

After Fifty Years: What I think is Needed

By Salamah Pope

Based largely on personal and anecdotal evidence, it looks to me—unfortunately—as though Subud may be fading away, “not with a bang but a whimper”. So here are some suggestions. These are not new. Over the years I have made some, perhaps all of them, to various office-holders in Subud, without any notice being taken or changes made. So thanks for the opportunity to spout my piece yet again.

What is right with Subud? A great deal: but you know all that, so I won't repeat it here.

What is wrong with Subud? It was a Norwegian psychologist who first pointed out to me that Subud is a closed, almost secret society. “We don't really—unconsciously—want new members”, he said. “We are comfortable as we are.” And, over the years I have observed this in different groups, and think it's true. But unless more people—especially young ones—come into Subud soon, we oldies will fade away, die out, and the young and middle-aged who do remain will not have sufficient critical mass to sustain an organisation.

I emphasise the young, because I have noticed, over and over again, that older people (say forty and over) who come in to Subud tend not to feel and/or experience much at their opening, and drift away again quite soon: whereas younger people coming in with less life experience are *more open to start with*, and get hooked—in spite of the helpers and the rest of us—and stay.

1. The Name

Change the spelling of “Subud” (which is usually pronounced “subb-udd”, or sometimes “subb-ood” by people before they hear it). Perhaps just put a ‘u’ in there, “Souboud”.

Or change the name altogether. When he first arrived in England, Bapak told Mr. Bennett that if it was not a suitable name for the West, he (Mr. B.) could change it.

2. Applicants

The helpers seem beyond repair. Lovely people, but IMHO many simply don't have what it takes to be “real” helpers operating from their inner. Therefore, when new people show interest, and have to come and spend three months with the helpers, well..., they are deluged with information, sometimes in quite inappropriate language, so it must be off-putting. Therefore, *shorten the applicants' period to one month.* (Such a drastic change would need a limited-time trial to see if it worked any better.)

3. Brochure

Get some PR people to work on a new brochure to introduce Subud to college and university students. Get them—PR and/or advertising people—to make a case for Subud. Some Subud siblings I know have suggested, variously: “Testing helps you to make good decisions” (Isaac Goff); “People of different religions can worship together without conflict” (Harris Smart); “No dogmas, no beliefs to adopt, no priesthood—and no payments” (I forget who).

Work all these into an attractive new brochure, thousands of copies of which could be left lying around in colleges, university libraries, tourist offices, local post offices, newsagents, etc.—as are plenty of other brochures for other spiritual groups.

Remember: the Subud symbol is attractive, so put that on the front of it.

4. Notices

Over and over again Bapak used to say, “Just be normal, just be ordinary.” So why can’t we in the Subud organisation do this? The “ordinary thing” in this case meaning doing as all the other spiritual groups do. We should put smallish (5 x 8 cms, say) notices in all the New Age magazines every month which would: display the Subud symbol, indicate that Subud is a source of subtle energy/spiritual energy/Spirit, and give a local contact phone number and e-mail address.

Alternatively, in the “Spiritual Training” section of these New Age magazines put small, three- or four-line ads, without the Subud symbol but with the same info in them. *Anything* to let the public know that Subud exists!

None of the Internet websites is really attractive—IMHO—and they can convey little if anything of the latihan. Why not get some good graphic artist/s to design one?

5. Books

Get some Subud books into at least the New Age bookshops. Reprint Harris Smart’s *Sixteen Steps*, for instance, or Harlinah Longcroft’s *Subud is a Way of Life*, Tony Bright-Paul’s *Stairway to Subud*, and even my *Antidote*. None of these is perhaps ideal, but better than nothing? Then get official Agents set up who will distribute them to ordinary bookshops in other countries. Bookshops still seem to be where many people go to search for “Something”.

6. “The” Book

Commission an interesting, can’t-put-downable, book—to be written by one of the talented authors in Subud. Or another anthology of Subud stories. (This is actually being worked on right now.) Or anything that will draw young people to Subud. Something with a well-designed cover and without the word “Subud” in the title, which I think is an off-putter. Why not a more attractive title, something like “A Source of Spirit”, “A New Dispensation”, “Panacea?”, “A Thief in the Night”, “The Essence of Mysticism”, etc. Again, to go into the New Age and regular bookshops.

7. Connect

Monitor and join in with public on-going religious and especially inter-faith debate.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly—

8. SICA

Throw some money—a lot—at SICA. Get it organised. Get an *administrator* in there, who can turn it into an umbrella under which all the different facets of culture—from arts and agriculture to philosophy and sciences (yes, there are some scientists in Subud!) and xylophone-playing, including SNSD, SEA, etc.—can share and co-operate in working methods and systems.

So set up a single, central, permanent, “SICA Central” office for files, information, communication, fund-raising, and archives for all the different sections. (Also, although I didn’t agree with all of Bachtiar Lorot’s dispositioning of the various branches of culture, you might do a lot worse than to go to back to his structure of the SICA organisation, which was ditched in 2001.) In any case, get the beautiful artists and creative types outta there, or, perhaps better still, bump them upstairs, and bring in a boring old bureaucrat or two to organise and run the whole variegated—and presently ultra-fragmented—caboodle as a basically unified whole.

Locally, bring local communities into SICA shows, performances, seminars, classes, lectures, workshops, exhibitions, etc. to attract more people—especially the young—into our Subud halls and houses. (We have a lot of talent in our groups, but it goes unseen!)

Ideally, such projects should exemplify, illustrate, and/or promote concepts and qualities associated with self-development and spirituality (it is fashionable these days), including the aim of becoming fully human—and humane.

Bapak once said that the function of Susila Dharma was “to repair the mistakes of the past” and the function of SICA was “*to improve the future of humankind*”. Well, if we don’t get SICA moving “to improve the future”, there may not be one much longer.