

The Rise and Fall of the 'AntiSubud' Site

By Sahlan Diver

There is a web site entitled 'AntiSubud' (http://www.freewebs.com/disaster_area/), which comes with its own twisted and distorted version of the Subud symbol, and features a mass of derogatory comment about Subud.

Would you like to visit it?

Probably not, which would be a pity as there is material there that, despite the web site's title, could be of value to Subud. And, as a Subud visitor you wouldn't be alone – many Subud members have engaged in discussion on the AntiSubud site.

The AntiSubud site was started, in 2003, by a Canadian Subud member who identifies himself on the site as 'Ryan'. He says he found Subud through a friend, a non-member, whose father was a helper.

As you might guess, Ryan is now an ex-Subud member. He was apparently in Subud for eight years.

The web site divides into a number of pages, which I will deal with one by one, leaving the most interesting page till last.

First, the home page.

Ryan starts by saying:

The aim of this site is to provide information about Subud from a different perspective. What's bad, what's good, and what's just downright wonky. My approach is unflattering, and is very much tied to my experience. I have no intention of raising the ire of Subud members, to each his own. Anyway, that would prove a difficult task, as Subud members tend to be a pretty docile bunch. My goal here is to get people thinking.

Leaving out the assessment of Subud members, that's not a million miles from what is said on the home page of Subud Vision – another web site that wants to get people thinking about what is good and bad in Subud.

Ryan then offers links to web sites where readers unfamiliar with Subud can find further information. The links include Subud's official site www.subud.org.

Tellingly, he then goes on to say: 'It is claimed that Subud is neither religion nor cult, but direct contact with God. My own experience has led me to reject Subud as more or less a cult....'

Ryan then sets out his personal perspective on Subud, which includes this statement: 'Some members claim that Subud has atheist members, however, I've never encountered one.'

From this he draws the conclusion: 'This ultimate requirement for faith is where Subud fails in its promise of direct contact with God.'

However, in my experience, although members tend not to talk much about their religious beliefs, one is aware that there are agnostics and skeptics in Subud, which

shows that Ryan's claim that members are required to have faith in God is untrue.

At the bottom of the AntiSubud site home page, there are links to the other pages on the site. First, there is a FAQ page. Ironically, this has quite a good explanation for a newcomer of what Subud and the latihan is. As most of us know from experience, it is very difficult to explain Subud well to others. There are a few factual inaccuracies about members' beliefs and behaviour, but, on the whole, the page is very fair in its comment. However, this page does contain some annoying diagrams, looking like something out of a medieval book on witchcraft – anyone not familiar with Subud might easily think these have some connection with Subud, i.e. that they were taken from a Subud 'text-book'.

Another page, the 'Concise Guide to Subud-speak' page, purports to translate typical remarks made by Subud members into what they really mean. This is the kind of thing one might find in a Campbell and Bolt Subud joke book, though Ryan lacks their finely tuned skill with humour. If read by a Subud member, Ryan's 'translations' would cause the occasional chuckle. However the problem with this page is that it is just as likely to be read by a non-Subud audience who are not in on the joke, and who therefore could easily get the impression we are a collection of weak, insincere and brainwashed idiots.

For example, according to Ryan, 'I just finished doing Ramadan; it was great,' means: 'I really want to be a Muslim, but can't make the commitment.' Such a statement is just plain silly. I myself did Ramadan for many years, without the slightest interest in becoming a Muslim, and I know members who are Jewish or Christian who also have no interest in converting to Islam but do Ramadan simply because they see the fast as being of great value. There are many other such examples on the page which the readers can judge for themselves.

Two other pages on the site, the page explaining the 'meaning' of the AntiSubud symbol with its jagged lines, and the page entitled, 'Proof that Subud Is a Cult', also disappoint with a similar mixture of mild humour and opinionated inaccuracy.

More promising, perhaps, is the 'Links' page. Interesting that nearly half the links are to well-known official or personal Subud web sites. Of the remainder, one might be concerned that the linked New Zealand 'cult information site' has Subud flagged with a flashing red danger flag. Concerned, that is, until one notices that the only organisations getting green OK flags are all described with language like: '...believes that reaching the masses will happen when the body of Christ moves in unity in the community.' Not difficult to guess the angle those people are coming from!

Another page on Ryan's site describes a bad experience he had with an enterprise venture that didn't understand the distinction between good business judgment and allowing business decisions to be made by the *kejiwaan*. Not surprisingly the enterprise came to grief. There are many such stories from the heyday of Subud enterprises in the 1970s, and in the '80s from Anugraha (<http://www.subudvision.org/sd/Trial%20by%20Feelings.htm>). Ryan's story shows that such mistakes are still being made. On the other hand there are not a few businesses run by Subud members that have carried on being quietly successful for decades, and there are also others of us who have been guilty of business gaffes, *kejiwaan* motivated or not, who have learned from our mistakes and moved on to do things much better the next time.

Finally, we get to the page that, in my opinion, is of most value – the 'Comments' page. http://www.freewebs.com/disaster_area/Comments.htm

Maybe what I have written so far has put you off visiting the AntiSubud site, but I

consider this one long page full of interesting comment and counter-comment about Subud to be well worth a visit on its own.

If the Comments page is working properly you can expect to see a feedback form and questionnaire at the top, followed by a mass of comments from non-members, ex-members and members.[* see footnote about a technical problem with the comments page]

The Comments page includes many messages of appreciation for the site:

— I must give it to you - how many Subud sites have such decent FAQs, never mind so-called anti-subud sites.

— If Subud can survive a critic, then it can only get stronger, right?

— I think it's good to have an intelligent critical site about Subud. Plenty of people leave Subud and I often wonder why. One day it might be me.

— Given the time, ideas and effort you put in this website, it is hard to believe that you are truly 'Anti Subud'. I even start thinking that you are part of Subud who want to explore the different or opposite sides of Subud opinion and spirituality in order to understand more or give positive feedback to Subud.

— I like what I've seen of this website. I wish I could discuss Subud in such a frank and open manner on Subud websites, but unfortunately there are the odd pious ones who won't hear of any dissent and scathe those that question the orthodoxy. This is a nonsense in Subud, really; we have no orthodoxy - only a culture and tradition, which certain people like to legislate upon, or else form a loose dogma. Don't worry - we won't let them!

Then there are interesting questions from enquirers about Subud. WSA take note! Shouldn't we have an official, easily accessible web facility for people to ask questions?

— How do the Subud [people] treat women? Are they second-class? Intellectually less worthy?

— I'm interested in Subud and wanted to find comments of general dissatisfaction with the practice. There is very little on *this* site to discourage one from the attempt.

— I appreciate your site. I'm thinking of joining, and it's refreshing to read something from somebody who speaks normal English and whose first name isn't Aladdin or Shaitan or something like that!

— I firstly want to thank you for your information I have gained from your website. I am currently a Muslim who for the last two years has been involved with a Muslim girl from a family very heavily involved with Subud.

Then there are discussions about Subud, and messages from people who have had bad Subud experiences. The most interesting of these is from a lady whose message I reprint extracts from below. I encourage readers of this article to visit the Anti-Subud site to read this most interesting message in full:

...My parents were devout listeners/followers of Bapak, consistently practiced fasting at Ramadan and even converted to Muslim back in the '80s. We weren't allowed to eat pork, ever, and I wasn't allowed to wear pants because

of things that Bapak said and what my mom received. I finally saved up enough allowance and babysitting money in junior high to buy my first pair of pants. To this day, and I'm in my late thirties, I rarely ever wear skirts/dresses! This may seem like a silly thing to be disgruntled about, and I have made peace with it as an adult, but it's a great example of the dogmatic and cult-like behavior that Subud members have displayed over the years. It wasn't just my parents that were so enamoured of Bapak; all the members of that generation did (or seemed to from my perspective), and took his word as gospel, no matter how much they said there was no dogma.

...Again, another silly-sounding thing, but I was so brainwashed that pork would make me sick it took me a good portion of my life to actually try it, slowly at first, afraid that I might get sick, and then to work through all the guilt about eating it. (And let's not even get started about the whole no-sex-before-marriage dogma - bodily pleasure is the lower forces....it goes on and on).

...Someone had a post here about Subud parents and that they should not even talk about Subud to their kids until they were twenty or so. Nice thought but impossible - it was so ingrained into every part of our lives and vocabulary, and where we went on vacation (only to Subud congress events), and where my parents went every Tuesday and Thursday night, and why I couldn't spend the night at my non-Subud friend's house, and all the other rules, etc. My only consolation is that I wasn't forced to go to a mainstream church or bible study like many children were. Thank 'God' for that!!!

... I do truly forgive my parents - they were just doing the best they could and trying to raise us with their ideals for a better world. I have friends that grew up in hippy communes and we have very similar experiences/ issues.

I have titled this article 'The Rise and *Fall* of the Anti-Subud site'. Why *Fall*? The AntiSubud site has not been maintained since 2004. People are still putting messages on the site, but there appears to be no editing of these messages. This is evidenced by a small number of unpleasant, abusive comments that have not been removed. Also, Ryan's given email contact address is no longer valid. Prior to writing this article, I tried to contact Ryan through 'Freewebs', the site's hoster, but they were unable to help me.

Freewebs, like all web site hosters, have rules about appropriate content. If someone were to post an obscene or abusive message to the AntiSubud site, and this were not edited out by Ryan, then, as the hosters, Freewebs could close it down. This might never happen, or it might happen anytime soon, so, if you are interested, I recommend you take a look while the AntiSubud web site is still there. (http://www.freewebs.com/disaster_area/)

* There can be a problem with the Anti-Subud site Comments page that is no fault of the web site itself:

My computer has the popular Internet Explorer web browser and it was showing the Comments page as a small feedback form and nothing else. No actual comments were visible. I found out the reason was that Internet Explorer was blocking some web sites, including Ryan's AntiSubud site, as being a computer security risk.

If you use the Internet Explorer browser and this happens to you, go to Internet Options /Security /Restricted Sites, highlight *freewebs*, and press the *Remove* button - this will allow you to use all the facilities on the site. Warning: following these instructions is *at your own risk*. Probably Ryan's site is safe - we can only guess as to why Internet Explorer chooses to

block it and other *freewebs* sites. My colleagues who are using Apple Mac computers had no such problem with the Comments page.