

Answers On A Postcard

By Edward Baker

Question: If Subud is so good why do people ever leave it?

And if, as some of us believe, the latihan is direct, unrestricted contact with the source of existence, if it is personal, unconditional evidence of what human beings have longed for through the centuries, then the question gets even bigger. Hundreds of thousands of people have come to Subud over the years but so very few have stayed. We need to know why.

Any organisation, whether business or spiritual, ultimately depends upon the acquisition and retention of customers or members. The acquisition of new members is seen as problematic in Subud—just how much can we influence new people to join? Retention of members, however, is much more in our own hands. The hole in the bucket needs to be fixed, but before we can do that we need to understand what made it.

Of course anyone you ask about why people leave will offer anecdotal information: Miranda's swimming classes that "clash with latihan"; Hadrian will come "when his wall is finished"; Darth's "gone over to the Dark Side"; whatever. The trouble is that replies like this—even sensible ones—are useless because they are known only to a few in the immediate groups and never shared in such a way that any pattern of causes can be discerned. And the given reasons might not be the real reasons. Because people are, in the main, polite, they might not speak frankly about their reasons for leaving, for fear of causing hurt or giving offence. But if, on the other hand, we could say that 38% of leavers go because they didn't receive, 40% felt their latihan wasn't going anywhere, 18% were upset by their helpers, 16% felt no sense of brotherhood, then we can define our problems. And go to work to solve them.

To start this process we have to begin the boring but necessary collection of raw data. This could be accomplished by a number of means. If a member indicates that he or she wishes to be no longer considered a member, then helpers/secretaries should inform a central point, perhaps using a simple tick box system identifying the main reasons cited for leaving with space for further comment. (There is no need for reams of paperwork and a box system would speed things up.) Additionally, when members are registered as leavers, they should receive a similar card with the assurance that any replies are anonymous. We are asking them, as a favour to *us*, to identify what went wrong, rather than re-recruiting! However, an offer could be made of an off-the-record chat with a helper, independent of the group, to discuss whatever prompted their departure. This should be considered as a simple quality check which would also identify any problems possibly "massaged" by the initial helper report. (Say for instance, a disagreement with another member or helper.) Again, minimal paperwork. Within a relatively short timescale we would be finding out the reasons why people leave something they should stay with forever. And, perhaps, this would give us a route map to get from where we are to where we should be.