like the Framework to properly address racism in all forms across vital areas of our lives like health, education, workplaces, justice and the media.

### 2. Learning and education

Skills in racial literacy are built over a lifetime. None of us can be expected to know everything. For us to tackle racism, we must all make a genuine commitment to ongoing learning, and educating both ourselves and others. We could learn from the Vedanta philosophy of listening (Shravana), reflection (Manana), and deep contemplation (Nididhyasana). However, enhancing racial literacy and education alone is not sufficient for addressing racism. It must be accompanied by actively challenging racist systems, structures, and ideas.

### 3. Action

The National Anti-Racism Framework aims to tackle racism in Australia through real action and change, instead of symbolic words and gestures. We are all too familiar with seeing corporate diversity campaigns that showcase staff of different backgrounds, while

---

there are no steps to address the discrimination those staff are being actively subjected to. We are tired of people in authority publicly condemning a horrific act of racism when it occurs, and then seeing no action being taken.

We no longer want the pain and suffering of so many communities being swept under the rug and silenced with platitudes. Examples like referring to IDERD as Harmony Day' hinders our collective anti-racism journey. It weakens our ability to identify and address the harm experienced by negatively racialised communities. We need to take this chance to address racism in Australia. Let's question how racism affects our society and commit to anti-racist efforts to eliminate it.

An interfaith gathering like today expands common bonds across common humanity and many faiths. As the first sentence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, **All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and**

**rights.**

And bridges of understanding can always be built, even after the most intractable of conflicts. I told you about my grandmother, who took shelter in the Vedanta Centre during the terrible conflict in Sri Lanka. The conflict morphed into a civil war between the Sinhalese government and the Tamil separatist movement. My cousin Bahi was particularly badly affected. He was in Jaffna and as a young man, beaten by government troops. His father was shot in the mouth, though he miraculously survived. Eventually, they were accepted as refugees in Australia and when they first came to Australia were very close and have remained very close to my immediate family.

Bahi, after coming here wanted two things more than anything else. One, get an education. Two, play cricket. He was a big fan of Adam Gilchrist, as many of us were. He started studying at North Sydney TAFE, and playing for a team in the Parramatta district. And back in the day I've bowled a few overs at Bahi, and he's a very handy cricketer. Not long after he arrived, he was at Strathfield station wait-

ing for a train when a young man came up to him. The young man looked Sri Lankan, and it turned out he was. He was Sinhalese. His name was Saliya. Saliya asked Bahi if he was Sri Lankan and then introduced himself. For those of you that don't know, Sinhalese and Tamil names are very different so it's clear quickly what your heritage is. Saliya then asked, as you do when you meet a fellow Sri Lankan, whether Bahi played cricket. Now this could have gone a few ways. Bahi had just escaped a horrific civil war between the Sinhalese majority government and Tamil Tigers. He could have been distrustful, could have told him nothing, could have walked away. Instead, he made a choice.

He chose to listen to someone who was Sinhalese.

He chose to be compassionate to someone else searching for a community, a common connection, and a sense of belonging.

Now I've mentioned some grand ideals here but just quietly Bahi also tells me the team was in sore need of batting talent which Saliya claimed to have. So Bahi told Saliya where to meet, when, and they

started playing together.

But here's the important post script. That was more than 20 years ago. And for 20 years Bahi and Saliya played cricket together. And over that time many other team mates came and went. But Bahi and Saliya always played together. And they became best friends. And they remain so today. In telling you that story I don't want to imply that an open heart will solve all conflict and the wicked problem of racism.

It won't. It can't. It needs intent and action.

It needs governments, State and Federal to adopt and fund the recommendations of the National Anti-Racism Framework. Its been disheartening at a federal level that nearly 18 months after tabling our framework with the Federal Govern-

ment it is yet to be endorsed or implemented. Instead we have seen responses that pit communities against each other and continue the ad hoc piecemeal approach to tackling racism.

On a state level in Queensland, it has been disheartening to see the State Government abruptly end truth telling and the path to treaty, and shelving laws that would have helped all communities affected by discrimination.

What's been heartening is that community organisations, unions, businesses, and others have gone on with the work. They aren't waiting for government. All of you in this room can play a part. We know that when people come together systems have to change.

Swami Vivekananda famously said:

*"Strength is Life, Weakness is*

*Death. Expansion is Life, Contraction is Death. Love is Life, Hatred is Death".*

Strength is admitting racism exists, that racism is divisive, and that we need to change. On that note I want to thank Senator Scarr for his strength recently in supporting a motion condemning racism in the Senate. That's the kind of strength we need to see from others.

Expansion is taking meaningful steps on the anti-racism journey to bring about change. Being prepared to learn, improve your racial literacy.

The destination is love. Love for one another and a love based on equity between each other. I hope that with the strength, expansion and love of those in this room we can get to that destination.

Thank you very much.

