

# Subud Is a Bud

## Looking at our Subud culture

By Stefan Freedman

Some point to the bud:

‘It will open by itself in God’s time. Use force and it will break.’

Others point to the roots:

‘Pot too small, earth too dry. Let’s create better growing conditions.’

A lively discussion about Subud is going on, and all views are being considered. This report contains a list of ideas from Subud members about protecting the bud, enlarging the Subud pot and moistening the earth. I’ve included personal anecdotes and observations.

Stefan Freedman, Information co-ordinator for WSA initiative, Ipswich, UK, July 25, 2008

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### **Section 2: WHY? What led up to this and what’s the point?**

World Congress aims to hear your views (via delegates) and turn them into actions. One theme that kept coming up at the last World Congress is this:

Some Subud communities, fortunately, are thriving, with new enquirers and new members coming in. But many groups are experiencing the opposite.

- Membership aging, becoming too old to attend group latihans, dying off
- High percentage of new members leaving (often after about one year)
- Very few enquirers or applicants

This prompted an initiative called ‘Being Present’ which encouraged Subud members and groups to become more open and accessible to the public. This is ongoing.

It also prompted a process of self-enquiry. Is there something we could do differently? If the problem were a signpost, what would it be telling us?

In between congresses, the ‘World Subud Council’ meets to review how things are shaping up and to keep things progressing. Meeting in Ascot, UK, last August a Compact Council gave their action team (WSA) this project:

Engage in an honest and fearless appraisal of how we function — from groups to the international (and all layers in between).

Scary brief, huh? I was co-opted by Garrett as an extra pair of hands in this. I'm fascinated by how individuals and organisations receive feedback and adapt (or don't). Some of my experience and training could be useful\* so that's why I'm penning this report. Hope you'll write back to me when you've read it.

So WSA invite you — Subud individuals and groups — to ask searching questions about our Subud culture. What serves us and what doesn't? What needs to be changed and how might we do it better?

This invitation is ongoing. Reflect on your own experience. Write about it, or talk informally with a Subud friend, or meet in your group or region. Let us know what's important for you by emailing me at [stefan@subud.org](mailto:stefan@subud.org)

The report includes voices from meetings of Subud members in many countries as well as from individual letters and feedback. The brief Garrett gave me included 'help to integrate insights and recommendations from the Subud Vision process'. The WSA team thank all those whose ideas have shaped this report. Something worthwhile that's been omitted? Please let us know. To see what's bubbling up, read on....

\*My degree was Social Science. Past work includes research and community relations. Current work includes facilitating international groups and promoting peace through the arts. Living (in the 1980s) as part of an organic farming community I had vivid lessons in what happens when a group becomes inward looking, viewing the 'outside world' as unenlightened.

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### **Section 3: Overview: summary of areas being discussed**

**Q** Is there some way that more people will find Subud?

**A** Members' responses include these suggestions:

- Glow more brightly. The key is not to get stressed or despondent. Deepen your latihan and people may be attracted by the stillness they feel in your presence.
- Appreciate one another. Latihan, for many, is a respite from efforts and from words. Socials are times of celebration. So when can Subud members really get to know one another? How to discover one another's dreams, struggles and unresolved issues?
- Be honest and authentic. Don't make everything sugar coated. When we can be 'real' with one another new members will want to stay, and others will be drawn.
- All gloom and doom? Far from it. Fresh breezes are a-blowin'.
- Sharing vulnerability. Latihan can bring about changes — inner and outer — not always comfortable. What if we don't want to be 'helped' but need a different support?
- Public visibility. Do you find it hard to talk about Subud? Do people see us as a secretive group? How can our leaflets and websites connect with the public?

- Help helpers communicate. Suggestions for mutual learning and skills to support helper work.
- Improve the applicant's experience. Three months of torture in order to gain access?
- Understanding Bapak. Members hold contrasting views on the role of Bapak's talks in Subud's future. One member suggests a way to reconcile some differences.
- Speak local lingo. To an outsider Subud can seem self-enclosed. How can we swim with today's current of ideas and words? What are the new generation of spiritually orientated people interested in?
- Plant seeds in your own garden. Individuals and local groups are the beating heart of Subud. How can the organisation support you and your group?
- What are the 'stuck' aspects of our association?
- How do we create a more flexible and responsive organisation? Change requires management. Easy to get enthusiastic about change, but hard to overcome inertia and habit. How about...?

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#### **Section 4: NO SWEAT! Deepen your latihan. Leave change to God.**

Letter to WSA on February 21, 2008

'Dear Sister and Brother,

I don't want to hurt anybody but I would like to say that we have a wonderful way to know more about oneself and the group and everything, it's the *latihan*. Do you remember?'

(longstanding, respected French helper)

Feedback to us includes a number of comments and letters like this, saying, in effect, stop all this discussion about change. The endless concern agitates the mind, dissipating the latihan's gift of harmony and inner peace. Any answers we need, we can find through surrendering, so relinquish all worries and trust that God has everything in hand.

I confess that initially I dismissed this as merely 'fear and resistance to change'. The insightful researcher and writer, John Kenneth Galbraith, observed: 'When faced with a choice between changing and proving that there's no need to do so, most people get busy on the proof.'

From the titles alone of Bapak's collected talks: *Subud in the World, All of Mankind, Subud and the Active Life*, we are reminded how keen he was for us to be something very different from a contemplative order. He urged us to balance inner growth with outer growth, to take initiatives, be courageous, to learn and to adapt ourselves. So the peace we may feel in latihan does not lead us to shun normal discourse but, rather, to infuse it with awareness.

But I've benefited from talking and testing with those who hold the view 'just

surrender'. What became clear to me was how easily I can get caught up with ideas about change. I had been thinking of Subud's challenges as Important and Urgent. In doing so I sometimes became zealous, forgot my sense of fun and lost sight of the context. Evolving the organisation and 'culture' makes sense only if at the heart of Subud there are people feeling the latihan deeply. The art, then, is to practise maintaining the feeling of connection. To cultivate a calm and compassionate feeling while facing up to nitty gritty issues.

NSMs (new spiritual movements) which flourished in the 1960s – 70s are mostly ageing and fading, yet Buddhism has been enjoying a huge revival. Why? Largely as a result of modern writers like Thich Nhat Hanh\* who advocate 'engaged Buddhism' using one's practice to benefit society. This is reminiscent of Bapak's advice to integrate spirituality and worldliness. To be able to 'walk your talk' seems to be what a lot of modern people are looking for. So the 'just surrender' approach contributes this reminder:

*Aim to stay centred while discussing ideas and planning action.*

\*Thich Naht Hanh is one of the best known Buddhist teachers in the West. He coined the term 'interbeing' and his practices appeal to people from various religious and political backgrounds.

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## **Section 5: HOW TO GET REAL (please see also Section 8 on 'Visioning')**

On latihan nights there is amnesty. We aim to leave our differences outside. As we remove our shoes and quieten ourselves we let our concerns drift away. Then, in our meetings, we try to maintain inner calm and to be harmonious. This can have a down side (or two). We may end up relating in a polite and superficial way without ever getting to know the 'real' vibrant person. It can feel as if there's social pressure not to raise any issue which peels away the veneer of group harmony.

I heard an example of this from a very longstanding member. She told me that she'd stopped doing latihan with her group and preferred to exercise at home. I knew her as very sociable and was surprised. She explained that every time she raised an issue her group acted as though she were in crisis. (She wasn't. She's a very sane and level headed person.) The final straw was when she wanted to make a suggestion at a group meeting and one of the helpers said — in what she felt was a sanctimonious manner — 'Before we discuss this, I think we all need to have a quiet.' She left the meeting and that was when she left her group.

This is a tendency that many Subud groups are now remedying. There's a hunger in the air for more depth and more honesty in communications.

Several gatherings have now explored an interview-based approach that corporations use to stimulate discussion and change, called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). I attended the 'pilot' in Lewes, UK in January. I was invited to interview and be interviewed by a member who I had seen at congresses for over 30 years. Our backgrounds are very different and somehow we'd never stopped to speak personally. The searching questions gave us a way to bypass chitchat and to talk in depth. Warmth, understanding and empathy arose in a short space of time. All now assembled to look at common threads which surfaced in our interviews. Finally, how to turn these into practical ways of building on our strengths.

Similar workshops have taken place now in France (at La Source), Germany and elsewhere. They are fun, energising and seed practical ideas. There's an info pack we can send you....

Another framework which corporations use has been tried by Subud members in Australia and in the UK. The 'open space' approach enables participants to propose a number of discussion topics. Each discussion is held in its own area (or room) while people are free to move from one discussion to another. This frees people from the typical 'stuck' feeling that can arise in meetings. Smaller groups enable everyone to be heard, while the flexibility allows people to contribute in the areas that are most alive for them.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_Space\\_Technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology)

The Australian members 'open space' session documented a number of sound practical suggestions which I'll refer to on other pages (marked AOS for Australian Open Space).

I want to mention one other approach I recommend groups try — a simple format called 'conversation café'. This was used very successfully at the recent UK Ministry for Peace conference. It's ideal when there's only a short time available. Groups of up to eight people gather for about an hour of dialogue with some very enabling and simple rules. For example, each person in turn is heard before the discussion is opened up. At the end the talk turns to practical outcomes. More at [www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org)

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## **Section 6: NASTY NASTY (Being Positively Negative!)**

We (WSA) invited members to respond with their thoughts about this initiative. One member wrote, 'I think Subud will not progress unless it learns to reverse out of its unbalanced desire to always put a positive face on everything.'

This deepens the question about being authentic. What can we do when 'honesty' conflicts with 'harmony'?

From what we hear (directly and indirectly) many members have experienced a suppression of their viewpoint if it challenges the status quo. Those who feel unheard may become marginalised, and ambivalent about their group. Some of those I've heard this from are second or third generation Subud members who feel that everyone wants to advise them but nobody is taking their input seriously. Eventually most of these people leave Subud.

Telling someone they're being negative is disrespectful. Offering to test with them may not always be what they are needing. How would it be if we create a culture in which it's normal to voice a complaint and have it taken seriously? Listening without judgement, keeping an open mind may be all that's required.

When it comes to improving the functioning of our organisation, honest criticism is gold dust. It's like the mechanic diagnosing what's not working so he can fix the engine. Not all criticisms will be accurate or will lead to improvements, but a proportion of them certainly will. An appropriate response to a 'negative' sounding remark would be:

'What happened that led you to this point of view?' and then 'Can you say more about how you would prefer things to be?'

For more on this theme see my article 'Handling Hot Issues'.

([www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org))

A side-effect of our desire for surface harmony is difficulty in acknowledging or resolving serious ongoing disputes. If, after talking and testing, there are still parties who feel unjustly treated there is good case for calling a skilled and impartial mediator (who doesn't personally know the people in question). This will mean employing a professional unconnected with our association.

(for example: [www.nvc-resolutions.co.uk/index.php/Mediation.html](http://www.nvc-resolutions.co.uk/index.php/Mediation.html))

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## **Section 7: REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL — the good news**

If you've read this far you've earned some light relief. I'd buy you coffee and cake if I could.

There's so much good happening in Subud. It just doesn't hit the front page news.

- *Mithra Project In India Steadily Growing* is — regrettably — not hot gossip.
- *YUM Indonesian Welfare Scheme Still Strong After Many Years* is also not a headliner

Here are some more headlines that deserve to be seen:

- Many Helpers Do Outstanding Job
- Longstanding Dedicated Pillars of Subud Committee Work Continue to Support Us
- 'Helpers Without Borders' Strengthen New Groups
- Subud Members With Widely Different Views Are Listening to One Another
- Ramdanjiwaan Brown Is Now Ron Brown
- Fred Pomfret Is Now Susanna Pomfret

Oh all right — the last two are fantasy, but the rest are fact.

Talking about change, becoming open to honest feedback and criticism is not a comfortable process. I notice that for some it's pretty excruciating! I just hope you know — all you Subud stalwarts out there — that without you the whole structure would crumble to dust. You are wanted, needed and very strongly appreciated.

Every healthy organism — be it a person or a group — needs agents of change and agents of maintenance, so whichever role you're currently playing we appreciate your dedication to it, and award you an invisible badge of merit (the angels can see it!).

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## Section 8: VULNERABILITY AS STRENGTH (and Visioning)

I'd like to tell you a personal story.

I read about Subud in my local library and was opened at the age of 18. It took time, but once the latihan became established I felt a huge sense of gratitude. Even without Bapak's advice not to evangelise I'd have been reticent to talk about Subud. It was virtually unknown and different from any previous experience. Hard to compare with something else, hard to describe. I would wait until the results showed — till I was 'a glowing example'.

A few years on, as a stressed school teacher, I developed a nervous tic. Aargh!

Can't talk about Subud now. Not when I look like a nervous wreck. If I was tired, had a headache, felt irritable or depressed etc., I thought, 'What kind of advertisement am I?' Sometimes I'd find myself talking to a friend and Subud would come up. (At last, at last, a chance. Don't blow it!) I'd try to feel the latihan and talk 'from the inner' but would get nervous and tongue tied. Frustrated, my voice would start to quaver. I suppose the message I'd absorbed was: "You are custodian of something important for the world" and — charged with that mighty mission — I felt both pressure and failure.

Fifteen years later I started working with adult groups, meeting a diversity of people such as Buddhists, Pagans, agnostics who meditate and yoga enthusiasts. It was also at this time that I made my first gay friends, and that a family member 'came out'. I was getting more relaxed about describing the latihan and often left introductory leaflets out when I was teaching. But I feared there would be a mismatch between the values of my work associates and some of the in-house values they would read or hear in conversation if they became interested. In several cases this proved to be so. Challenging the Subud status quo would — I feared — be 'unharmonious' so again I was in conflict and stuck.

I didn't perceive these dilemmas as 'personal problems' to test about with helpers. What I really wanted was a chance to discuss and unravel these issues with equals. I needed to be able to talk over these conflicts with people who wouldn't patronise, 'quick-fix' or judge me.

Today, appreciative of similar qualities in others, I look at sensitivity as an asset. I'm happy to talk about Subud without trying to be anything other than 'me', with my vulnerability on display. I still have a struggle with what seem to be Subud 'norms'.

In Portland, Oregon, the group initiated open meetings to give members a chance to get to know one another more deeply, to air issues, to give and receive support as equals. (This is the quality of support I yearned for during all those years!) Members of the group are involved in a local community project, balancing 'self-care' with being outward looking. Portland, we take our hats off to you, and hope you'll write more....

In England and Scotland more recently, sessions — inspired by this process have given a different flavour to regional and national meetings. The process is known as 'visioning'. It can yield practical results too, and has, for example, prompted the Lewes group to look for larger premises.

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## Section 9: HELLO WORLD — Subud meets today's public

Most members agree with Bapak's advice not to proselytise or make propaganda. However, we each interpret it differently.

Group A say 'just do the latihan and leave membership up to God'

Group B say 'be more willing to mention it to friends'

Group C say 'make efforts to put Subud on the map'

Their proposals include getting books into libraries, putting information (small and low key) in magazines with a spiritual leaning — such as Resurgence, writing articles, putting leaflets in the local health shop. These ideas apply in UK, Canada, USA etc. while other ideas may work better in Indonesia, India and Africa.

Group D say 'arrange open evenings, arts events, concerts, talks with slides, youth activities or other events that bring the public to Subud informally' (Salamah Pope's article develops this theme: [www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org))

Examples: a meal which Subud Edinburgh provide annually for attendees of a Peace and Spirituality festival; a large public/family event (600 people) held this month at Loudwater farm; an open air concert to which Norwich group are inviting the public this August.

Group E say 'just advertise, giving straightforward information rather than hype'

Group F say 'stop focussing on Subud committees and get out into the wider world'

A specific proposal about this came from the Australian Open Space session. Host an Interfaith event. Aim for Subud to become a respected host and to learn more about the faiths and cultures of all participants.

WSA encourage groups to discuss these alternatives and to feel free to experiment. Bear in mind that when there was a large influx of members, most heard of Subud either through the Gurdjieff network or through the sensational newspaper article about Eva Bartok's healing. Today there is neither a ready made network of interested people nor a newsworthy story, and Subud books are rarely found now in libraries and bookshops. Effectively we're hugging the latihan as if it is 'our little secret'!

Websites are becoming a common 'portal' whereby people discover the world of possibilities. Here are three ways we might improve our website interface with the public:

- Make them easier to find (eg exchange links with other sites; place entries in online directories)
- Make them fun, visual and interactive (include a questionnaire for browsers/enquirers and some humour such as an animated cartoon)
- Review the wording to be sure that it's attractive to people of all faiths (or none). Test the wording out on non-Subud friends, relay their frank feedback and improve it.

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## **Section 10: STOP HELPING ME — new resources for helpers**

Since Subud began to spread around the world, we poor helpers have been under fire. Untrained volunteers who can expect no official appreciation, no official holidays or retirement present (or even retirement) soldiering on stoically for decades. It seems unfair don't you think — to have to endure endless criticism and carping?

Helpers deserve a huge accolade. We play a key role because, to be blunt, you really can't get opened without getting past us! We can be either a gateway to Subud or an obstacle.

At the last world congress and in later conversations the following was reported:

- Overbearing or bossy helpers
- Interfering helpers offering unasked for advice
- Helpers who talk endlessly and who lecture applicants
- Those who are past their 'sell by date' but won't become inactive

On a more subtle level some members (including helpers) are hesitant to invite friends and family to applicant meetings. The concern is that one or more helpers present will lack the skills to accommodate their views and will accidentally repel them.

From the recent Australian Open Space meetings:

- Some language in Subud is 'inbred'
- Much discussion about helpers alienating new people by imposing the Words 'Almighty God', or saying that some of the new person's religious practices aren't suitable (meditation, yoga)

A simple suggestion that many members propose is for helpers to develop their listening skills. In the teaching profession we learn that it's not really about teaching but about supporting learning. Likewise for an effective helper it's often not about helping (and definitely not about 'Helping'). The art is to create a safe space for another to explore their own experience. Rather than give a ready-made solution, ask a question.

Carl Rogers, renowned therapist and author, observed that his clients made significant progress when they were allowed to structure their own sessions. His presence provided a safety valve. He would witness the unfolding of their understanding with what he described as 'unconditional positive regard'. This has additional benefits in that the client feels respected and empowered — never invaded or pushed.

A swift way of learning and practicing this skill is known as 'co-counselling'. (Sometimes known as Re-evaluation Counselling.) It can be learned in two weekends.

Another tool which I can commend to Subud members, particularly in their helper role, is called non-violent communication (NVC). The approach enables one to notice 'jackal words' which we all use habitually but which contain hidden barbs or judgements.

Some Subud members in France (la Source) and in Canada have started meeting to

explore the usefulness of NVC and I trust we'll be hearing more, as they gain experience and confidence in applying it.

NVC develops a capacity to listen deeply. To understand the raw feelings and unmet needs that fuel conflict. Having taken a few weekend courses I've been very impressed at the difference it's made to my ability to hear criticism, and even anger, as useful information. I've also become better at identifying my own feelings and needs and taking responsibility for them. The basic framework can be covered in a day, though I recommend the full introductory weekend. Here's a worldwide directory of places where one can attend a course (failing that, there are — of course — books and DVDs). Another option is for a group of Subud members to employ an NVC trainer to give an introduction, perhaps at a congress or regional meeting:

[www.cnvc.org/en/cirt-directory-qmap](http://www.cnvc.org/en/cirt-directory-qmap)

Years ago, when I lived in London, a delightful group helper from Indonesia couldn't quite get her tongue round the word 'helper'. In her loud, gleeful voice she would refer to 'the yelper meeting'. Smiles and chuckles all round. I miss that. If we helpers started calling ourselves 'yelpers', there'd be a lot more levity.

'He deserves paradise who makes his companions laugh.' (The Holy Koran)

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## **Section 11: LESSONS FROM A DENTIST (or how to torture applicants)**

First, tell the applicant to relax and feel at home. You may even say 'This won't hurt a bit!' (Try not to cackle sadistically as you say this.)

Then right away proceed with the drilling. Let them know about the *jiwa*, the *nafsu* and about purification, the seven life forces — material, vegetable, animal etc., the experiences Bapak had when he first received latihan, Ibu Rahayu, the outer structure of Subud with regions, zones, congresses, WSA, committees, welfare and SDA, educational and enterprise projects, not forgetting Subud's 'Wings' such as SICA, SIHA and youth. Describe 'testing', the quiet period before latihan (not to be confused with meditation) and why we remove jewellery and why we need to latihan separately. To be thorough, mention 'prihatin', 'special latihan', 'talent testing', latihan at home after about three months, and be sure to throw in some warnings about 'crisis', 'mixing', how the analytical mind can be an obstacle, and the danger of too much latihan, not to mention 'runaway latihan', perhaps some advice on what to wear and when in the month not to attend. Now be sure to explain the helpers' role and the full meaning of Susila Buddhi Dharma, the importance of patience, sincerity and submission, the thousand or so talks readily available to members, and that Subud is simple and has no teachings.

Ooops! You seem to have mislaid your applicant. Ah well, they obviously weren't Subud material.

A lot of members, independently, have made the same proposal (e.g. AOS):

*The three month mandatory applicant period is far too long.*

At Coombe Springs in the 1950s there was a huge influx and no waiting period. To help keep track of members and stem the flood of openings the applicant period was introduced. Now we live in a much faster world. Modern society via the Internet has instant access to a bewildering menu of options and time is no longer measured in

months but in nanoseconds. And do we still have a problem about too many applicants? Make the preliminaries shorter and more flexible.

Some members report that whereas applicants have an overwhelming amount of contact with helpers, the opposite can apply after they're opened. Sometimes just the simplest invitation is needed such as 'any questions or anything you'd like to talk about?' or 'how do you feel your latihan is going?'

Helissa Penwell reports that in her group the rather denigrating term 'applicant' (sounds like supplicant?) has been replaced with 'inquirer' and the 'probationary period' (seems to refer to a prisoner) is called an 'inquiry period'.

Another point raised (AOS) 'several members mentioned that the notion of Subud being "special" and its members having exclusive access to "grace of God" is unattractive to outsiders'. Unfortunately it's a bit of a cliché. Groups who think they have exclusive rights to heaven are waving a red flag saying 'avoid'! This is explored more fully by Lilliana Gibbs — in her article. ([www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org))

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## **Section 12: REDISCOVER BAPAK**

I'm going to be candid. Of all the issues where there is discussion the one that causes the most discomfort is on the role of Bapak's words in Subud's future.

Those who treasure Bapak's guidance lament the idea of his talks lying in an archive, forgotten by the members. In some cases they (we) knew him personally and have an enormous feeling of affection and gratitude. In their enthusiasm they arrange for Bapak talks and videos at their groups and at congresses, wishing that more people would come and experience the benefit. Hearing criticism of Bapak is puzzling and acutely painful. It may seem as though a rebel faction is 'wanting to destroy Subud'.

But that's a misunderstanding. It turns out that 'the other camp' are also devoted to the latihan. Attitudes vary, and include:

- I find certain ideas distancing or offensive (eg statements about homosexuality)
- I find some value but want to de-emphasise our founder's words and personality so that Subud is clearly seen not to have a dogma or a teacher
- I can't relate to Bapak's way of explaining things — not relevant to my latihan

Those who want to de-emphasise Bapak's words are not (generally) against individual members cherishing Bapak's talks, but challenge the assumption that everything Bapak said is infallible and has to be believed. Bapak himself made no such claim and emphasised that he was a fallible human.

There is also concern that many members have (unconsciously) adopted familiar phrases from Bapak's talks without noticing that they evoke a very specific religious framework. When, for example, we say 'latihan is prayer' or 'by the grace of Almighty God', this is spoken in all innocence. Yet it would alienate not only an agnostic but also most religious people because it's out of tune with their own familiar terms.

Rozak Tatebe suggests a way of reconciling these two perspectives (writing

on July 23rd 2008) as part of the discussion on [www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org)).

[edited extracts...] 'Bapak travelled the world many times, giving more than 1300 talks — but only to Subud members. Why? Someone — maybe Ian Arnold — asked Bapak about this once, and Bapak replied that the explanation to the public should be given not by Bapak but by Subud members, using their own languages, that is, using the words and terminology which are understandable by people living there.

'I think that this suggests that Bapak himself was aware that words, notions and terminology he used were based on the culture he belonged to, and are not necessarily acceptable by people living in different cultures and different religious backgrounds. I think that, nevertheless, he had to use the language he was familiar with because there was no other choice and no one can do otherwise.'

Our thanks, Rozak, for this helpful clarification. For those interested in finding 'fresh words' this is encouraging news.

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### **Section 13: SPEAK LOCAL LINGO**

We take our shoes off before latihan and allow our thoughts to become still. But for everyday life we put our shoes back on and switch our minds back on. It wouldn't be appropriate, for example, to drive home with your mind out of service!

The busy brain, an impediment during latihan, is needed in order to participate fully in daily life. Nevertheless there seems to be a tendency among longstanding latihaners to avoid 'heavy' thinking in order to retain a calm inner feeling. It seems that not many read books or articles which keep them up with the current of ideas and words with which the next generation might express their spiritual discoveries.

So in case you missed them, here are a few buzzwords:

*Emotional intelligence*: the ability to receive verbal and non-verbal messages from other people, to be comfortable with your own and other peoples' emotions. (related to this — 'emotional literacy')

*Grounded Spirituality*: 'You gotta be somebody before you can be nobody.' Bapak's interest in balancing inner awakening with an organised practical life is in tune with the new wave of spiritual explorers.

*Meditation*: used today in a very general sense. For many busy people it's simply a short spell of calm, allowing racing thoughts and feelings to quieten without effort — very much like the pre-latihan quiet we so much appreciate. (see Buddhism and Subud [www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org))

*Mindfulness*: calm awareness. Behind the chatter of the mind exists the possibility of being fully present in the moment. This has some resonance with Bapak's description of the interplay of life forces, and his explanation of why he quietened himself before eating.

*Spiritual Intelligence*: it's not just in Subud that people talk about trusting their intuition or inner guidance; it's now a widespread idea. Key elements in spiritual intelligence are balance and integration.

I may already be out of date. Language — like everything else today — is part of the quickfire environment of change. What I do notice is how ‘tired’ some well worn Subud phrases can sound. How about some simple research? Go online and find a ‘spiritual search’ chat site. See what people are talking about and the language they’re using. Check out what the Buddhists say, and those involved in interspiritual dialogue.

The following is from the recent Australian Open Space meeting: ‘Language needs to be fresh, alive, communicate using the seeker’s own choice of words and beliefs so it appeals and is understood.’

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## **Section 14: HAPPENINGS — Invigorating Subud’s Grassroots**

A veil lifted when I read:

‘The local group is the sharp end of Subud.’  
(Sahlan Diver in ‘Blueprint For Change’ [www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org))

When I visit larger Subud groups I notice a typical pattern. Let’s say there are 40 members and I want to talk about starting a local project:

8 attend rarely and don’t wish to get roped in to activities,  
8 more are elderly and frail  
8 are already over-committed with work, voluntary work and family life  
10 are busy with group, regional, national, zonal and international helper work  
3 form the group committee  
3 hold regional or zonal committee jobs (or SICA, SIHA, SDA etc)

Who’s left to help me start up a local project? (Nobody)

We’ve created such an elaborate structure of roles and functions to serve the association that (unintentionally) we’ve depleted ourselves of energy at the grassroots.

This can be reversed. A number of discussions have suggested that we prune and simplify our superstructure and reinvigorate the roots and shoots. This WSA initiative invites groups to discuss, brainstorm, vision or in any way you wish to gather your energies and focus them. Perhaps part of the solution is for all of us involved in committee work to make it clear and plain that *we are not in charge*. We exist, by your kindness, to support whatever initiatives are alive at the grassroots group level.

This may also be a key to Subud becoming part of the local community — something visible, familiar and accessible to the public.

See also ‘Opening Up The Future’ by Howard Melder ([www.subudvision.org](http://www.subudvision.org))

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## Section 15: GLUED — Why we get stuck in our ways

It's not just Subud. Most organisations get stuck in their ways, which is why the most successful ones always experiment, do research, invite feedback and embrace change.

A notable example of this is 'the scouts'. Originally it was exclusively for Christian boys — a bastion of 'good old fashioned values'. Then the movement was almost destroyed when accusations of abuse were rife. It went through a testing time which it handled by facing its problems head on, with full disclosure to the public. Now the scouts have re-emerged as a worldwide multifaith group of young women and men, building bridges between nations and religions. Their key to survival was successful adaptation. Can we learn from them?

In a book about organisational change (*Imaginization* by Gareth Morgan) the author explains the hazard. Many organisations accept the *idea* of change, talk about it endlessly, use new buzzwords, put up posters, charts, etc. but stay with their old habits and outmoded ways of thinking. This is known as 'the Deerhunter Syndrome'. You shoot the deer, mount the head on the wall and feel pleased with your trophy. But there's no life left in the deer.

Ask Subud members how we are stuck and the answers vary: too secretive, too long an applicant period, opinionated helpers, etc. These views by members are explored on other pages, so here I'll explore one new idea...

Apart from 'traditional' applicant meetings why not try something else?

I was impressed by an introductory evening to the Quakers which I attended to see how they do it. Here are the things that impressed me and made me feel cared for:

- Info was concise, non-pushy, and included a sketch map
- O.K. to 'drop in' unannounced
- I liked the name 'Quaker Quest' (gave it a tinge of excitement — like Star Trek!)
- I was welcomed by 'a greeter' who asked if I'd been before and if I knew what to expect? I did (I'd read info. online) and then I was offered tea or herb tea and 'finger food' — all of which helped me feel at home and less shy.
- We sat in a circle and 3 speakers each gave a short talk (6 mins) about why they were Quakers. The speakers had been well selected for contrast: one young, one agnostic (science background) and one warm and engaging. Between them they created a sense of broad inclusive values.
- Then we were invited to break into groups of three and talk about our own spiritual values. This interaction was fun and the room was buzzing.

Wouldn't it be great to arrange an introductory evening to Subud something along those lines? It may include music or a meal, and definitely some ice-breaking activity and interaction. I'm not imagining that a local group could do this weekly! I'm picturing several groups getting together, perhaps every 6 months, to offer a publically advertised and well planned event with an enjoyable atmosphere.

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## Section 16: UNSTUCK — The strange science of change

The way we now organise ourselves reflects what we are: a group of volunteers holding temporary positions. Of course it's hard to get continuity and to fill positions so we muddle through as best we can. Let's see if there's a way to become more dynamic:

We hear about perennial problems, such as ineffective helpers. We hear recommendations, such as (here's one from the last world congress): helpers should have a regular 'check up' and test how it is for the group if they keep serving in that role. The process should be conducted with all possible respect and love. Here's another (AOS): helpers should be elected by all group members rather than tested in exclusively by helpers. Their role should come up regularly for re-election.

So far this is just talk. There are 3 proposals on offer:

- helpers regularly test whether to remain active
- all members democratically appoint group helpers and review the situation
- leave things as they stand

O.K. we call a meeting to discuss it (National Council). To make it effective here's what needs to be done:

- The information and 3 options are sent to all delegates
- Prior discussion by email or phone takes place
- A second info. is sent summarising the discussion
- All delegates are expected to be up-to-date and on-the-ball by the time they meet to vote on the proposal, decide how best to implement it, and have a policy of follow through to help make the new approach stick, and to monitor how well it's working for the members.

This is an effective approach to change. Given the natural tendency for things to stay as they are or to slip back (inertia and habit) useful change needs to be well planned and managed.

'Lots of folks confuse bad management with destiny.' (Kin Hubbard)

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If you've read all of this you have my thanks and my respect.

WSA hopes that you will take any ideas from this big pile that could be useful to you or your group. Think about them, discuss them, act on them and please let us hear from you. [Stefan@freedmans.fsbusiness.co.uk](mailto:Stefan@freedmans.fsbusiness.co.uk)

I leave you with two final quotes. Keep smiling. With all good wishes from

Stefan

'Everything I did in my life that was worthwhile, I caught hell for.'  
(Earl Warren – social reformer and 16 years chief justice of the USA)

'When in doubt, make a fool of yourself. There is a microscopically thin line between being brilliantly creative and acting like the most gigantic idiot on earth. So what the hell, leap.' (Cynthia Heimel — popular author of books such as, *If You Leave Me Can I Come Too*)