

Forget About Outreach

By Aliman Sears

Please note that this is a Subud USA working document and does not yet represent a finalized plan of action nor is it board policy.

Subud has been in the USA for 49 years and our membership has not grown significantly in 30 years. This led to the christening of the first official "National Outreach Subcommittee" at the Berkeley National Congress in 2004. Thanks to the work of this committee, and its current incarnation, we're starting to realize that we have a different kind of challenge: Outreach isn't really the main issue—the main issue is "Inreach" or "Membership Development," especially serving the needs of newly opened members. For many years now about 100-150 people per year have been opened, while our national membership has always hovered around 2,000. What's happening? People are being opened then leaving Subud—we have an aging demographic. This now means, rather than focus on giving public talks and attracting people to Subud, we should put more focus on serving the needs of the newly-opened members so that they feel welcome. And, importantly, we do this not to increase numbers of Subud members, but because we're following our latihan and we care about each other. Thus, because "outreach" traditionally meant trying to increase the numbers of members, let's focus on making our current member's experiences better via "Membership Development" and surrender the rest.

Membership Development is centered on "abilities." There are three main abilities that would be good for us to develop: 1) The ability to feel closer to and interact more with each other. 2) The ability to take care of, specifically, new members and make them feel welcome and loved. 3) And rather than give public talks and "outreach" in that sense, we need to individually have the ability to express our spiritual life to everyone we interact with in a natural, easy, and organic way, using simple words and ideas that people understand. When we frame the issues in terms of **abilities**, we then have something to actually **work on** in a pragmatic sense: **developing** those abilities. Thus Membership "Development."

Development of the Abilities: These three abilities could be developed in a two-step process: Step One: New and Different Strategies, and Step Two: Projects.

Step One: New and Different Strategies:

Expressing our Spirituality: Explore through testing how all our local members may live the latihan more fully on a daily basis with friends, family, and at work—be more comfortable talking about our spiritual life. Note that this isn't concerning talk about "Subud" but rather it's about expressing our "spiritual life." Let's forget about trying to explain the latihan. Rather, e.g., test about directly receiving the words at the moment we're speaking to someone about our spiritual life. Or open it up and test about how we talk to people as spiritual beings about anything. In fact, isn't it artificial to focus on the correct way to talk to someone about "spiritual matters?" Receive how we should "talk" the right way. E.g.,

learn to talk about how you “felt” (not “received”) from deep inside, that you had to leave your job, and the burden that it caused you to have to follow that feeling. But you followed that guidance. Then, miraculously, you received a surprise notice in the mail about a sum of money which was owed you. (My recent example!) If you do the latihan twice a week, this is pure Subud—but let’s learn the ability to speak about it in an easy, natural way. Many of us get tongue-tied in an explanation about what it means to “receive” something: there are various modalities of receiving in the latihan, and various levels and sources from which to receive, etc.... Or we just jettison the whole idea of trying to explain it because we think it’s too complex... we just say, “I quit my damn job!” and leave it at that. Comfort and a feeling of ease in expressing ourselves is an ability to develop.

Using Different Talk: Let’s test about our traditional ways of talking about Subud. Do we rely too much on words and phrases like “heart and mind” “purification” “dewan” “lower forces” “nafsu” “don’t think” “don’t mix” etc.) I’ve been in Subud for 21 years (and I’ve read Immanuel Kant!), and when I hear Subud folks talking about “not thinking” it’s downright bizarre. Should explanations of words and phrases come later? Should blanket statements about “not thinking” and “not mixing” come later, after the person really has a feeling about the reality of Subud and the helper or member has a feeling about the person and their actual spiritual life? Talking about Subud in non-traditional ways is an ability to develop.

TAKE ACTION! Take the bull by the horns: Conduct a survey: Contact local members who have left Subud and ask them why they left. What is your group doing wrong, if anything? Develop the courage to talk about it amongst the group and make changes if necessary.

Develop the ability to be flexible: Experiment with simultaneously “shortening” and “extending” (*sic*) the Candidacy Period—“Blend” it into the experience: Forget about calling it a Candidacy Period. Just test for each candidate, on a weekly basis, after they understand the aims of Subud, whether it’s correct that they’re opened next week. Should they really wait three months, or is the reality that they should wait three weeks? Rely on our direct guidance for the specific situation rather than a time period. Then, try continuing a Question/Answer dialogue with new members *after they are opened*. This is the way we may care for our new members.

Change “Outreach” to “Public Relations” or “Public Information.” Traditional Outreach was a concerted effort to talk the general public into joining Subud via a public talk in a library or other venue. The intent was to increase membership numbers. Consider traditional outreach could change into something like “Public Relations” or “Public Information.” Certainly the public needs to know about Subud. But the drive at that level is **not** to open people, but rather only to get information out to the public, and nothing else. We then surrender the rest. Bapak continually discouraged us from making efforts to increase numbers of people in Subud through public campaigns, and for good reason. “Public Information” should be a committee function, like paying the rent or mortgage, and interested people may then talk to the helpers if they wish. This is different from a concerted effort in a public venue designed to get people to join Subud. Also, let’s understand and feel the difference between publicizing Subud and trying to convince people to join Subud. Publicizing Subud is necessary—names and/or contact phone numbers in phone directories and such. But giving public talks or spreading leaflets or using arguments (in the technical sense of the word) is what Bapak called “propaganda.”

Step Two in Development of Our Abilities: PROJECTS!

Remember, Membership Development is centered on three **abilities**: Being closer to each other, Taking care of new members, and Expressing our spiritual life naturally. Projects, when guided by the latihan, may help us develop these abilities.

One caveat! We must **not** do projects for the express purpose of increasing the membership of Subud! We must do projects because it springs from the latihan and we care about our fellow human beings! As Bapak continually told us: we act from the latihan, and surrender the outcomes.

Projects:

- ▪ Organize and conduct “Family Activities” in local groups, which focus on children. Ask the teenage youth to help.
- ▪ Organize and conduct local weekly or monthly potluck dinners—maybe even have a theme designed to bring people closer together. We had good success with a theme of one or two people giving their Life Story each month. This brought us closer together.
- ▪ Test about organizing and conducting a local charitable project. The latihan should spontaneously move us to help others in our community. This brings the group closer, involves new and long time members in group life, and is a way for the public to discover Subud through us “Living Subud.” Many *Lions Clubs* conduct 15 or 20 local charitable projects per year, and have only 20 or 30 local members.
- ▪ If you can’t conduct your own project, then let another group (such as a *Lions Club* or other charitable group) organize and conduct the charitable activity, and the local Subud group volunteers, as a group, to participate. Of course, it’s critical that the group volunteers as “the Subud group” rather than simply as individuals.
- ▪ Organize and conduct “Subud Suppers.” These are a series of five or 10 weekly potluck dinners to help new members (or long-time members) feel more involved. They are organized around different themes each week, such as:
 - ○ Who was Bapak?”
 - ○ “Do some Subud members pray--How does it fit in with the latihan?”
 - ○ “Is there a benefit from reading Bapak's talks?”
 - ○ “What is *Susila Dharma International* and how does it work?”
 - ○ “What is the purpose of giving donations to Subud & how are they used?”
 - ○ What is the WSC and how does it function?” Etc....

And the item that adds real Vitality—real Vigor and real Punch—consider opening all or some of these projects up to the general public rather than only to Subud members. To do so may exponentially increase our abilities!

Part of the Mission Statement for Subud USA is “Living Subud Together.” It’s clear that we have a different kind of challenge: to Live Subud Together—to maintain group harmony and make Subud the kind of association that is attractive and helpful to all members—new members and long-time members. If we don’t do this, we’re falling short of what Bapak continually told us: look after each other, and the rest will take care of itself. Let’s

forget about traditional “outreach” and focus on developing the abilities of our members.