



Association of Engaged Buddhists

## **ASSOCIATION OF ENGAGED BUDDHISTS**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

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## **From the President**

It has been a great privilege to be the President of the AEB over the past year. I feel as if it has taken me twelve months to understand the association and its administrative processes along with finding an effective way of working with the committee to fulfill our duties and obligations. This has been my priority for the year, and I hope to have more contact in the next twelve months with the broader AEB community.

Sadly, Bhante Tejadhammo, our Spiritual Director, has continued to experience ill health this year and remains unable to participate in activities and teachings as he would like to. We all wish Bhante an improvement in the conditions that are limiting his involvement. You will not be surprised to know that his spirits remain high and his sense of humour intact. Ongoing gratitude to Bhante for guiding the committee and the association with his wisdom and his practical sense of what is appropriate.

The AEB is indeed fortunate to have had such wonderful people who have worked tirelessly over many years, indeed, decades, to support Bhante Tejadhammo in his endeavours to provide the teachings of the Buddha in an accessible way to the AEB and the broader community, and to support his passion for helping those who are ill and facing the end of their lives. Without the incredible energy and commitment of all those who have gone before us the AEB would not have survived.

There have been many positive activities that have occurred throughout 2023. Meredith Tan continued to provide an almost seamless continuity of teachings held by Zoom each Thursday night. Thank you to all the teachers who helped us provide these teachings. We are so grateful for your selflessness and energy.

There have been a number of retreats held at Vejjasala in a beautifully renovated space which is a delight to stay in. Thanks to our teachers, retreat managers, garden maintenance volunteers, and to the ongoing work of David Wilson who has overseen the work at our retreat centre. Many thanks to David Denton and Pip Gallagher who have poured their energy into Vejjasala, both inside and out, to ensure that it is a safe and sacred space for all who go there.

Prior to Christmas we are having what we hope will be the remaining work done at Vejjasala, other than ongoing maintenance. We are having a retractable awning and a blind installed over part of the back deck to provide shade from the intense summer heat and to reduce the heat going into the Teachers room.

Kynan Tan has held several Days of Practice at the Buddhist Library which have been very well received. Two Weekends of Practice have been held at Vejjasala.

Unfortunately, this year we were not able to offer Dana Days due to Bhante's poor health.

There are many people to thank for their hard work over this year – Chris Burgess, our immediate Past President, still working quietly and helpfully on the committee. Kynan Tan as Vice President has been updating our manuals and processes digitally. Thanks to Jennifer Kok for taking on the role of Treasurer and to Alex Lee our previous Treasurer who has helped from the sidelines. Bronwyn Sweeney has helped keep the committee on track as Secretary. Thanks also to Robert Ljubcic and David Wilson for their ongoing work at Vejjasala, and to Meredith Tan for her commitment to the teaching schedule and so many other things. Thanks to Russell Bostock who manages our IT and website out of sight and further thanks to Kynan for his work on the website.

From the committee we are saying goodbye to Meredith, Kynan, Jennifer and Bronwyn. They will all be a huge loss to our small group. Enormous thanks for all you have contributed over the past year, and for much longer.

Despite these losses, the AEB is continuing to move forward and is now approaching a crossroads. All of us need to think deeply about the future of our association. It cannot continue without the support of its members, not only financially, but also in terms of members being willing to step up and assist in the running of the AEB. We cannot survive on the goodwill of those who are currently involved and those who, although no longer on the committee, continue to support us from behind the scenes. Without active involvement we cannot offer the scale of activities, retreats, teachings and community events that we have been able to offer in the past.

In 2024, we need to refocus and consider what we are able to offer. There have been so many changes and challenges for us over the past few years – Bhante’s compromised health, COVID, the loss of Sangha Lodge, reduced accommodation at Vejjasala, fewer people coming to online teachings, to name a few.

As the AEB moves forward we need to assess what it is practical for us to try and achieve with the people who are willing to work with us.

We will be looking to hold a meeting early in the new year, in person, to discuss options and ways forward and to canvass the views of the broader AEB community of friends and members.

If you feel you can contribute in any way please send an email to [office@engagedbuddhists.org.au](mailto:office@engagedbuddhists.org.au) and let us know of your ideas and your ability to execute some of your ideas. Please also be in touch so that we can contact you if you are interested in attending the meeting to be held to discuss the future of the AEB.

With metta,

Megan Thorpe  
President

## **From the Spiritual Director**

This report will be very different to any others I have prepared in the past for our AGM. The Sangha Report this year will be very short due to my ongoing problems with health.

I have only managed to visit a handful of people who are ill or in need of some sort of counselling. Hospital visits have been very few and far between on the advice of my own medical specialists. I have not been able to conduct retreats and only on odd occasions do some teaching via Zoom.

In short it has been, in the words of the late Queen Elizabeth II, an “Annus Horribilis” - a year of medical disasters.

I have undergone two major spinal surgeries of some 3.5 and 8 hours duration. The rheumatoid arthritis is still causing considerable suffering. In addition to this I have been diagnosed with osteoporosis just a few weeks ago. Today as I write this, I have seen the spinal surgeon again and may require a further operation. I had a colonoscopy and gastroscopy a week ago and it was found that I am bleeding in the lower part of the stomach. The doctor, a lovely Sri Lankan gentleman who is a close friend of Venerable Dhammagavesi of Lankarama, clamped the bleeding and has sent off samples for pathology. My blood count was extremely low and iron levels were in his words, “almost non-existent.” I also had an infusion of iron from Dr Abey.

So, all I can do is recall the words of my beloved teacher: “If you have a body, what do you expect?”

I apologise for this tale of misery. I am missing greatly my interaction with our little community especially being able to conduct retreats at Vejjasala. I even miss teaching, quite a surprise!

I am hoping to be up and running again for the start of the New Year ahead. I want to thank the committee, both those departing and those continuing. They have been truly splendid. I also want to thank the various members and friends for your support and wonderful efforts to keep teaching and retreats running in my absence. It certainly shows that all is anicca and that none of us is irreplaceable. So, a huge bow of gratitude to all of you and a hope that next year will be a better one and that I can get back to work.

With every blessing

Yours in the Dhamma

Tejadhanno Bhikku

## **Treasurer's Report**

### Income

In the last financial year 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023, AEB received donations of \$45,000. Interest income were more attractive than previous year and substantial amount received from retreats.

About 50 membership renewals – about the same as 2022.

### Expenses

The total expenses for last financial year is \$73,103.75. The greatest portion is on the renovation and recently mainly on repairs and maintenance cost for Vejjasala, standing at \$20,725.

The other big expense is building insurance \$8,880, donations to teachers \$6,000, followed by medical and motor vehicle expenses.

### Financial Position

AEB had an operating profit of \$4830.

Currently, the Building Fund has \$33,407 in general savings accounts and \$105,000 in fixed deposits. The General fund has \$94,953 in several general saving accounts and \$25,000 in fixed deposits.

We managed to raise around \$4,000 on Food Fair (VJ Open Day) but this is unlikely to happen again. Retreats held at Vejjasala generated income of \$14,939. The Association's retreat centre has become a source of revenue. We had the opportunity to rent out Vejjasala to Defence Force chaplains for a weekend retreat in October 2023; such external retreats may be another income-raising option.

*Jennifer Kok, Treasurer*

## **Activities**

We are grateful to the following teachers for offering their time and wisdom for our Thursday night online teachings:

Bhante Tejadhammo

Bhante Akaliko (in person)

Bhante Pandit

Thay Thong Phap

Sue Toohey

Kynan Tan

Jonathon Page

David O’Rose

Tina Ng

To Kynan Tan for offering Days of Practice at the Buddhist Library in May, July, September and November.

To Alex Lee, Jim Teoh and friends for cooking at the Asylum Seeker’s Centre once a month, and for preparing 100 meals for the Metta Convention Cultural Dinner in late September.

## **Vejjasala**

Work continued at Vejjasala following the major renovations completed early in 2023:

- The road entry providing access to the shed and top clearing was upgraded to provide all-weather access.
- The floor tiling and waterproofing in the bathroom with disability access was upgraded to prevent pooling of water.
- The trip points outside the kitchen sliding doors were removed to prevent accidents, and a level route gained past the kitchen to the grassed clearing.
- The Fire Safety Certificate was successfully renewed (an annual requirement).
- A retractable awning to part of the back deck has been ordered and should be installed prior to Christmas. This will provide a shaded area in summer. It has been funded by donation.

Upcoming work:

- A small awning over the window and glass door of the Teacher's Room to cut down summer heat.
- Minor work to remove the remaining trip hazard adjacent to the front door.

Working Bees occurred under the watchful eye of Robert Ljubicic and we were grateful for Ken and Michelle and Michelle Ljubicic for also assisting.

It has been very pleasing to see the effort put into maintenance of the property by the volunteers since the completion of the major renovation. Visitors praise the facilities and their condition -well done all, and a big thank you to David Wilson, Robert Ljubicic, and David Denton and Pip Gallagher!

**Retreats and Working Bees** were held throughout the year:

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| January   | -Retreat led by Kynan Tan                                      |
| February  | -Weekend of Practice led by Megan Thorpe                       |
| March     | -Working Bee led by Robert Ljubicic                            |
| April     | -Retreat led by Bhante Akaliko                                 |
|           | -Retreat led by Kynan Tan                                      |
| May       | -Weekend of Practice led by Megan Thorpe                       |
| July      | -Working Bee led by Robert Ljubicic                            |
| September | -Retreat led by Kynan Tan                                      |
| October   | -Retreat led by Megan Thorpe                                   |
|           | -Retreat led by Venerable Bom Hyon Sunim for defence chaplains |
| November  | -Working Bee led by Robert Ljubicic                            |

## **Publications**

### Website/IT

Kynan Tan took over maintenance of the website this year, including some simplification and restructuring of the pages for ease of use and updating it regularly with all the events and activities of the Association.

We were also able to make use of Google for Nonprofits to move all our files and storage to Google Workspace, providing more storage and ease of use. Thanks again to Russell Bastock for his assistance in the transition to the new platform.

Thanks to Meredith Tan for keeping activities updated on Facebook and WhatsApp.

### Newsletter

The email newsletter moved to a new simpler format this year focusing on upcoming events and teachings and being sent on a fortnightly basis. Many thanks to Bronwyn Sweeney for attending to this task.



## **Administration**

### Spiritual Director

Bhante Tejadhammo has been Spiritual Director of the Association since its inception and continues to provide needed guidance for the community. When able to he continues to assist community members with advice, blessings, counselling and direction.

### Management Committee

At the December 2022 AGM, a new committee was elected that comprised Chris Burgess (Immediate Past President), Megan Thorpe (President), Kynan Tan (Vice President), Jennifer Kok (Treasurer), Bronwyn Sweeney (Secretary), Meredith Tan, David Wilson and Robert Ljubicic.

This year Meredith Tan, Kynan Tan Jennifer Kok and Bronwyn Sweeney have signalled their intention to step down from the committee in 2023–24 so we will be seeking new committee members at the AGM.

*Again, heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed to our small sangha over the past twelve months.*

*With metta and every blessing,*

***The AEB 2023 Management Committee***

***25/11/23***