

AGM - 3 November 2024,

Report for 2023-2024, from the Chair.

On behalf of the Board and the entire Beacon Yoga Centre and the IYA community, I would like to thank Swami Vishveshananda Ji for his presence, leading morning meditations for the past two months, wonderful retreats, yoga lessons, talks on three Monday nights unbelievably lucid talks on Drg Drshya Viveka (Discrimination between the Seer and the Seen). Swami Ji, you have been wonderful company and a teacher. Please come every year.

For the Board it has been a mixed year of significant strides forward in the quality and content of our offerings and equally misunderstanding at other levels among Yoga teachers for lack of adequate communication.

The year did not start very well when the incoming Board was immediately confronted with lack of insurance cover for the Ashram, its assets and all programmes. The insurance companies simply refused to insure us. Our insurance agent was telling us that we will be up for huge increases in the premiums, a situation that we learnt was not uncommon throughout Australia in the post Covid world. There was no discussion on this matter at the last AGM. Proposed budget did not identify this as a significant issue.

Most of us, new and incoming Board members including myself were caught unaware. By the time of our first Board meeting in November it seemed to resolve itself with a cost increase of plus 10,000 more than it was budgeted. The entire saga of uncertainty and a walloping impact on our finances affected many of us in different ways and rapidly evolved into some resignations, some quietly drifting away and motivating others to do something for the Ashram.

A few things that evolved are as follows:

The then Chair of the Board resigned, essentially on policy difference on 'staffing vs volunteer' roles and I found myself in that role.

Operations Manager role was abolished in early December. In any event Idil Tasbasli, the then Operations Manager was planning to go on a month's holiday to Istanbul and others would have had to fill up the breach. Two days after the Chair resigned and the Relief Operations Manager left, I left for a month-long holiday, our first in 5 years. Upon my return we met every week and continued to do so well into March. These meetings were informal but with formal presentations from Rene Stapel and major input from Helen Knewstub, mapping future activities. I take this opportunity to record my sincere appreciation to both.

Not everything turned out as we had planned or had hoped but we made some significant successes. Unfortunately, we also ended up annoying a few, who found it difficult to share in the enthusiasm that was pulsating in the Ashram at that time. Some changes we adopted very quickly are as follows:

These were:

- Re-iterate our commitment to safety and introduce regular evacuation drills.

- Return to workaway-residents programme for free board and lodging in return for work commitments for two persons at any one time.
- Return to no time bar for long term residents which in recent years had resulted in some wonderful long term residents leaving the Ashram after the mandatory requirement to leave after 3 months.
- Promote and celebrate volunteer (service) culture and this was done in great style acknowledging volunteers and their contribution in a magnificent ceremony in the Yoga Hall. Thank you, Helen Knewstub and Rene Stapel, for making it happen. This culture is delivering a wonderful ambience in the Ashram, our gardens and grounds are looking better than ever before. Thank you, Kriya Ratna, Mary Peck, Deepak and Ritu, the latter two cook wonderful meals on special events.
- Chinmaya and Denise both contribute at least 100% more hours than they are paid. Meg Meyer for facilitating our Jnana Yoga class every Sunday morning and Brad Cooper, who works untold hours on finances to garden to maintenance, are our unsung heroes. Ian Meyer, Shreya support Meg on the Jnana Yoga front. Patrick does not need any excuse to contribute whenever and however needed.
- Thanks to Rene Stapel, we initiated several activities including a book launch for the second edition of 'Recollections' titled 'Beacon Yoga Book 2024' to celebrate the enormous contribution made by Swami Lakshmi Ananda. Thank you, Meta Doherty, for bringing out once again a magnificent and colourful edition of a series of memoirs we hope will continue.
- We celebrated Navaratri early in the year over nine (9) days with great fanfare, devotion and enthusiasm with rave reviews in writing from many who attended.
- Shivaratri night in the Yoga Hall was a pulsating unforgettable musical experience that more than 75 enjoyed immensely.
- In progress at the time of this report – a caravan style Awareness Café largely donated by Rene Stapel and painted anew by Satya which we hope will bring together people who love the Ashram and the ambience it offers with a venue and reason to chat and share important topics of philosophy and life as well as bring some money to the Ashram. Keep it up mate, Rene you are my favourite for the Person of the Year 2024 award.
- The Board has tried to invigorate our Hatha Yoga activities working together with Yoga teachers. It seems the Goddesses of Yoga are not easily pleased with mere words of apologies for poor communication on our part but with some more pleading I am sure this activity too will rise to realise its potential in 2025. At our last Board meeting we have decided to ask Chinmaya to lead the process of healing and take on the role of communicating with the Board on this matter. In the meantime, our grateful thanks to; Atmaroopa not only for his massive donation but also taking on a regular slot in yoga teaching; to James McIntyre who is stepping into a new class; to Meta Doherty for starting a yoga class for Pre-Schoolers also attended by their mothers. We also have Natalie Snooke, coming back to the fold to teach. Our thanks to Kellie Brett for taking on a 6am class for 2025; to Caroline Hutton and Fran Fuller for stepping in to take two yoga retreats and a short course respectively; to Bindu for starting a 6-week yoga course for beginners. All this bodes well for the Ashram and the Yoga fraternity. A 4pm special class for school teens is on the roll to be offered in 2025.
- Another significant news for the Ashram is that after years of neglect our water bore is working. In progress at the time of this report is brick paving of a sitting area behind the Awareness Café offering a wonderful view of our vegetable and flower garden.

- Monday night Parliaments have been some of the finest that have been offered for many years by many new presenters covering diverse topics of philosophy, Jnana and Bhakti. Alan Camp, Chris Courier, Terry Doyle, Kellie Brett, Justin Bell, Kate Barrett-Lennard, Sophie Amat, Meera Finnigan, Branana, Aniss on UG Krishnamurtgy and Michael Seats on Japanese Buddhism, all new entrants as Monday night Parliament presenters are a few names that readily come to mind. Thank you all.

These above are in addition to the many other offerings we regularly make every year.

The Ashram offers a very large array of activities from havans, meditation, Jnana Yoga discussions, parliaments, satsang evenings, festivals, celebration of birthdays and a large library and beautiful gardens at no cost to those who wish to make progress in spiritual matters and yet when we offered a few paid activities to the offerings this year it generated some negative reaction. I request and plead with you to look at the totality of this place and reflect. I am truly proud of my colleagues on the Board to put our sustainability at the forefront. We had hard time to make a few, indeed a very few unpleasant decisions in this regard, but each one was well considered and fully supported by the Board. Where we were misunderstood, or our communication was poor or not as articulate as we would have liked, we apologised for the same and offer an apology now again today on behalf of the entire Board without any reservations.

We all love this place. That is the only reason we come here together, often sacrificing our family and personal life. There are no Conflicts of Interests here. **This Ashram is a wonderful place of Confluence of Interests.** If we can see it that way, then our journey has been truly worthwhile. Otherwise, Swami Venkatesananda and Swami Sivananda will for ever remain trapped in photos, pictures, memorabilia, bronze or other statues and books. To show them light is to be the light.

Free them and free ourselves from our limited structures in the process to reside in the One Heart.

Hari Om

Shanker Madan

Chair IYA