

Designing the New

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Introduction

This is the **second version** of an article presenting an outline description of a new organisation for the latihan, based on ideas that have come out of recent discussions. The original document was less than clear on the spiritual aspects of the proposed new organisation, so it has been re-written with added information in the hope of avoiding any misunderstanding.

Scope of the document

The document tries to cover the content of recent discussions on the subject of a new latihan organisation and tries to provide a comprehensive summary of the required characteristics of such an organisation.

It is important to appreciate that there is a difference between the internal detail of something and the way that something is experienced by its consumers. For example, a huge amount of technical, management and financial expertise goes into an airline flying people across the world, but from the point of view of the passengers none of that is of direct interest -- all they want is comfort, good food and drink, and a swift, safe journey. Similarly, this document is engaged with designing the internal detail of a new organisation. It is a necessarily long document. For those who have difficulty extrapolating from the detail to imagining how the new organisation might be experienced by the average latihan practitioner, there are provided some imaginary case-studies that show how simple it all is in practice.

Intended Audience

It is expected that the document will be of interest to three main audiences:

- 1) Subud members who are disenchanted with Subud, for whatever reason, and are looking for a new organisation under the auspices of which they can do latihan with others.
- 2) Subud members who are concerned that the formation of a new organisation might disadvantage Subud, and wish to be informed about the plans currently being made.
- 3) Open-minded Subud members interested in how it might be possible to 're-package' the latihan, independent of Subud and Bapak's teachings.

Nature of the new organisation

It should be stressed that what is being planned is not a "breakaway" Subud, not a 'Subud-with-all-the-faults-put-right'; rather there are ideas for a completely new form of latihan organisation, which will be unlike Subud in many respects.

Future Developments and Timetable

The small group of people who have been discussing the new organisation in depth since the beginning of this year will probably widen out the discussion to invited contributors via a special web site being planned. Later the discussion may be widened out further so that anyone can participate. It's possible that the new organisation may be formed quite soon, say within a year.

Contents

To aid readability, the article is divided up into themed sections, as follows:

- Characteristics
- Names
- Form
- Membership
- Spirituality
- Principles
- Beliefs
- Aims
- Aspirations
- Tradition
- Implementation
- Testing
- Applicant Period and Opening Words
- Structure and Reporting
- Legalities
- Authentication
- Objections
- Case Studies
- Starting Up
- Conclusion
- Appendices
 - What has been agreed
 - Describing the Latihan
 - Some miscellaneous comments
 - Mini discussions
 - A final thought

Many sections are sub-divided into a numbered sequence of statements, with typical questions raised, and the answers to those questions.

Disclaimer

Although this article reports on recent discussions, it very much represents the author's opinions on those discussions. Other discussion participants may disagree with some of my conclusions.

CHARACTERISTICS

The new latihan organisation should possess these key characteristics:

- a) Lightweight - latihan practitioners should not be burdened with excessive procedures and obligations - whether administrative or personal. The organisation exists to facilitate the practice of the latihan - no more than that.
- b) Non-prescriptive - the organisation has no business to preach, to recommend, or to favour, any beliefs, teachings, spiritual advice, morality systems or personal behaviours. It is neutral on all these matters. The corollary is that individual latihaners should feel free to reasonably express their beliefs and opinions about the latihan, without organisational favour or censure.
- c) Flexible - the organisation must be adaptable to the differing sizes and circumstances of its constituent groups. For example, a small isolated group of family members does not need the same organisational structure as a large city group.
- d) Dynamic - Instead of the imposition of "one-size-fits-all" procedures, groups should have the freedom to experiment, within reason, with their local arrangements. The organisation as a whole will benefit by encouraging the creativity of its members. Innovation is more likely to proceed when it is bottom-up, by experiment and proven example, rather than top-down by imposition of rules.
- e) Effective - To have a raison d'etre, the organisation must be more than just a nominal collection of latihan groups. It needs to provide facilities, services and support that individual groups can benefit from but would not be able to provide on their own.
- f) Safeguarded - The organisation needs sufficient constraints and adequate means of enforcing those constraints that it can't be derailed or diverted by individuals or cliques seeking to push their own agenda. At the same time the organisation must not possess undue powers. Governance has to be done in such a way that it is by consent, not by sufferance, of the organisation's members.

NAMES

1) Name of the new organisation

No name has been decided yet. There have been some suggestions (e.g. "The International Latihan Network"). For the purposes of this article, we will refer to the organisation as "The Latihan Association", or as "The Association" for short. (We were going to use "The Latihan Federation", but the shortened form, "The Federation", sounds like something out of "Star Wars".)

Would the proposed association use the name "Subud"?

No. For two reasons. Firstly, the new organisation will be fully independent of and operate quite differently from Subud. Therefore it would be misleading to use the word Subud as part of the name. Secondly, the name "Subud" is a registered trademark and can only be used by Subud.

Would the proposed association use the "Subud" symbol?

For reasons of copyright, and because the new organisation would not be based on any cosmology or belief system (i.e. the seven levels), the new organisation would not adopt the Subud symbol.

Would the proposed association use the term "latihan"?

An advantage of the word "latihan" is that, at least outside of Indonesia, it is a jargon word that has no unwelcome implications. Even a seemingly harmless alternative, like "spiritual exercise", can be open to objection on a number of grounds. However, at this stage it cannot be stated categorically whether the word "latihan" would be used to describe the latihan exercise or not.

FORM

2) The new association can never be an alternative Subud

Subud is a spiritual association, but nobody, however much they are disenchanted with Subud, will want to join Joe Blogg's spiritual association, or a new type of spiritual association designed by an arbitrary committee. The spiritual aims of Subud get their authority from the perceived spiritual status of Bapak. No contrived, alternative set of spiritual aims could garner widespread acceptance and support, so no point in trying.

3) The new association will be a service organisation

In Subud probably the majority of members are "just there for the latihan". Only a minority dedicate time enthusiastically to the aims of Subud. The new association will recognise this phenomenon and will exist only to provide a service - the provision and support of the latihan.

What's the justification for the term "service organisation" ?

We are using the term "service organisation" in its broadest sense to mean an organisation that is providing latihan facilities as a service rather than as part of a movement with spiritual aims. Individual practitioners are still free to regard the latihan as being spiritual, but the organisation does not concern itself with that, it is only concerned with making the latihan available.

Exactly how many services would the association provide?

We repeat we are using the term "service organisation" in its broadest sense. It should not be taken to imply the burden of provision of a large number of services. In fact, it is expected that the new organisation will have a lesser burden than Subud. For example, helpers in Subud often act as personal advisers and counselors. The equivalents of the helpers in the new organisation are expected to deal with latihan-related matters only.

"Service organisation" sounds rather impersonal. Wouldn't it be somewhat unfriendly compared to Subud?

In Subud, because of people's involvement in the various ventures and initiatives inspired by Bapak's vision, many close friendships have been built up over the years. On the other hand, not everyone has enjoyed Subud in this way. There are many who never subscribed to Bapak's teachings or ideals, who have felt very much on the edge of

things, and maybe it's even possible that large numbers have left Subud because they haven't fitted well into the Subud mould.

By not requiring any allegiances or commitments the new association may turn out to have the advantage of allowing people to be fully themselves, so what at first sight may seem somewhat impersonal could provide a framework where people can relate to each other naturally, without feeling straight-jacketed.

Would there be national and regional sub-organisations?

Initially the aim will be to get a few groups going, regardless of country. The Association would have a web site that will help to coordinate international efforts. If the organisation grows, there may arise sub-divisions, but the emphasis would be on keeping everything simple at first.

MEMBERSHIP

Warning:

The next few statements, about the nature of membership of The Association might seem to some to be unnecessarily theoretical. They are in fact fundamental, and should be read carefully. The section is not long, and it is summarised at the end. Everything else in this document is built round and flows from understanding the distinctions made in these few statements.

4) The Latihan Association will not offer individual membership

Here's the problem. A group of people want to offer membership of a new organisation. How do they devise a set of aims that people would be happy to sign up to? Subud didn't have this problem because it had a founding authority figure who decided what the aims of the organisation should be. Clearly an arbitrary group of individuals setting up a new organisation is not going to be able to present a set of aims with the same kind of authority as Bapak. Even if such a group were to agree amongst themselves, how certain could they be that other individuals would be happy to sign up?

The solution to this problem is: "no individual membership of the organisation". Thus, there are no principles or aims for an individual to personally agree or sign up to. Not providing individual membership has the further advantage of removing any appearance of, or tendency to be, a cult. You can do latihan without being required to join anything or to give allegiance to somebody else's ideas.

How can you have an association without members?

We are not saying there will be no members, just no members who are individuals.

5) The Latihan Association will have group membership

The local latihan group organisations will be the members of The Association.

(Note that we use the word "group" here in its broadest sense to mean a group of people in the same geographical area who have organised themselves to do regular latihan together. There is no implication of property ownership -- they may own a premises, or they may latihan in hired premises, or just in each other's homes)

What's the difference between an individual being a direct member of The Association and an individual being a member of it as part of a group?

We repeat that The Association will not offer individual membership. You cannot be a member of The Association in any form, including "as part of a group". It is the group organisation, as normally represented by the group committee, that will be the member of The Association.

The distinction between an individual, and an organisation that includes individuals, is widely understood outside of a Subud context. For example, a company or corporation has a separate legal identity and has different legal obligations from the employees of that same company. This commonplace distinction is perhaps not so easily understood in Subud, whose members have been taught to believe that everything their organisation does is merely an extension of the sum of its individual members' spiritual states.

6) Local latihan groups will offer individual membership

For insurance reasons, for security in a large group, or maybe because of local laws, a local latihan centre will probably be obliged to run a membership scheme. i.e. in order to do latihan at a group you'd need to become a member. So whereas the Latihan Association does not offer individual membership, it is expected that each local group will offer individual membership.

So we're back to individuals becoming members?

Yes, but not in the same way as in Subud. Membership of Subud is a bit like membership of a political party. It implies alignment to a set of aims and ideas (as represented in Subud by the meaning of the name "Susila Budhi Dharma" and by the spiritual cosmology portrayed by the Subud symbol). You join Subud primarily, and your membership of a local group is a secondary consequence.

The Latihan Association turns this on its head. It does not have any aims or ideas that it requires an individual to sign up to. Local membership of a group is more like membership of a gym.

Let's look further at the gym example: It may be that there is a national gymnasium association that all the gyms in a country belong to. However someone using a gym just gets a membership card for their local gym. Membership of a gym does not imply signing up to any ideas and aims of the national association; membership is just a convenience, an entitlement to use the gym's facilities. Membership of a Latihan Association group would be similar - an entitlement to do latihan at the group -- you join the latihan group - it is only secondary that you are joining a group whose organisation happens to be a member of the Latihan Association.

Could group members latihan at other Latihan Association groups?

It is expected that the Association will require, within reason, that its member groups will allow individuals from other Latihan Association groups to latihan with them.

We say "within reason" because we should never be dictatorial; we should recognise there always have to be exceptions. A group of frail elderly people would probably not want to invite visitors (there is actually in Subud a group where this same restriction has been applied for decades). A family group latihan only at home might not want to invite strangers into their home. And so on.

Could visiting Subud members latihan at Latihan Association groups?

Within the provisos above, it is expected that the Association will require member groups to allow Subud members to latihan with them also. Remember that the Association does not discriminate against people on the basis of their beliefs, so it is of no consequence to the Association if visitors having the Subud belief system want to latihan at an Association group.

Could interested Subud groups also become members of the Latihan Association?

In theory they could, but it will be seen when reading down this document that many of Subud's operational procedures are in direct contradiction to the proposed principles of the Latihan Association, so that a Subud group is unlikely to meet the criteria for membership unless of course it was willing to align its operations to the principles of the Latihan Association, which might then bring it into conflict with Subud.

Summary

To summarise so far
(it's very simple:)

The Latihan Association
 has its members
 which are local latihan group organisations.

Each local latihan group
 has its members
 who are individual latihan practitioners.

Membership of a latihan group is a matter of expediency, as described above. The individual member of a latihan group has no obligation to the Latihan Association. Similarly the Latihan Association has no direct obligation to the individuals who belong to its member groups.

SPIRITUALITY

The question of the place of "spirituality" in the Latihan Association has been a vexed question. It led, in the first version of this article, to much misunderstanding, so this section has been added to clarify matters.

Will the new association be a "spiritual association"?

Subud is a spiritual association. The Subud symbol represents Bapak's explanations of the spiritual world, and the name Subud is a contraction of words representing the three qualities members are supposed to aspire to. Remember that in his talks Bapak constantly refers to members aspiring to "be" Susila Budhi Dharma. The name is more than just a label; it represents a spiritual goal.

As already hinted, no "Joe Bloggs", nor any committee of Joe Bloggs's, is going to be able to draw up a list of spiritual aspirations that would have the same authority as Bapak. Even if the founders tried very hard to come up with a set of general-purpose aspirations, the likelihood is there will always be those who say those aspirations won't fit with their religion or personal philosophy. Also, since the Latihan Association is being formed by people who mainly want to get away from the teacher-follower situation of

Subud, it would seem ridiculous for them to immediately be setting themselves up as originators and guardians of a new spiritual creed.

What do you mean by "spiritual"?

That's a good question, which the author would also like the reader to answer. I bet your definition of the word is different from mine, maybe even quite a lot different. This shows a second problem of The Association stating it is a spiritual association. Suppose someone turns up at an enquirers' meeting or visits a web site and wants to know in what sense we claim to be spiritual. This can be a lot more tricky than it appears at first. Where is our evidence or authority to claim that the latihan will benefit us in the after-life, since none of us have died yet, nor have had a major ascension as Bapak claimed to have had? And if we want to re-interpret "spiritual" as just meaning "making us better people in this life", then, sure, individuals can offer their own stories, but as regards official claims, we can't wheel out a nice, official spiritual explanation of how the latihan works to make us better people, for example *there are these things called nafsus which are out of place, the latihan life-force puts them back in order, and hey-presto you become a new human being.*

What I am trying to say is that if The Association makes a claim that it is a *spiritual* association it has to be able to back up its claim, and this is very difficult to do without introducing some sort of authoritative teaching, which is the very situation that its founders are trying to get away from.

"Spiritual" can be a major turn-off

There's a third reason why it might not be a good idea to claim the Latihan Association has the special characteristic of being "spiritual". Admittedly for some this is an attractive adjective, but for possibly a much greater number in today's world it is a major turn-off, having connotations of preciousness, religiosity and maybe already sounding the danger signal that what is on offer is, likely, a funny cult or sect.

Remember that latihan practitioners generally regard the latihan as coming from "beyond the mind", so in that sense it works regardless of what you think it is, so putting obstacles in the way of the practice by expecting people to align with one viewpoint or the other seems fundamentally inappropriate.

I'll always think of the latihan as spiritual whatever anyone tells me !

And so you may! The important distinction made in the Membership section was that the Latihan Association does not offer individual membership. Therefore, it has no influence over what individual practitioners think of the latihan. If they want to bear witness that, in their view, the latihan is a spiritual exercise, so be it. The Latihan Association will make no categorical official statement that the latihan IS spiritual, but likewise, will it make no official statement that the latihan IS NOT spiritual. It will be neutral on such matters.

As described above, individuals cannot be members, so they do not have to concern themselves with agreeing to this or that philosophical / esoteric pronouncement. The personal philosophy of a latihan practitioner is none of the Latihan Associations' business. The members of the Latihan Association will be groups and its relationship with the groups is in terms of maintaining the service of the provision of latihan. More of that below.

Could a latihan association that is not explicitly spiritual be viable?

John Elwyn Kimber discusses just this question in a recent article, to which the reader is referred.

It's possible that without an attached spiritual or religious element, or without the attached idealism of enterprise and social welfare projects, or without the trappings of an exotic mini-religion, or without an attached exclusive and cosy social scene, the latihan by itself may have insufficient holding power to keep new people beyond more than a "school term's" duration. The jury's out on that one as far as this author is concerned. The new association may have to be creative in the means by which it can keep people interested long-term.

PRINCIPLES (of the Latihan Association)

7) The Principles relate only to the provision of a service

The word "Principles" can have a connotation of people signing up to a personal code of behaviour. We definitely do not mean "Principles" in that sense. Remember that the members of the Latihan Association are not individuals, therefore the Association can apply no principles to individual behaviour. The members of the Latihan Association are groups, and the Principles we are talking about relate to provision of a service by those groups.

What are the Principles?

No precise list has been firmed up yet, but the final list will be probably be quite short, maybe somewhere between five to ten principles, the minimum number that is necessary to describe the quality of service that the Association expects its groups to provide.

Three principles were suggested initially:

- 1) The latihan will be provided without any attached, recommended or favoured cosmological belief system or teaching. The group organisation must not promote or recommend any such belief system, nor should it censor any of its latihan practitioners against expressing their personal beliefs about the latihan.
- 2) The group organisation has a duty of care towards any of its practitioners who require assistance with any matter regarding the latihan.
- 3) The group organisation has a duty of care to enquirers to give them a proper introduction to the latihan, sufficient for them to make an informed decision as to whether they want to do latihan or not.

The wording of the above is somewhat scratch. As we said, nothing has been firmed up yet, but note how the three principles quoted refer only to the responsibilities of the group organisation. They make no expectation of individuals latihan at the group.

How would the principles be applied in practice?

Let's take no. 3 above, the "duty of care to enquirers". As with all things of this nature there is no hard and fast right or wrong, but there will be procedures that are broadly unacceptable and others that will be broadly unacceptable.

Suppose a group organisation decided that it needed to meet an enquirer three times before it was ready for the enquirer to join the latihan. Maybe in the first meeting, the enquirer gets a formal explanation, maybe in the second they get to hear the opinions

and experiences of the latihan from individual latihaners, maybe the third meeting is a final Q&A to make sure they are happy to start doing latihan. (This is just an example, not a recommendation.) It's likely that the Association would regard such a group as satisfying principle no. 3. Another group might do things differently, having, say, two meetings, at both of which the enquirer gets to meet a mix of group officials and many other latihaners and ask questions. Again the Association would probably regard such a group as also satisfying principle no. 3.

What the Association would almost certainly not be satisfied with was a group where somebody was taken straight into the latihan without enquiring of their background or expectations and without offering any prior explanation. At the other extreme, the Association would probably not be satisfied with a group that kept an enquirer waiting for six months or so before it got round to organising the enquirer's first latihan. Neither of these behaviours are likely to satisfy the principle of duty of care.

What about the principle no. 2, of "duty of care" to existing practitioners?

We stress that this is meant to be limited to matters relating to the latihan. For example, suppose somebody was being woken at 4 a.m. each day by going into spontaneous latihan, they might be worried and wish to seek advice on why this was happening. There is a duty of care for the group organisation to provide advice and reassurance in a circumstance like that. However, "duty of care" is not meant to cover non latihan-related activities such as counseling somebody on a recent bereavement or losing their job.

What happens if members of a group decide they disagree with one or more of the Association's principles?

Remember that the Principles are binding on the group organisation, not individuals, so we are talking about the situation when one or more individuals object to their group being run according to the Association principles. An option open to them is to campaign for a change to the principles they don't like. Periodically, the Association will schedule a debate on its principles and aims with the groups voting for or against any proposed changes. In this way the groups are in control of the Latihan Association, not the other way round.

Suppose the vote goes against the proposers of a change in the Principles. What they then do, whether they stay latihanng at their group, or leave in protest, is their decision. The Association is only concerned with ensuring that groups implement the will of the majority in terms of the Association's principles and aims, it is not concerned whether individual members of groups happen to agree or not with the principles and aims of the Association.

How are votes counted?

The members of the Association are groups, not individuals. However, it seems unfair that a group of, say, three people should have an equivalent vote to a group of, say, 200 people.

A suggestion is to base a group's voting tally on the number of its members voting "yes", and the number of its members voting "no". For example: if 60 members in a group of 100 vote "yes", and 10 vote "no", with 30 abstentions, then the group's contribution to the total voting tally would be 60 "yes" votes, and 10 "no" votes.

BELIEFS

Before going any further, some clarification is needed of what this article means by "not promoting beliefs", because past discussions on this point have caused some confusion. Like a lot of English words, the word "belief" has several applications of its meaning, so it is important to be clear, especially as "belief" is a fundamental concept in spiritual and religious matters.

It's best to give an example:

- Many people take up yoga because they believe the claim that it's good for their health.
- Many people take up meditation because they believe the claim that it will help them to feel calmer and more centered.
- Many people do tai-chi or Qigong because they believe the claim that these practices increase energy level.

None of these benefits involve believing anything that you can't prove through your own experience.

What about the benefits people claim for the latihan ?

These include:

- You will get a feeling of calmness and inner peace.
- Over time you will have more control over your emotions, less likely to get unnecessarily angry, and so on.
- Your relationships with other people may improve.
- Various faults in your character may be eliminated over time.

These are all verifiable, or not, by a new practitioner's own experience, and they are all good points in favour of the latihan. More importantly these claims are unlikely to cause controversy and discord amongst practitioners. If someone says they haven't felt the inner peace aspect but they are sure the latihan has helped their marriage, and another person says the latihan didn't stop them getting divorced but, on the other hand, it did help them to cope with the divorce, there's hardly likely to be any difficulty about this; we can accept that the latihan may affect people differently, according to their personal makeup and their differing background and life circumstances.

So in publicity material, the association and/or its groups can certainly point out the most common benefits **reported** by people who do latihan.

Where there is difficulty is when you attempt to explain **why** the latihan has an effect:

- The atheist may want to say it is some inner psychological force that is being released, some sort of wisdom of the subconscious.
- The mystic may say it's some universal life force.
- The religious person may say the force must be a direct gift of Almighty God.

There's no harm in the association and/or its groups suggesting the **possible** explanations, but it's clearly going to be impossible to get a compromise, a kind of middle-way statement that will please everybody. Much more intelligent, and inclusive, is to suggest several alternatives and leave it to the individual to settle on any explanation that satisfies them.

Subud has a back-story, that Bapak was a great and holy person given a mission by Almighty God of bringing the latihan into the world as a last chance to save mankind from the lower forces leading mankind to destruction. The presence of this back-story leads to the conclusion that, if Bapak was specially chosen, it follows that he must be a high person and therefore we had better believe and trust in everything he says. These beliefs - elevating the founder to guru status, and making holy cows out of his suggestions - have been an ongoing cause of confusion and disillusionment in Subud, both for applicants and for members. The new association's principle about "not promoting beliefs" refers to just this kind of belief -- belief in the rightness or truth or a particular set of spiritual theories as promoted by one or more spiritual teachers. The principle is intended to prevent just such a situation arising again, to create a space for people to do latihan without implying an obligation to study and respect a spiritual teacher and his teachings. What remains are statements about verifiable benefits and speculative explanations about what the latihan is in essence. Such reports of experiences and individual explanations as to what the latihan might be (including Pak Subuh's explanation) can be offered, but in a way that is interesting and provocative without being dogmatic.

AIMS (of the Latihan Association)

8) Aims are different from Principles

Whereas principles relate to the standards set in respect of the quality of the venture, aims are more related to what you intend to achieve from a venture, what is the purpose of engaging in it.

Again no firm list of aims has been established yet.

We repeat that we are talking about aims of The Association. The Association has no business to dictate or imply what the aims of an individual practitioner should be.

An example of an aim that has been suggested is:

To share the latihan as widely as possible.

Are the Association's aims binding on its member groups?

The aims would be that of the Latihan Association. Some groups might not have the circumstances or resources to be actively engaged in the aims. For example, a group of a few family members latihan in their home would be understandably cautious about publicity that might find them overwhelmed with enquirers. The Association would expect its groups to support the aims, but only within the context of each group's means to do so.

How would the latihan be promoted?

This could be through newspaper advertisements or an advert in the telephone directory, group web sites, a radio interview, latihan practitioners giving the occasional public talk, and so on; all the normal means of promoting, in fact.

A note of caution has been sounded by one of the discussion contributors, who warns that it is very easy for promotion to become proselytising. Even though the Association might do its best to avoid any suggestion of religiosity or cultishness, undue fervour for spreading the latihan can be just as off-putting and suspect to an outsider as any blatant attempted religious conversion.

Other discussion contributors have been sensitive on this same point. They feel that any advertising of the latihan, whether in print or by personal encounter, should not make claims for supposed benefits, such as "you will make spiritual progress", "the latihan will benefit you after you have passed over", "the latihan will improve your character", "the latihan could change the world". We should instead be taking a position more akin to "many people have tried this and found it to have benefits for them. We are informing you of its existence because you might like to try it too".

ASPIRATIONS

The following, written by John Elwyn Kimber, I believe sums up a situation that members of the new organisation would like to see aspired to:

"...Even where an individual acknowledges an influence or influences, as we all may, the question of the correct blend of those influences and their relationship with the individuated psyche is one that should not be short-circuited with pre-conceived notions and dogmatic formulae. These may of course include being dogmatically anti-dogmatic: so the essential rule is not to expect to be able to avoid the influence of others, but to work through all influences and arrive at one's own conclusions as to their relative value. Such influences may include, of course, the views of Bapak on the inner life. But nothing can be beyond question and examination. Durable values can neither be arrived at nor conserved by blind faith in unexamined assumptions. An individual's inner truth cannot be expressed in secondhand words. A latihanener may be influenced by many things but is unlikely entirely to subscribe to any of them on the terms which will usually be offered: suppression of doubt, blind acceptance for the sake of group solidarity, and other such tests of 'loyalty'.

It has to be implicit that a vital and authentic 'spirituality' needs to be radical, empirical, exploratory, and therefore not constrained by pious precedent and foregone conclusion. ... "

Some discussion contributors are concerned that it is not enough for the Association to set standards for the group organisations -- they say that unless standards of behaviour are expected of the individual, in particular a standard of tolerance and respect for other people's viewpoints, then the whole venture is likely to come to grief through the disruption engendered by individuals attempting to dominate with their idea of a "correct viewpoint" concerning the latihan.

This fear is understandable after the experience of Subud, where anyone who speaks in criticism of the predominant Bapak-originated ideas is likely to find their opinion marginalised or summarily ignored, and where there is strong peer pressure, through the official Subud press and through the helpers, for people to read and respect Bapak's talks.

However I believe that any proposal to require individual latihaneners in the new Association to sign up to a code of behaviour when they join their group would not only be very wrong, it will ultimately be ineffectual. Let me give the reasons why:

Firstly, here we are complaining that Subud is straight-jacketed by a Bapak-based belief system, and immediately we want to replace that with a code of our own devising. Please don't say to me "well it would be optional" because that's exactly what many of us have been complaining is the problem in Subud - a strong attachment to a set of ideas, while simultaneously pretending "they aren't all that important, really".

Secondly, if you ask me, "How could you possibly object to principles of tolerance and respect for other people's views?", you are thereby showing what is wrong with your proposal, because frankly it's none of your business to enquire what my moral guidelines are and whether I will or won't support this or that set of guidelines. None of that should have relevance to my desire to do latihan. Suppose I am a Christian who believes "Christ is the only way to God" and that the latihan is in fact a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, am I to be prevented from doing the latihan because I don't have the slightest interest in taking an inclusive attitude to other spiritual ideas?

Getting people to sign up to a code of behaviour won't work anyway. Sure, it would work for the reasonable people, but the nature of the fervent person is to believe they have a God-given mission to educate people as to "the truth". Being thus in contempt of reasonable discussion, they'll similarly have no interest in honouring any aspirations they once signed up to.

My belief is that the proposed structure of the Latihan Association provides adequate means for dealing with individuals or cliques who disrupt the intended inclusive nature of the group by pushing their own spiritual agendas. When somebody becomes a member of a group, they should be given a leaflet informing them that the group organisation is a member of the Latihan Association, and supports the principles and aims of that association, including the aim that no latihaner should be pressurised into adopting any belief system. The leaflet will inform the latihaner that if they are unhappy with any aspect of the group they have a right to make a formal complaint to the group organisation, and, if the matter is not solved to their satisfaction, they have a right of appeal to the Latihan Association itself.

Does the Latihan Association have any powers to deal with disruptive individuals?

With individuals, no; because individuals are not its members, but it can require the affected group organisation to take action against the disruptive situation. The Association's web-links will enable those doing latihan to share experiences about resolving conflicts and personality clashes, and to consult with other groups and individuals. In an extreme case, when communication and mediation fails, then – as a final resort – the group may threaten the disruptive individual with expulsion. Ultimately if the group fails to act to effectively improve the situation then the Association could threaten to expel that group as no longer upholding its principles and aims.

This article has been mainly focused on the disruption caused by people attempting to weave and promote a religion around the latihan. There are of course other types of disruptive behaviour, e.g. a person turning up for the latihan in a drunk and disorderly state, but it is assumed the Association does not need any special principles for that to be dealt with, that groups will have common-sense procedures, and rules where necessary, for dealing with anti-social behaviour, as would any organisation.

How likely is it that a new organisation would eventually become like Subud?

In the author's opinion, possible, but unlikely, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Subud organisation give strong tacit support to anyone who sticks to the party line. An individual with a different viewpoint is not just up against people in their group who disagree with them, they also have to face the weight of the entire organisation. The Latihan Association would be neutral on viewpoints about the latihan and would neither lend nor withdraw support because of somebody's viewpoint.

Secondly, if some groups of the Association publicly advertise to get new members, there is every chance of an influx of new members who from the start will be practising the latihan without a teacher/guru background, and who would probably strongly resist

any subsequent attempt to introduce what they would see as an alien philosophy.

Thirdly, the Association's principles do not require the provision of a Subud-like helper system. Meeting of enquirers, assisting with testing, and so on, may be carried out by periodically voted-in officials, or by volunteers on a rotation basis, whatever system the local group has devised. So the Association groups would not have the dominance of the helper-hierarchy and traditional helper viewpoint stifling freedom of thought, that Subud has.

How does a group ensure that its official representatives do not act out of line with the Association's principles?

A group organisation should not seek to control the reasonable expression of opinion by its members. However, when some of those members are also group officials there is the issue of what happens if an official speaks out of line.

How would it be distinguished between when an official is merely giving a personal opinion and when they are making a statement of official policy? Sometimes there is no clear distinction, but an example of a situation that would not be acceptable is if an enquirer turns up a group and hears a group official loudly proclaiming his/her personal opinion that "people really should read Pak Subuh's talks or their latihan won't progress" -- the enquirer could be forgiven for thinking this was an officially approved statement.

One discussion contributor suggested all officials should sign a pledge that during their term of office they will not express any personal opinions about the latihan, whether acting in an official capacity, or whether "off-duty". A pledge seems over-kill for a small group, but maybe in a very large group of a hundred or more it is not such a bad idea. For this reason, it's best if the matter is left to each group to sort out according to its size, circumstances and local culture.

TRADITION

A valid and pertinent question is to ask how the starting arrangements for latihan under the auspices of the new Association should be decided. Should there be two group latihan a week, three a week, or maybe only one a month? Should men and women still latihan separately? Should there be a quiet before latihan, should the latihan still be 30 minutes? And so on. It has been suggested that as well as the Principles that are binding on the groups, the Association should also draw up a set of recommendations, which are based on current best practice, but which are nevertheless non-binding. We can think of these recommendations as being latihan "tradition".

How do you decide the recommendations? Fortunately, with the background of 50 years of Subud, that is not so difficult. It is all those things which are not contentious and which people seem mainly to be happy to accept. It is interesting, for instance, that with all the criticism of the Subud organisation on the Subud Vision web site, there is almost no criticism of the latihan itself, or of the regular arrangements for doing latihan.

We say the recommendations should be non-binding because, although they would be offered in good faith on the basis of experience, nobody is in a position to say that these practices must be followed precisely, for ever and ever. It is expected that the guidelines would be subject to review and the Association's members may vote to change them in various ways as time goes on, on the basis of the benefit of further experience, and to adapt to the changing conditions of society in the future.

IMPLEMENTATION

This section should be much more detailed, but, in the interests of brevity, it attempts to answer just a few common questions about how the principles of The Latihan Association would be implemented in practice by the member groups.

Would there be helpers?

To quote one of the discussion contributors "Experienced members may act as helpers to assist newcomers. Helpers are simply there to help; they are in no sense priests, ministers or elders . . ." If elected by the members the authority they have is not an authority over the members, but rather an authority to act **on behalf of** the members.

This again is a matter for the local groups. Their system of care may be very similar to the helper system, or it may be a rotating volunteer system, or some other system. Unlike in Subud, helpers would have no influence on policy-making through testing (see below), their job would be purely to assist individuals on latihan-related matters. The term "helper" may, of course, be replaced by one that more appropriately describes the new role.

Who would speak to enquirers?

As suggested near the start of this article, this again is a matter for the local groups.

What about mixed latihans?

This may be a facility developed by one or more groups. Whether it becomes an acceptable practice in the organisation may depend, as with other matters of organisational policy, on a majority vote of the group organisations.

TESTING

Here is a proposal from John Elwyn Kimber about how the new organisation should regard testing:

The process known as TESTING is divinatory in function, but as it is an application of the Latihan the procedure is simpler and more direct than with well-known traditional divinatory methods such as the I Ching. The main requirements of testing are that the individual or individuals affected by the question being tested shall all have an opportunity to test, and shall all be free to reject the result if it proves insufficiently convincing. Experience has shown that the results of valid testing must make common sense before they make any kind of uncommon sense, and that there is something wrong with the testing if this proves not to be the case.

To test on behalf of others not present, or to attempt to act on behalf of others as a result of testing with which they may not concur, cannot under any circumstances be recognised as a due and valid process of testing by Latihan Association standards.

Testing may clarify an issue, but "receiving" is rarely perfect and the results of testing must accordingly never be regarded as infallible or binding on others.

Of course, John is referring to testing in general, but in the discussions about a new organisation particular attention has been paid to the undesirability of allowing collective decisions to be determined by testing. I won't repeat the arguments here; they are well covered by Subud Vision articles. Suffice it to say that the proposal is that a principle of the Association should be that organisational decisions should not be decided by testing.

In a recent discussion about testing, I made these relevant comments:

Let's say that while the Association does not censor an individual's beliefs it does not permit group decisions to be determined according to cosmological belief systems. That would include doing everything as Bapak said because of a belief that he received it from God and doing everything according to testing because of a belief that God is guaranteeing the rightness of the answer. Categorically stating this may lose the Association some "converts" from Subud, though I doubt in any significant quantities, but it is too high a price to pay to allow testing in as a means of manipulating people against their better judgment. A group can of course vote to run its affairs according to testing results, and then it would simply be expelled from the Association. As regards to what Michael Irwin has referred to in the past, people doing individual tests for guidance on which way they should vote, I'd say group officials should not proactively organise such testing sessions because that is equivalent to promoting the use of testing, but on the other hand if an individual tests for guidance for themselves only, then the initiative is coming from that individual for their guidance alone, and it's probably ok to do it. However, whether any individuals have tested or not for guidance on an issue to be voted on, they will still need to cast their vote along with those who haven't tested.

Would groups test whether it was right to open someone?

Testing the "rightness" of an opening may be seen to be in direct contradiction to the Association's principle that groups should not impose belief systems on their members. It's effectively saying "we believe there is a higher intelligence out there that we can tune into and get yes/no answers for what we should do". This is not to say that testing in general would be wrong, because an individual can decide once they have started latihan whether to try the practice of testing and they can then form an opinion whether, for them, it is a useful and valid practice. But the individual, by definition, cannot test before their first latihan, and therefore the group would effectively be obliging them to share a belief system for which they as yet have no evidence and might not be willing in any case to subscribe to.

APPLICANT PERIOD AND OPENING WORDS

It's already been hinted above that the period of introduction for enquirers before they do their first latihan will be a matter for individual groups, provided they satisfy the principle of a duty of care to the enquirer / newly opened person. It is expected that, after experimentation, groups may settle on similar procedures which are found to work best in practice, though there may still be local variations. It is not the purpose of the Association to dictate procedures. However, it is also possible that one or more groups might propose a vote that all groups in the Association should adopt the same procedures for new enquirers, to provide them with consistent information about the applicant procedures, whichever group they consult.

Regarding the "Opening Words", it's difficult to imagine a form of words that would satisfy the Association's principle that no cosmological beliefs about the nature of the latihan should be officially sanctioned. Maybe the enquirer has signed an application form indicating their willingness to do latihan, and that in itself is sufficient.

STRUCTURE AND REPORTING

The structure of the Latihan Association is designed to be as simple as possible. There are only two layers, the groups and the executive committee. It is suggested that the executive committee has five officers who are elected on an annual basis by majority votes of the groups.

The Latihan Association adopts a hands-off approach to organisation. Groups make all decisions about how to run their affairs. The executive committee's task is only to ensure those local arrangements do not violate the Latihan Association principles that the group signed up to as a member. To this end each group must fill in an annual questionnaire where it describes its current latihan arrangements, location, frequency etc, its procedures for meeting with enquirers and starting new people in the latihan, how it advertises itself, whether there have been any disputes and how they were dealt with and resolved, and so on. Should the executive committee feel that any aspect of the group is departing from the Association's principles they will discuss the matter with the group committee. Ultimately in cases of a serious breach that cannot be resolved, the executive committee has the power to expel the group from the Association. When the Association is big enough, such a decision should be made by a plenary meeting of the member groups.

The executive committee also arbitrates in cases of complaint from a group member about the way a group organisation is running its affairs. It is hoped that such disputes will be discussed and resolved locally, but, if not, the executive committee provides a route of appeal.

The committee will also appoint a webmaster to organise a web site where Latihan Association groups can share news and ideas with each other.

Finally the executive committee is responsible for organising a vote of the groups on any proposed changes to the principles and organisation of the Latihan Association. Note that the Association is not set in stone. Groups can propose changes.

LEGALITIES

Our discussion of matters concerning the formation of a new organisation would be incomplete if we did not consider the legal implications.

Certainly, in the author's current country of residence and also in his country of birth, an informal association of people has a shared, unlimited liability for any damage caused by their association. Put simply that means that if one of a group's members is painting the latihan hall and a visiting member of the public trips over a carelessly placed paint pot and injures themselves, the whole group would be legally responsible for footing the medical bills, even though the injury was caused by the carelessness of just one of their members.

Depending on variations in law from country to country there may be ways to legally constitute a group so as to limit liability to the group's assets, rather than individual member's assets. A major responsibility of the Association would be to draw up a template for a group constitution that is legally sound and advantageous in the different countries where its groups are situated. This would be of great assistance to groups wanting a solid and unambiguous basis for their foundation. Fledgling groups will not want to get into lengthy and uncertain research and discussion about how to constitute themselves. The Association can make it easy for groups to start on a sound basis.

AUTHENTICATION

Another advantage that the Association can provide groups is that a by-product of their membership of the Association is an implication that they provide an **authentic** latihan.

Let's explain what is meant by "authentic" in this context.

Anybody could read a book about the latihan, devise a practice where the body goes into spontaneous movements, and call it "latihan". (The author tried out just such a practice some months before being opened, an exercise for actors where they just follow wherever the body takes them – he found himself racing round the room with arms flailing.) However such an exercise would not be latihan in the sense of the latihan practice that the Association exists to protect and facilitate. Just as with yoga, or with any other similar experience, newcomers have the right to be able to verify that what they are being offered is genuine and not a scam by imitators or charlatans. The Association has no control over charlatans, unless they try to pass off their groups as being approved by or representative of the Association, but it can provide safeguards by being clear about what distinguishes the latihan that it provides against any other practice claiming to be in essence the same.

It is interesting to note that the question of authenticity probably cannot be divorced from the question of origin. We know there are a very small number of exceptions in Subud of people who claim to have experienced an opening before encountering Subud, but in the main it is accepted that "I can do latihan because it was passed on to me by a man who had it passed on to him by another man, who had it passed on to him by another man, who had it passed on to him by Pak Subuh."

OBJECTIONS

This section contains replies to some common objections raised by Subud people to any discussion about forming a new organisation.

Subud is guided by God. It will grow when God decides it is the right time.

A lot of Subud people hold to this belief. Interesting that it is so common in Subud, which claims to have no belief system. Needless to say, the people interested in forming a new organisation probably no longer find the belief convincing. There's no point in arguing about it, since the new organisation will be independent of Subud and no longer constrained by the belief system that determines how Subud run its affairs.

Subud will grow when our latihan has reached a sufficient level

The implication is that all efforts in the meantime are doomed to failure. Again this idea is part of the belief system that Subud says it doesn't have. There's an alternative view about the latihan, that it's up to us to put our latihan into practise to the best of our abilities, to create something that works. The new organisation is likely to appeal to people who have this alternative belief, as well as to people who think the latihan has nothing to do with it: skill, experience, know-how, compassion and concern for others being more important factors determining the likelihood of success or failure.

You can't dictate to people

I always smile when I hear this old chestnut. It's a bit rich coming from Subud, which has a glaringly bad record of dictating. We can't choose our helpers -- we are stuck with them for life on the basis of somebody else's supposed receiving ability. Similarly we are stuck for two to four years with a chairperson chosen by testing -- no consultation, the

decision is forced on us by the accepted practice of chairperson selection, even against our better judgment. Subud people are fearful of straying too far from the approved procedures laid down by Father and Mother. Try changing just one tiny thing in Subud and see how the status quo will close ranks to resist it - a friend of mine tried this recently; she asked for one tiny change in her group; she said the experience was so unpleasant she won't even bother to try again. Subud, in fact, is a living example of how easy it is to find people who will readily consent to being dictated to. By contrast the Latihan Association will decide everything by vote of its member groups. There will be no paternalistic hierarchy either laying down the law or finding ways to obstruct democratic change.

However much you make plans, you can't control people

The statement is usually made to imply that in any collection of people, and particularly of Subud people, each person will always act entirely individualistically, without reference either to other people or to rules.

In practice that almost never happens. Usually, when there are no proper organisational constraints, what will happen is that the stronger-willed people battle for dominance while the weaker-willed either resign themselves to a position of subservience, or they leave the organisation. Look at Subud groups. You don't see a great variety of flavours forged by the local mix of personalities. On the contrary there is a recognisable sameness, a recognisable Subud-ness, that comes about through acquiescence to the dominant philosophy pushed by the more devout and zealous members.

A badly constituted organisation will reinforce the dominance of factions, either by being too weak to do anything, or by approving and aligning with those factions. A well constituted organisation will have built in safeguards that make it difficult for individuals or cliques to willfully push their agendas.

CASE STUDIES

The following examples attempt to show that all the organisational detail above is there for a purpose, to provide a framework for the practice and dissemination of the latihan that is experienced as something clean, clear and straightforward from the point of view of the average practitioner.

The case studies also demonstrate that the proposed organisational model can be both flexible and scalable.

Case Study no 1: The Greenhill Group - number of members = 6

The Greenhill family, mother, father, son and daughter-in-law and uncle and aunt do latihan twice a week at the rural farm house which is the centre of their family business. Their group is a member of the Latihan Association, whose aims and principles the family are keen to support. Since it is a close-knit family group, they have no need for a committee or any other official roles. All their arrangements are decided amongst themselves. One of the family acts as liaison officer for the very few occasions when they need to communicate with the Latihan Association. Because of their isolated location, the family do not consider it appropriate that they should take on new members and they are considered to be a "private" group who are not listed in the Latihan Association's directory of latihan groups.

Case Study no 2: The Blue River Group - number of members = 30

The small town of Blue River has a Latihan Association member group started by four ex-Subud members. These members took the initiative to give talks at a local community centre. The talks attracted a lot of interest and as a result many enquirers were able to experience their first latihan after a weekend induction course. Sufficient of these people continued with the latihan, with some introducing their friends to it, so that the original four ex-Subud members were soon outnumbered by twenty six new members. The group hire rooms in the community centre for twice-weekly latihan, and their affairs are run by a committee who carry out any necessary administration. Additionally there are the group "assistants" -- these are four volunteers, two ladies and two men, chosen by annual vote of all the group members. Assistants meet with enquirers, time the latihan, assist with personal testing if requested, and carry out any other latihan-related, non-administrative tasks. The committee, like the assistants, is chosen annually - the chair by vote of all the members, and the chair then chooses people to help -- as the group is small this usually means that only a treasurer is a necessary additional role. The committee communicates matters for discussion by a mixture of email and face to face meetings - that way they ensure that everyone is included. Voting is by email ballot so that everybody gets a chance to vote.

Case Study no 3: The Big City Group - number of members = 200+

Big City has a population of three million, and the latihan group, which is a member of the Latihan Association, owns a meeting place right in the city centre. As with all other Latihan Association groups it is free to organise its own affairs as it sees fit, as long as it supports the principles of the Latihan Association. For the Big City group this means a number of special procedures which would not be necessary in small or medium-sized groups.

Firstly, latihan are not at fixed times but on a drop-in basis. The latihan rooms are permanently available for latihan. Usually different sub-groups of members informally arrange amongst themselves to meet at certain times for latihan. People who work in the city have chosen Tuesday and Friday lunchtimes, there is a mid-morning latihan twice a week mainly attended by older members, and there are some early evening times favoured by members who are students at a local college. Some other members just turn up and latihan alone at times when the centre is quiet.

Secondly, the group decided it was not necessary to have any helper-like officials attending latihan. However, newcomers to the latihan are required to only latihan at certain times where volunteers who are experienced latihaners are present. The role of talking to enquirers is carried out by a separate set of volunteers. The committee have reserved Wednesday evenings as "enquirer-only" occasions. An enquirer is required to attend four successive enquiry meetings where they get to meet group officials and a variety of members, then they can attend a separate first latihan before joining the specially organised latihan for new people. After two months, the group allows them to attend for latihan at any time.

Thirdly, because of the large size of the group, discussion of issues by email and by face-to-face meeting is considered too cumbersome. The group have appointed a webmaster who has devised an excellent discussion forum on the group's web site for discussion of any issues that come up. Voting is by an electronic voting system, which ensures that it is very easy for people to vote, despite the group's large size. When face-to-face meetings are held they are also broadcast by Skype conference call so that any member with a Skype connection can listen in to the discussion.

The mix of people in the group reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the city, and one of the members recently organised a series of talks where members talked about their religion. The best attended was the talk by a visiting member of Subud, about Pak

Subuh and the origin of the latihan. Two members expressed an interest in finding out more about Subud, another member said he had felt a lot of benefit from the short time he had been doing latihan and didn't want to confuse his mind with someone else's ideas. Some others commented that although the history of the latihan was interesting, they already had a religion and had no interest in what they saw as the somewhat dated teachings of a guru figure.

Some trouble was caused recently by a new member who got hold of copies of Bapak's talks and started to take a very preachy and superior attitude that some other members found disturbing, especially because said member had been officially appointed to talk to enquirers and abused this position of trust by telling new people that they wouldn't get the full benefit of the latihan unless they studiously read the talks of its originator. A complaint was made to the group committee, but for various reasons the committee did not act on it effectively. A further complaint was then made to the Latihan Association who discussed the matter with the group chair. The member in question was relieved of their official duties and asked to tone down their anti-social behaviour. The member was not happy to do this and left the group to join a Subud group instead.

STARTING UP

Some may quite reasonably ask "It's all very well to talk about the theory, but how would such an organisation get started in practice?"

This could happen in several stages:

- 1) The people who have been involved in discussions draw up a constitution for the Latihan Association according to principles, aims and procedures similar to those discussed above. (In fact, a new web site for drawing up a constitution will be announced some time in Autumn 2012.)
- 2) They vote for an initial executive committee of five people.
- 3) The committee create a web site as a resource for people who are interested in setting up an independent latihan group under the auspices of the Latihan Association. The web site is the means by which people can share ideas, discuss the problems of forming a group, and so on.
- 4) Eventually some small groups will be formed, most likely consisting of families or friends, or groups of disaffected members who have decided to break away from Subud and give the new organisation a try.
- 5) Some of these groups will decide to advertise the latihan and new members will be obtained that way. As groups grow it is possible that their more lively and more relaxed attitude to the latihan will attract members, particularly younger members, away from Subud.
- 6) Gradually the Association, through the shared experience of its member groups will become more adept at starting new groups, more savvy about knowing how best to promote itself, and a steady growth in numbers may be expected from that point on.

CONCLUSION

Some people may understandably feel sad that we are now discussing the formation of a new organisation that might lead to the demise of Subud as the main provider of the latihan. While sympathising with that point of view, this author questions whether Subud, even if it decided to put right all its flaws and problems, could ever have had wide appeal. With its enthusiasm for the talks, teachings and ideals of its founder, its "funny" name, and mysterious symbol, Subud is always going to look to outsiders like an esoteric religion or guru-led sect or cult. This is not a sale-able proposition in the modern

world. Because of that, "large numbers joining Subud" ain't never going to happen -- at its best it will only ever attract a minority.

If the latihan is truly to be accessible to "all of mankind" it cannot do so within the confines of a narrow package promoted by well-intentioned but mistaken people who expect others to convert to their spiritual viewpoint.

When the latihan arrived in the world it seemed to promise the dawn of a new age, yet it has become increasingly embroiled with an organisation that can only conduct its affairs on old age lines. What is needed now is people with the courage, conviction and especially the vision to see that the latihan should be provided through an organisation that reflects the latihan's essential open-ness and universality.

APPENDICES

What has been agreed

When working through my notes for this article I came across this neat summary from Michael Irwin of what appears to have been agreed so far in discussions about a new organisation:

We have accomplished this much as far as I can see: We have agreed that eventually there should be an association of groups adhering to a set of principles. We have agreed that nascent groups will have different processes of growth concerning their internal membership and decision making arrangements and that larger groups will need to find different models from those of small groups. I think we have agreed that the principles are more likely to be aspirational for nascent groups while they decide whether they want to continue with them or not. Once committed to the principles, as groups get larger and more formal in their organization, the relationship with the Association of federated groups would develop more formally also and involve decisions about enforcement of the terms of membership in the Association.

Describing the Latihan

An important debate that has been going on, both parallel and relevant to the debate about forming a new organisation, is "How do you describe the latihan?". We don't want to make claims for it, we don't want to describe it terms of this or that spiritual theory, so what do we say? The general conclusion seems to be that it is best to give only a very basic description, accompanied by individual accounts of people's experience.

There is this warning from Rosalind Priestley about making basic statements about the latihan too basic:

A superficial description of something that is more than a superficial experience is not factual, just superficial. We should avoid describing the latihan as seen only from the outside. The latihan also has an inner dimension. To set out only the external facts is like describing the experience of eating in terms of forks going into one's mouth and food disappearing, without any mention of tasting and swallowing and enjoyment or lack of it. Just because it's not possible to arrive at a one-size-fits-all conclusion about what goes on in the consciousness during the latihan, doesn't mean that it's okay to omit this part of the experience.

Here's a basic description, suggested by Stefan Freedman:

The latihan is an experience which varies greatly from one person to another and for the same person on different occasions. In many cases the effect includes sounds and movements which arise spontaneously. Unlike similar sounding activities participants report that there is no trance, no frenzy, and no loss of control or consciousness, and that often a sense of calm ensues.

For some this may be viewed as a naturally occurring experience while others may see it as 'spiritual' or 'sacred' (according to their individual beliefs). Participants are invited to experience latihan directly in order to form their own views. It is not widely known, so those who take part are co-exploring. Those who find a benefit generally agree that the process deepens over time.

And a comment from Marcus Bolt:

Stefan's attempt is brave, but left me wondering (pretending I was a newcomer) - 'Well, what's the point of it? What's it for?' (ref. Rosalind's comments about superficiality of description).

I know this area is a minefield and there would be as many 'descriptions' as there are members (not counting those who opt for the one-fit 'Worship of God'...). I have no immediate answers, but feel it's something that needs tackling in some way.

Some miscellaneous comments

I am including below from my notes some snippets of comment from other people. These don't fit into the framework of the article but nevertheless are valuable points. They are included in no particular order.

SF: If people don't first see the liberating intention they won't buy the apparent restriction of having principles.

SD: I think it's possible to make too big a deal out of the principles. It's not like Subud where you are trying to design a constitution that has to formulate the place of helpers, the status of Bapak, the ideals of Susila, Budhi, Dharma, the relationship between the org and the wings, the place of the zones and national structures etc. We should be talking about something very simple. There's no reason why people should have to go on for years thinking about principles. The local detail, where groups experiment with the way things are done, is where I see the evolutionary process occurring. Yes, principles may be changed over time, but the org needs to start with solid and strong principles that people can feel are reasonable and not over-bearing, so the member groups can get on with their real and more interesting job un-distracted by constitutional uncertainties.

SF: Ideally there'd be a team in at least one area who could start things up. It seems a slow and daunting prospect to start it as a solo practitioner.

RP: Incidentally, (as in my article about choosing officials) I would strongly recommend that when people stand for election they should be asked to make their platform clear and be willing to answer questions, so that people are not just voting for a man or a woman but for a known set of policies.

MI: I think the approach to design was to be acutely aware that the circumstance that has to be always present was the worst case. That didn't mean that the worst case would happen very often but it set the boundaries. Once the worst case is prepared for, then I think an explicit statement has to be made where and in what ways the parts of the design allow for complete freedom of choice.

SF: It seems to me a website with lots of input about the latihan, latihan experience, latihan

problems and solutions, etc. is actually a very radical move that ought to have the biggest impact of anything we've done yet. The free sharing of information is not something that happens easily in Subud and it's badly needed. People will consult the website, and become used to looking to it for pragmatic rather than dogmatic answers to their problems. That would be a big shift!

HP: I think the biggest influence is that from the members' point of view testing is the way Bapak arrived at his answers. We mostly assumed that much of what he said was received from on High. It's not like we saw him entering into debates about issues. He didn't make a decision and then have the members vote about it, or if he did, it was only a rubber-stamp. So now we have members looking at what Bapak modeled and trying to be mini-Bapaks. (Umm, now where could that go wrong?!) Didn't Bapak see that coming? Maybe he should have spent a little more time warning "don't try this at home, kids"! To be fair, he regularly told us how bad our own receiving was, but people have chosen to ignore that.

Anon: I'm willing to 'come out' and see whether any are interested to start a non-Subud latihan group in xxxxx. I anticipate that many of my longtime local cell-mates will feel shocked and 'betrayed' which is unfortunate. But if I continue to do nothing I am colluding with an approach to latihan that's restrictive and seems unsustainable.

Mini discussions:

Question: Isn't the best protection for the principles a free and open atmosphere where the principles are known and discussed among all those that might be affected by them.

MI: I assume you refer to policies. The protection of the principles is an Association matter. The adoption of the principles is a group matter.

Reply: I don't have much confidence in the survival chances of principles that are followed in a perfunctory way, according to prescription rather than out of conviction.

MI: The survival of the principles is a matter for the Association. If they are followed in a perfunctory way by a group, then the group would risk losing its Association membership.

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Question: This week we've pointed out a couple of major turning points in Subud: (1) the decision to elevate Bapak to guru status, and (2) the decision to replace some democratic processes with testing. These have changed the course of Subud, yet have not been adequately discussed, nor voted on by the membership. I'm starting to wonder if there was a group (cabal?) that functioned behind the scenes to bring these about, probably with good intentions, e.g. the membership is losing interest so we have to do something, etc. That's what the Koontz article implies.

MI: How (2) happened is a really good question and I doubt that it can be answered. My own theory is that the developments come from the seductive and encouraged attitude that God is in charge and that therefore proactive action is not needed. In other words the false notion (to my eyes) that the practical world is subject to the same force as the movements in the latihan and all that is needed is to kick back and watch it unfold. In short, a nice lazy, comfy new world where one need do nothing. This view is not peculiar to Subud. Karen Armstrong has clearly outlined the scenario in her discussion of religions and their failure to make a distinction between the temporal and the secular world. "I'm not responsible; God is responsible". So, helpers, as the best intercessors with God, can make all the decisions and I am not responsible.

A final thought

A vital aspect of the way the Association and its groups should present and promote the latihan is that it shouldn't feel like there is anything strange you have to join to do it, or that you are mixing with some secretive and enclosed clique with special ideas, rituals or allegiances; it should feel like latihan is a well-known and respected practice that anyone can try without obligation or commitment, in other words: "Oh, you do latihan? I've heard of that. I might go along and give it a try some time."