

Assessments of the Subud Vision Project

(in alphabetical order)

Five years ago it seemed to some of us that Subud was not doing as well as we hoped. We had a sense that something had gone wrong, and if we could figure out what it was, then we could do better. We could get Subud back on track.

It appeared that there was an urgent need to review the organization, the history, and the culture of Subud. For this to take place, there needed to be a site where members and former members could openly discuss Subud's problems and offer solutions leading to improvements, which could possibly lead to attracting new members and keeping the ones we have. Subud Vision was created to serve that purpose.

Now, with over 150 articles, Subud Vision is publishing its final group of articles for awhile. After five years it's time to take a breather and think about what we've accomplished and where to go next, so we've asked our readers, authors, and editors to give their assessments of the Subud Vision project. Here they are.

Marcus Bolt:
(editor)

There have, so far, been 4 major stages on my spiritual journey through life. The first was a serious mental breakdown after a period of using hallucinogenic drugs (I now consider this as a wake up call). The second was finding Subud and the latihan and being opened 44 years ago (its continued practice has, for me, become like breathing - something I only notice when I stop and essential to life). The third was discovering, through diligently practising the latihan, the healing power of psychotherapy (this is where I learned that the genius of latihan is to open doors, but it is then up to me whether I go through or not). The fourth was stumbling across Subud Vision after a traumatic, life-disrupting experience involving my home and livelihood and the Subud Britain organisation.

For the first time ever I had found, within the Subud structure, a place where I could communicate and explain, through a written article, what had happened to me and how sickened I felt about it, with no judgment from my peers. All I had to do was to stick to a set of formal guidelines - such as no ad hominem attacks; sources and citations to be quoted; articles to be logical and grammatically correct and so on.

Added to this welcomed relief was the fact that over 50 other Subud member writers had discovered the same freedoms and written about their concerns over the way the Subud Organisation conducts its affairs and treats its members (expecting all upset, all bad behaviour, all questioning and dissent to be 'surrendered to the Will of Almighty God' - including even discussion over falling membership); about the religiosity creeping into our public language; about our

formulaic rituals; about our tribal and cult-like behaviour; about our mythologising and lionising our 'spiritual guides' and their talks; about the usage and abuse of testing and, above all, about the way constructive suggestions for change and improvement to the organisation are dismissed as 'from the mind' and as threats to the continuance of 'Bapak's legacy', which must be protected at all costs, regardless, and so on. Today, it is still rare for any of these things to be openly discussed at Subud meetings.

What is fascinating to me is that of over 150 articles, not one was critical of the latihan itself.

In summary, I can say that Subud Vision is not only one of the best things that has happened to me, but also to Subud itself. Only time will show the veracity of that statement.

Sahlan Diver:
(editor)

Two decades ago, when I was still a true and enthusiastic Subudian and my only gripes were the pomposity of some helpers and my disappointment with the general chronic lack of interest in Subud enterprise, I would occasionally have a curious experience. Talking to a Subud person, I'd suddenly feel as if I were talking to somebody dead. Not submitted, not calm, not spiritual, not detached, just dead. Many years later, after forming the break-away country, Subud Eire, and then being involved in the Subud Vision project, I came to understand the cause of this strange phenomenon. Despite their claim that Subud has no beliefs, Subud members are very much infused with confining, rigid ideas about the spiritual universe, the state of the world, and Subud's place within the scheme of things, as a result of decades of exposure to Bapak's talks, testing and writings, none of which they dare to counter or question. Just as in a cult brainwashing situation, bringing up new ideas outside of this comfort zone, as I was doing at the time, creates a situation that the recipient has not been programmed to handle. Thought shuts down and the predictable behavioural response is a cutting off, often with a reaction that the questioner must be suffering from a serious flaw in their character and therefore not worthy of further attention.

When David Week and I founded the Subud Vision project, the initial team of editors made a strategic decision to create anticipation by holding back on publication till we had collected 50 articles. We expected opposition, but it was interesting to see, even then, how many people were already pre-judging the project without waiting to see what the articles had to say. We hoped to move beyond the initial opposition to a project that would thoughtfully discuss Subud, leading to useful changes and improvements over time. However, once article publication commenced and we were getting a lot of feedback and discussion on the web site, I remember a reader warning that there was a danger Subud Vision could become a "hole in a corner" affair, meaning a specialised site, of interest only to a minority, and not seen as relevant by the mainstream. I believe what has actually developed is a two-corner affair: in one corner the Subud hierarchy, determined to obstruct change at any cost, and in the other corner, Subud Vision, determined to go on reminding of the need for change.

In between we have the passive majority, not particularly wanting to engage with either side.

Stefan Freedman wrote an article in which he compared Subud to a battle between traditionalist 'dogs' defending the status quo, and radical 'cats' out to challenge. I liked Stefan's article, but I had two objections to it. Firstly I felt it needed the addition of 'mice' to represent the majority, who were not interested in taking one side or the other, but secondly, and much more strongly, I objected to the possible interpretation that the 'dogs' were defending the pure source against the 'cats', who just wanted to substitute new ideas of their own. In fact, if I had to say what Subud Vision has done for me personally, it is that I no longer trust anything that is claimed in religion. I am not talking about belief in God or the idea that Jesus, Mohammed and others were spiritually very high, I don't have a problem with that. I am talking about all the myths, laws, customs, rituals, pontifications, explanations, personal morality edicts, and so on weaved into religion. Why? Because through studying the problems of Subud, I have come to see it as a microcosm of a religion in the making, not a battle between right and wrong, between pure and impure, between truth and falsehood, but a battle of wills between factions wanting to variously select ideas of their founder, reject or ignore others of his ideas, add ideas of their own, and even downright distort some of the founder's ideas so they almost become their opposite. The tragedy for religion is that over time ideas that may have originated from ignorant, narrow-minded, uncompassionate, manipulative, power-grabbing people are attributed verbatim to the founding prophet, or even to Almighty God, so they acquire a sacredness that people are prepared to dedicate their lives to, maybe even to kill for.

Back to Subud Vision. Has it achieved anything? Our authors haven't written in vain. Our article hit counter stopped fully working but we know that at least 30,000 article readings have been made. That equates over the lifetime of the project to approximately 500 regular readers, about the same number as Subud Voice. By any standards 500 is a significant proportion of the English-speaking active membership of Subud. Many people have emailed us since the project began to thank us for helping them realise they were not alone in their doubts about the way Subud has been developing. So will Subud Vision change Subud? Ironically, the presence of a strong, articulate opposition may have driven Subud even more firmly into intransigence. That's why in this final (for the time being) issue of articles, you see the beginnings of serious attempts to define what an alternative organisation for the latihan should and should not be like. At least a new organisation will benefit from the project, even if Subud doesn't want to.

Stefan Freedman:
(editor)

I joined Subud after searching for 'something'. Hungry for inner guidance. Hoping to feel less weighed down, and to bring out the best in myself. Two things were of enormous value: the latihan and my Subud peers, many of whom became good friends. I eagerly took on various roles, ran children's camps, organised dances and entertainments, chaired two groups (Hampstead and Islington) and became an active helper in London.

After a few years I started to feel uneasy about some aspects of the Subud community. I tried to surrender these concerns, but they kept coming up. I didn't want to be ungrateful. I couldn't, as it were, spoil the party by mentioning them. But eventually, feeling growing dissonance, I found myself backing off from Subud social life and just continued attending group latihans.

The Subud Vision project was the first time, after 35 years in Subud, that I found people I felt I could talk with in depth and detail without being patronised ('just keep surrendering and pray for help') and start to make sense of my questions and discomforts.

Reading Subud Vision articles wasn't easy. Some of them challenged my 'faith' and made me aware of my own limiting assumptions. The discussions and articles have given me a spectrum of different perspectives and have helped me to give clear edges to the things I was battling alone to make sense of. I need Subud peers I can talk with frankly and freely, and having found them has enabled me to re-engage with Subud's community life and become active again in contributing to musical events and congresses.

I hoped the Subud Vision project would help foster a culture of open and frank discussion, with no holy cows. It seems to me that it has done so for a minority of members, while others have just seen it as a thorn in the side. This is understandable as it's not a feelgood project. In my view it's about thinking outside the box. An uncomfortable remedy for complacency. But sweeping away cobwebs ultimately feels liberating. It has been invaluable to me.

Bronte Grivell:
(Subud Vision author)

One big thing I found in Subud Vision made me feel that many people rejected the Subud that I knew, and, indeed, most people have an individual approach even more so than was expected from Bapak's "Subud is You" statement.

I particularly revolt against the people who revolt against Subud!

The article that most recently stirred me is an old one which says that Subud is a dis-association. From what? From Reality, of course. Well, I take a LOT of issue with that.

If any person has involved themselves either with the practice of, or merely the study of, any religious practices in this world, one thing usually stands out. That is, the disassociation needed in order to be a follower of that religion. Not disassociation merely from other religious practices, but from the world. As a result of that dis-connection, some religions offer the advice that a person will be more in connection with Reality, as they describe it.

Subud, offering a quietness in feelings and thought, does fit into this category. It does not have all the dogma and ritual. Neither does it have the counselors nor healers, of either conventional or alternative types, that may be found within some religious organisations. But to suggest that Subud is so invalid that a person should not join it, and this is implied by the author in the fact that they left it, is going too far. Such a response to an absence of

healing is neither fair to Subud, nor to all religions, even if Subud is not, technically, a religion.

Since when did Subud promise healing of psychological wounds? It does seem to offer some comfort in dealing with them. I am sure many people coming to Subud bring with them much grief and distress. I did, though I did not realise how much. And, if there is one thing I am grateful for, it is the chance to be a little calmer and a little more disconnected from some of my worldly confusion when I have the chance to do latihan, on my own always now. The other problems can be dealt with by the specialists in those areas, that is, when I can't cope with the problems, which I say I can. In any case, I am more afraid of the interference from those people than of the latihan. So I have not sought any help from the western psychologists, or any other. If that leaves me a twisted and scarred person, then all I can say is no one can get rid of the scars. They may, sometimes, get healing, with the help of people who care. Or they may find that Subud is a help to reduce a little of the distress they find in life.

If Subud Vision serves any need, then it is to enable some of us to look at the world we "joined" with a little less rosy view and make a connection with the world we may have tried to escape from, hopefully in a way that improves life. I would prefer to address each separate point of the original article in much greater depth, but time does not permit. I have just heard too many people blame Subud for their own shortcomings.

Andrew Hall:
(editor)

The intriguing, sometimes infuriating and at turns sad and funny tale of Subud has certainly been told on the Subud Vision website. There are a variety of voices from the different authors, and the result is an amazing range of articles. People have told their stories, given their analyses, participated in wide-ranging discussions, and sometimes ranted about different insanities and injustices that have bedeviled Subud. I learned enormously from it all, and especially want to mention the splendidly researched and well-argued articles written by David Week. They really turned my head around.

The overall impression, to me, is that Subud is in dire straits. Before we head for the life boats, I want to talk about Subud Vision from two perspectives, my own personal perspective and then the wider organizational perspective.

On the personal level, writing articles and participating in some very intense discussions has helped me understand why I see some things in Subud as valuable, and why other attitudes and habits personally irk the hell out of me. I think it is because they call up memories of growing up in a fundamentalist church in the 1960s when the world outside was changing and the church community still insisted on looking inward upon itself, always looking towards the past.

Another example of my fundamentalist past coming back to me in Subud is magical thinking. We all know this manifests in Subud but I now wonder if this actually might have initially attracted me to Subud. I think on a child level I was still wishing that the magical thinking of

the Bible was true. I well understand magical thinking since it is so familiar but now when I encounter it in Subud, I am hypersensitive to it and it sure turns me off.

On the organizational side, I think the jury is still out about whether Subud Vision will make a difference. I fondly see Subud Vision as a place where I try to make sense of what is special about Subud, figure out what works and what is not working, and talk about how to do things differently. Those discussions will still go on somewhere.

However, as in life generally, there is no rewind. People are now beginning to look ahead seriously to life after Subud really fades from the scene. Put bluntly, I think the question of the moment is whether the latihan can survive the demise of Subud and continue to exist in some other organizational context, or not.

Subud Vision is publishing in its final group of articles, several pieces that talk about the issues around how a continuation of the latihan outside of Subud might happen. It is an important discussion and worth having.

Michael Irwin:
(editor)

The weekend of October 27-8th, 2012, I attended the Western Canada Regional Meeting. It was termed a 'retreat' and there was no formal meeting. I went with some trepidation. The trip was going to be costly for me for gas, potential car breakdown, ferry tickets and retreat fees. As it turned out, there were no untoward costs, and the trip came in on budget. But it left me more tired than I have been for years.

Part of my anxiety going was that I had no idea whether it was going to be a complete waste of time from the point of view of bringing in ideas from Subud Vision to a gathering. I expected that I would spend a miserable weekend. In fact, I left feeling very bucked up by the experience with consequent confusion about ideas that I had previously come to, that there was no point in betting on Subud and the only path was to form a new organization.

The people there included the WSA Chair, an international helper, two or three regional helpers and a zone rep. We met in an initial circle where I presented for consideration a subset informational meeting to be about Subud Vision. At that circle of about 22 people, I asked 4 questions: How many had heard of Subud Vision before I had just mentioned it, how many of those had visited the site, how many of those had read an article and how many had read more than one article. About 17 answered yes to all four questions. I admit I was shocked.

Over the next two days the organizers of the weekend managed to get two, one-hour sessions in the long list of activities wanted by the attendees. I gave no introduction but merely asked that people question me about Subud Vision. The result was a lively discussion with no

animosity at all. Through questioning I clarified the role of the editors and the role of the site. This led to discussions among the attendees about some of the ideas in the articles. Frankly, I cannot remember many details about what was said. The spin-off effect was that I had a series of pleasant one-on-one meetings with about 5 people through the rest of the weekend. These conversations were very intensive and probed deeply into some of the ideas in Subud Vision articles and my own personal views. Again I have no way of reporting the details of that content.

One addition to the above meetings, among others, was a presentation given by the WSA Chair about WSA activities. We had pleasantly sparred all weekend and ended on a pleasant note. However, during one part of his exuberant presentation, with slides showing all the standard rah-rah about activities and enterprises, I could help myself no longer and interjected that the pep rally atmosphere and the glowing picture of the enterprise plus activities was wrong-footed and that meeting should know that that was how I perceived the presentation. Later at the second meeting about Subud Vision, I was asked what I meant by my interjection, so I had a chance to point out that the fall in membership was the problem and that expanded enterprises and business practices was beside the point and not the solution. There had been not one mention of what to do about attracting and keeping new members at any time up to that point. We had as extensive a discussion on that problem as could be held in the 15 minutes that allowed for it. The weekend had many little examples of the unconscious preachy testing that Merin Nielsen writes about (*Eds - see the December 2012 issue of Subud Vision*) and in private, one-on-one talks I was able to broach this subject, among other topics, in surprisingly quiet discussions.

I have no idea how long lasting any of the content of sessions and discussions will be when the attendees return to their groups but I can say that without the existence of Subud Vision, none of these meetups would have been possible. I was heartened by being approached by very new members and, surprisingly, long term members who held significant jobs, in particular by helpers with inquiring and flexible views and open to change. I also observed there helpers opening up to change in their moments of speaking up publicly in the closing circle and at various other times.

I can't help but think that Subud Vision is actually freeing up and making possible attitudes that had previously been suppressed.

John Elwyn Kimber:
(Subud Vision author)

The important arguments have all been ably and eloquently made from a rich multiplicity of individual perspectives. There seems as yet to be little constructive dialogue with Subud conservatives, and so far no definitive summary or synopsis of everybody's concerns which could form the basis of an agenda or manifesto for reform.

Perhaps this is the next step: to be able to sum up and present Subud Vision's concerns on a single sheet of paper?

Ragnar Lystad:
(Subud Vision author)

For me personally, the project has given me the possibility to express my views in a more gentle way than openly in the group, where they could be felt as offensive by some. Somehow this feels more honest than keeping my mouth shut. At the same time, trying to write something down is valuable in itself - opinions and ideas become more clear and consistent.

That was the easy part, but what the project has achieved and what not I cannot say much about. Maybe some more openness and acceptance for unorthodox opinions? Apart from that I regard it as a part of an ongoing re-orientation of Subud; the outcome of that is uncertain. I think that the important thing is to do what is felt as right and honest, whether we can specify concrete results or not is not so essential. In business we can measure results in dollars or Euros, in this field it is not easy.

Rose Moloney:
(Subud Vision author)

Subud Vision is a valuable resource. I am really gutted if this is curtains. Many questions were answered for me in these articles, what I wanted was facts - research on Indonesian traditions, Bapak's early influences and his context. Dirk Campbell's article Subud and Sufism (2009) gave me the information I wanted on a possible Sufi source for the latihan. Having been opened myself by accident when visiting Subud premises I am now convinced Bapak was absorbent as Dirk posits, Bapak was affected by a Sufi transmission and called it latihan. That Bapak overestimated its scope has affected us all with unfortunate results. The latihan has not cured all nor given us the same as Abrahamic prophets as was promised.

David Weeks' articles on his early life in Indonesia as a Subud child were especially helpful. The 'ball of light' which marked the start of Bapak's mission, that this was an almost normal occurrence in Indonesia even upon political leaders is important for us to know. The story of Anwar and Anwas, the dismissal of Buddhism as inferior, the negative attitude to yoga (which I renounced on joining) are all explained by David and have set me free. These are Indonesian cultural and historical prejudices. They have blighted lives. The truth really has set me free. Recently I met by chance an Indonesian Subud member who relayed to me the disaster at Cilandak, everything sold. Coming from her, with the same cultural background as Bapak, I accepted her view that the inheritors are materialistic. The centre has not held. Kalimantan was for her a dispiriting experience of money-grabbing and elitism. Is this also a reflection on the wisdom of Bapak's choices?

I want to add something on the perils of Islam. Bapak's example and the Koran caused me to override my inner knowing to go vegetarian, and that irks me still. We in the West must be

confident of our own evolution which far outstrips Bapak's Indonesian view - we are advancing as ecologically aware, we are eating a lighter diet with mainly fruit and veg, we are saving Nature and preserving animal species, we are composting and recycling, we are working on ourselves. None of these things appear to matter to Islamists in or out of Subud. Having congratulated myself on escaping the clutches of false gurus on a huge scale like Osho Rajneesh, I now look back and see that I also was misled. Subud Vision has helped me assess this. Thanks to the editorial team - I only hope the decision to end it will be reversed. *(Eds: We hope that Subud Vision will only be taking a temporary break)*

Merin Nielsen:
(editor)

What's been accomplished by Subud Vision? At the personal level, I've been extremely heartened to discover that lots of other people regard the latihan in much the same way as I do - a great thing, potentially beneficial to vast numbers - but paradoxically held back from the world at large, thanks to the Subud community's publicly obvious and unnecessary religiosity, which implicitly gets official endorsement. Subud Vision has wonderfully provided a prominent venue for the expression of concerns that would otherwise never have reached the light of day.

It all goes to highlight interesting divergences of human nature. On one hand, many of us would like Subud's conspicuous devotional piety to be cast aside, at least in official terms. But others feel the latihan should be deeply linked with the spiritual perspective offered by Pak Subuh. The first group want to not hypocritically deter other people from the latihan, while the second group treat the founder's "explanations" as crucial background theory. The members of these groups have amazingly distinct outlooks and long-term emotional investments. The first sees the second as cultish and irresponsibly inward-looking. The second sees the first as wilful and spiritually imperceptive.

Meanwhile (as Sahlan Diver notes in a recent Subud Vision editorial), a third group could well be the biggest - those who just want to do the latihan. They lack the energy and interest either to support Subud as a religion-free zone or to explicitly support the Bapakism. They might be a little embarrassed by various elements of religiosity in Subud, but since the status quo is what they rely on, affording their weekly latihan and possibly some degree of warm and fuzzy social life, they are typically disinclined to rock the boat.

While Subud Vision has been a tremendous source of hope and encouragement to those in the first group, the absence of official response to the sorts of views expressed through Subud Vision (and elsewhere), over the past five years, has led me to a subdued conclusion. I've come to suspect that Subud cannot get out of its hypocritical decline into oblivion. If nothing much has improved within a couple more years, I'll put energy toward helping to start an alternative latihan caretaker organisation. The feasibility of this 'last resort' solution has gradually become evident through many people's heartfelt contributions to Subud Vision.

Helissa Penwell:
(editor)

I had long thought that Subud would grow from word-of-mouth, as I had learned about it back in the '60s. As the years went by after Bapak's death, I became increasingly concerned about Subud's declining numbers. In frustration, I asked my grown daughters why they thought their generation wasn't coming to be opened. Specifically, I asked, "How would Subud have to change before you invited your friends to join?" They replied with honesty, citing such obstacles as the long applicant period, the Indonesian influences, and the inward-looking Subud culture that sometimes seems reclusive and wrapped in secrecy. In fact, most of what they named were the same issues and problems named by many of the Subud Vision authors.

Not long after this I was invited to join Subud Vision's editorial team. I accepted because it seemed like an excellent opportunity to further explore these same issues I had discussed with my kids. I almost immediately began to receive a vision. I saw a large stage, and Bapak was in the center standing in a bright spotlight. Then I saw the scene change, and Bapak was moved to the back of the stage out of the spotlight. Over the next few years these images often came to me, while I developed a greater understanding of their meaning. I realized that we had created a myth around Bapak through repeating positive stories and discouraging or censoring negative ones. We'd invited Bapak to give talks and promoted them in our media. Gradually the talks became teachings and the teachings became "rules". A whole Subud belief system was created, and more and more it felt like you weren't really "Subud" unless you accepted it. In focusing so much on Bapak, we were slowly becoming a quasi-religion. Clearly we were going down a wrong path and needed to reverse direction. People today don't need another religion, but many might benefit from the latihan. Weren't we told that from the beginning? Wasn't that part of the original appeal?

Has Subud Vision been able to reverse Subud's direction, so that it returns to its original promise of "no gurus, no teachings, no beliefs"? Not really. In fact what seems to be happening is that Subud is becoming more polarized with conservatives digging in deeper, refusing to change anything of substance, while others become more vocal calling for meaningful change. Testing seems to support whichever side you are already on. However, there is one thing that is very different--members are speaking up against the status quo in greater numbers and with more well-thought-out arguments. Before this, if you disagreed, you tended to keep quiet or leave. Now there is a small, but growing community of members who feel more certain of what must be done and who know there are others who feel the same, so we feel more emboldened to voice our opinions. And, like it or not, the rest of Subud is beginning to find it hard to ignore us.

Recently the vision I first received four years ago changed, reflecting my own changing point of view and, perhaps, a possible future for our organization. The stage is now flooded with an intense, powerful white light, while latihaners sing and dance within it. I look again and notice that Bapak is sitting in the front row of the audience. He is joyously laughing and applauding, delighted in what he is witnessing. I feel myself sending him love and appreciation as I climb the stairs and join in the celebration knowing that I and my fellow latihaners have finally gotten it right--the latihan and our experience of it have finally taken center stage. As we continue, our latihaners intensify and the walls of the building around us begin to dissolve, opening up to the wider world.

Margaret Pevec:
(Subud Vision author)

I have only written one article for Subud Vision [Reflections on Rejoining Subud], and several times I have browsed the articles looking for inspiration from other members who are feeling how the cult aspects of our organization confine us and make the latihan less attractive to a wider audience. Now that I've been doing the latihan again for nearly three years and our group is growing, I am looking for ways to institute change. For example, I have re-assumed my helper role, but am finding it difficult to conduct an opening because I don't feel an alignment with the opening statement Bapak wrote. It's a dilemma. I was hoping someone had already tackled rewriting the statement to be inclusive of people who don't perceive the latihan as the "worship of Almighty God," but some more general terms that would be inclusive of people who are atheists or are more in-tune with "Source energy" or "the Spirit of Life."

My point is that Subud Vision has been a way to connect Subud members who feel the culture of Subud needs to change for us to grow as a spiritual organization. I think Subud Vision has been an important tool to help us feel encouraged, connected, and inspired about how Subud without the cult aspects might look. That's what it's done for me. I certainly hope that all the articles that were written will still be available, since I haven't read them all.

Have you published a statement about why you are discontinuing Subud Vision? That would be helpful as well.

Rosalind Priestley:
(editor)

The invitation to join the Subud Vision team came for me out of the blue, but it soon felt like something I'd been preparing for all my Subud life. I had been involved with Subud journalism several times before, and while enjoying the work, I'd had major reservations about at least some of the content I had to work with. Subud Vision offered me a way to do work I liked but now with ground-breaking content that I found exciting and stimulating.

It also automatically provided like-minded people for me to converse with and bounce ideas off. Sceptics like me are not thick on the Subud ground, and for the first time I found myself in a group of people that I felt entirely comfortable with, where I could speak my mind unreservedly, where I could be my complete self, not just a self-censored, watered-down version of myself. Very liberating.

However, I was not expecting miracles and I haven't seen any. I think the forces against change in Subud are too strong. Personally, I think Subud and even the

latihan are not very relevant in the world we now inhabit, with the huge challenges that face us, climate change in my opinion being by far the most urgent. Subud people in the main are intelligent, caring and conscientious human beings. After decades in Subud I think it's time for them to break away from their navel-gazing, to stop trying to perfect their submission and to put their emphasis instead on making the world a better place (or even on just not letting it become a much worse place) for their children and grandchildren.

For me, the failure of Subud to spread is not an issue. Rather, I feel that concern about the success of our movement is a signal to the world that we are still mostly a cult, taking on the burden of our Founder's mission. I believe the latihan should stand or fall on its own merits, not on members' attempts to sell it to the world, by whatever means, however subtle.

I hope Subud visitors to our website have found, and will continue to find, the support they need to set their own thinking free. And I hope they will not be afraid to speak out and share their insights and observations within their Subud circles. In my experience an honest opinion shared tends to generate respect and trust and bring about a new atmosphere of openness.

Michael Rogge:

(Subud Vision author)

- *Q: What do you like and what do you dislike about Subud Vision?*
I like it as an unique forum that did not exist before in that form in which surprised opinions of members can be vented.
- *Q: One of the aims of Subud Vision is to stimulate in-depth discussion. Do you see any evidence of this in Subud's collective culture?*
No. In 'official' Subud literature the 'party line' is being followed. A mockery is made of the statement that Subud has no doctrine. It has. It advocates the belief in a God (not in the Divine) and propagates belief in a Javanese/Islamic mystical belief system with outdated concepts.
- *Q: Has your opinion or understanding of the latihan changed as a result of reading something on Subud Vision?*
It has widened my approach to an extent to the latihan as a spiritual method to open oneself to the Divine and to healing forces laying dormant in ourselves.
- *Q: Has your opinion or understanding of Bapak changed as a result of reading Subud Vision, and if so, how?*
Well, after being a member for 57 years I knew enough of Bapak's mission.
- *Q: Were there any Subud Vision articles that you found especially valuable, and why were they valuable to you?*
Sorry, I forgot. I found those of David Week valuable, but there were others too.

- *Q: Did you ever discuss Subud Vision articles with other Subud members at group or national meetings? What sort of reactions did you get?*
I find little interest in the background of Subud. Most members enjoy the latihan and do not wish to know more. The typical psychology of the believer, be it Christian, Muslim or otherwise. People prefer articles about how wonderful their experiences are and how they changed their lives.
- *Q: Did any articles surprise you?*
I forgot -- on the whole it did surprise me that Subud Vision came in existence without censorship of articles (as far as I know!) and so became the mouthpiece of members whose opinions were hardly ever heard.
- *Q: Did you change your mind about any issue after reading an article?*
Maybe.
- *Q: What did you hope Subud Vision would accomplish? Did it, and to what extent?*
As for me Subud Vision should be a continuing enterprise. It will be hard to ascertain its influence, but it is valuable for the continuation of the Subud movement. After 60 years its membership is still on the same level. Most of the members have left and few people wonder why? I see Subud's salvation in a modern approach to spiritual matters, specifically 'explanations', based on the latest state of knowledge about the universe, evolution of life and the human being, bearing in mind that science does not encompass spirituality but concentrates on factual information.
- *Q: What is left undone?*
May be spreading information on its existence amongst members who hardly know about it.

Steven Somsen:

I haven't been following SV very intensively the last years so what I say may not completely reflect the now. I read more about 2007/2008. That is my disclaimer.

Here goes:

- *Q: What do you like and what do you dislike about Subud Vision?*

I like the free thinking and the honesty of it. The longing and care for a more real Subud. That is great!

For me though it is too much about Opinions about Subud in General (OSG). Mental mostly, too seldom do I hear or feel the heart. Like the Subud Forum. Does it go anywhere? No. It is about the OTHER generally, be it Rahayu, THE helpers, THE Subud culture. Too much past also. I do not read very much new. I would say, have a look:

mirrors don't lie.

So for me there is something lacking. It is not about self/Self and not about relations and culture of the local group of which I am part!! In my feeling this is where the rubber hits the road and the going gets tough, for all of us.

- *Q: One of the aims of Subud Vision is to stimulate in-depth discussion. Do you see any evidence of this in Subud's collective culture?*

What happened in my local group was fragmentation. Some keep to the old, others freely experiment, but open discussion (which is an art and needs the heart and the mind) not so much. Something was gained in this process - a feeling of wanting to be more real and less sheepish - and something lost - the feeling of brother- and sisterhood. There is an endeavour to bring it together again which needs willingness to truly meet, to discuss yes and test.

- *Q: Has your opinion or understanding of the latihan changed as a result of reading something on Subud Vision?*

No.

- *Q: Has your opinion or understanding of Bapak changed as a result of reading Subud Vision, and if so, how?*

No

- *Q: Were there any Subud Vision articles that you found especially valuable, and why were they valuable to you?*

Yes, but maybe it was the other older forum where suggestions were made on Bapak's sex life. It made me aware that we are all somehow screwed up on our perception of sex and I didn't give damn about Bapak's alleged exploits because we are all projecting anyway.

- *Q: Did you ever discuss Subud Vision articles with other Subud members at group or national meetings? What sort of reactions did you get?*

I several times mentioned it and I think I even quoted articles. Not many reactions. Some (many?) people are still fast asleep, others go their own way anyway.

- *Q: Did any articles surprise you?*

No.

- *Q: Did you change your mind about any issue after reading an article?*

Not that I remember. I started reading it after I returned to Subud after 10 years and SV was about the only fresh voice I saw. It was more like recognition which was good for me.

- *Q: What did you hope Subud Vision would accomplish? Did it, and to what extent?*

I hoped it would have been more on looking for a new Subud, alive, real and sort of stimulate/share that with examples of people being more naked and honest about themselves, more autonomous.

- *Q: What is left undone?*

Go for the positive, the local, where you see the new Subud emerge. Put yourself on the line - if not you who else would do it - and, YES, keep your fresh mind (as a servant of the heart).

As a mirror, SV feels like an old mirror for me. Time to move on.

David Week:
(former editor)

In retrospect, my involvement in Subud Vision has been one step in a long process of disentangling myself from Subud. The first step in that process came when I was living in Cilandak in the late 1960s. Aged 15, I'd hang out with other Subud teenagers on the guest house roof, smoking cigarettes and exchanging jokes. We'd also talk about some of the adults, especially those scurrying back and forth from The Big House, immersed in what seemed to be very important missions. I would also spend time with some of the less pious residents, of whom two of my favourites were Hanafi Troncelliti and Mansur Medeiros, both now off the planet. Hanafi and Mansur were full of pointed and funny observations of the reality of life in The Compound. Growing up this way, I seemed to avoid being entranced by any Subud mystique. I even suggested to my friends that we start a magazine to be called the Tilendjak Haboob, to tell tales of real life in The Compound. This might have been the conceptual precursor to Subud Vision.

The second step came when I moved to Berkeley, to go to university. Once I shook off of my initial culture shock, I found I was in another place that saw itself as the centre of the known universe. I also discovered that Berkeley was full of people who were thoughtfully and with care envisioning and acting to make a better world: so Subud was not unique in that way. Only in Berkeley, they seemed to be doing it better. Subud, at the same time, had moved into its enterprise phase, with its obsession with banks, office buildings, and hotels: hardly a bold vision for a new world. The Mas Totok affair also blew through at about this time, casting a particularly ugly light on Subud politics. And there was one particular moment when I was at Berkeley, in the Shambhala bookshop on Telegraph, when I looked up and saw Clifford

Geertz's *The Religion of Java*. Of course, I bought it immediately. What I found within was this: many of Subud's most treasured spiritual stories and insights were in fact recycled stock from the Javanese religion. Not new or special at all.

In the decades following, I found myself dipping into and out of my childhood Subud community: attending the occasional Congress, participating in the occasional group, while at other times living and working far away from it all. Over time, my childhood conditioning of Subud as something very, very important became deflated. Subud seemed to lurch from catastrophe to catastrophe. This didn't bother me, in itself. But it did disabuse me of any belief in Subud's early, world-saving grandiosity.

The final step came in the first decade of this century, when I became more involved in Subud again, this time in Australia. I took on roles as Chair of Sydney, and of Subud Australia. In taking those roles, I applied what I'd learned about community development, letting the community express itself and lead its own way. In return, I also learned much. But what I continually encountered were obstacles to development centred around odd beliefs about decision-making, action, "harmony", money and thinking. This led me to go deeper into understanding the culture and religion of Java, since it became clear that these odd ideas came from Pak Subuh, and—since reading Geertz—I'd gotten the hint that maybe they didn't start with him at all. Subud Vision became my platform for this exploration.

As I searched out the origins of Subud, I was helped by Mansur Medeiros, whom I'd re-met via SubudTalk, a subterranean listserv with a bad reputation. Mansur, who lived in Jakarta for 20 years, had become fluent in Javanese language and culture. Returning to the US, he spent some time in the Harvard library. He emerged quite angry. What he found there was what I found, independently: that all of Subud lore and practice—wahyu story, latihan practice, and all—was just a mash-up of other bits and pieces of Javanese traditional religion. And that creating these mash-ups was a common practice in the Central Java, which is where Hussein Rofé first came upon Pak Subuh. The turning point for me was uncovering the origins of the story of Anwar and Anwas: religious hate-literature, born out of the wars between Hindu-Buddhist and Muslim Javanese empires.

I had a great time growing up in Subud. I had an exotic upbringing. I got to hang around with a group of very unusual and adventurous people, whom I still hold in fond regard. I wouldn't exchange it for any other upbringing. At the same time, I increasingly saw the Subud community as people who had become caught up in a bubble of their own making: a tiny world in which their actions, their leaders and their stories were terribly important, but which in the greater world was of no importance at all. I had no desire to live in that bubble. And I also came to see Subud not as the creation of Pak Subuh, or even of the Javanese, but as the necessary creation of those people we call "seekers"—the members themselves—who, dissatisfied with something in their own lives and culture, had set out to find a remedy outside their own countries and places. What they sought, they had to find: and Pak Subuh just happened to be who they found. Others found the Maharishi, or Meher Baba, or Baha'i. I admire the courage and adventurous spirit of those early times, and I think that spirit is another positive aspect of that time, that I am privileged to carry with me.
