An Alternative Explanation of the Subud Exercise in Psychological Terms
By Merin Nielsen

Table of contents

Foreword:

What's in an explanation? It's an answer to what, how and why questions, attempting to understand complex phenomena in terms of simpler ones. But explanations needn't be 'true' — merely satisfying. They may refer to entities and processes which are observable or unobservable, metaphorical or allegorical. They may expediently deploy pre-defined concepts that are selected from traditional belief systems, or else laboriously delineate new concepts in terms of not-so-traditional understanding. The point of an explanation, though, is to satisfy. We all possess our own spiritual, cosmic or 'nature of reality' belief systems, which in the long run might matter less than we are inclined to imagine, but questions like what, how and why can keep on being posed in response to every answer — until at some point the questioner is satisfied.

The latihan needs no explanation in order to be practised, but I've been very dissatisfied with Pak Subuh's explanation of it, and so have gradually developed my own, presented here in case anybody else finds it satisfying. I don't claim it's true, just that it seems reasonable to me, so I'm open to considering other approaches. It will be declared that this or that account is 'all in the mind', 'from the material level', 'limited to the physical', 'rationalising away proof of the inner', misguided, impious, arrogant, ungodly and so on. Such responses, though, emerge from alternative mental frameworks simply created by differently contrived explanations of how the physical and spiritual facets of reality exist together.

An acquaintance recently summarised Pak Subuh's explanation to me. In fifty words, it goes something like this:

> People possess souls that may become subdued by the basic 'forces' of life, whereas those forces should be servants of the soul. The action of the latihan gradually puts them back in their right places, thereby allowing the true soul or human essence to be given control and manifest appropriately.

I hesitate to judge the validity of the above, but this article isn't primarily about Pak Subuh's theory, which is an entirely personal, optional 'extra' for Subud members. My explanation is summarised here in a hundred words:

People operate with two cognitive systems for addressing needs — one 'rationality' from Homo erectus (maybe), which works more graphically, plus the linguistic Homo sapiens version that employs concepts and speech, but is necessarily based on the older one. This new system is so advantageous that evolution never had to guarantee integrating it smoothly — so blending the rationalities has awkward side-effects. While the older mode is submerged into functioning non-consciously, it often conflicts with the new one, especially because of socio-cultural factors. By facilitating expression of the non-conscious rationality, practice of the latihan helps them appreciate one another and integrate better.

My article develops this explanation pretty gradually, covering different aspects in turn. I hope that interested readers will pick up the gist of the overall idea even though I haven't provided authoritative references or many examples.

Section 1:   Where a person lives — and the reality beyond

It seems that the reality in which I mainly live is basically the one that I understand — generated by reasoning in much the same way that a map is created — filled with consistent, relevant and interesting relations between the experiences that I've had, then somehow 'represented' and subsequently labelled. In fact, it's a world largely made of labels, words, concepts, descriptions, syntax, logic and other interconnections between hosts of mental entities, rules, principles and locations that have become densely and intricately established within my own portable 'symbol-based-map' of reality. This is not the 'real' reality, but it is very valuable — being the kind of reality that we can share with each other through speech, and which thus makes us human — having the capacity to mix and match labels around and so imagine bits of reality that aren't actually present, and talk about them — collectively processing acquired information and speculating.

So, where has the real reality gone? Nowhere, except I cannot think about it because the only way I ever actually think is with labels and so on — 'reasoning' through my conceptual, symbolic reality. As soon as I try to explore reality at all, the undertaking is enveloped by my mental map of components and relations — sets of mental representations of all my experiences and inferences about just what is real, literally speaking. Behind the labels, though, is the real thing which is also encountered, but only fleetingly during the moments before I constantly compartmentalise it. In the end, this is all nothing but my life and its surrounding universe, which is a contiguous, intrinsically non-compartmentalised whole. Yet to consciously encounter this as real reality might be to experience it via what the mystics call 'non-duality', rather than through symbolic representations. Being in this state isn't necessarily useful, however, since it appears that human beings can't readily operate that way on an everyday basis. Within this context, our societies function most effectively as belonging to a species of conscious symbol users. The central point of the unreal reality is that it's the shared mental world in which humans get along together best by jointly processing information in the format of linguistic symbols.

Thanks to this remarkable facility of language and conceptualising that we possess, the real reality appears always just out of reach. It's paradoxical. Language and imagining supply us with an astonishingly great wealth of resources that we've turned into culture, civilisation, technology and social wisdom, but symbolic reality simultaneously forces us to direct ourselves away from real reality! Motivated by its own symbolic reasoning and connections between labels, my imaginary 'self' asking questions about life is automatically immersed in the symbolic domain from which it was born.

Section 2:   Old and new — humanity came from an earlier species

We notoriously sense that we are somehow out of touch with our true nature or reality. An intriguing though almost clichéd speculation, often heard in New Age circles, is that our prehistoric ancestors might have been more in touch with the real reality. And maybe we still are, but with our linguistic-symbolic veneer hiding or submerging it. Just as modern people navigate our everyday lives consciously with the help of the expedient system of speech and symbolic rationality, our ancient ancestors navigated life with some different kind of rationality, relying on another sort of map. This doesn't mean a 'physical model' of the world in anyone's head, but a system of mental connections that functions like a map. (In this article, the term 'rationality' is often interchanged with 'world-model', 'map' or simply 'mode'.)

Half a million years ago, they engaged in highly complex social interactions, but their mode of

rationality must have involved a non-symbolic scheme of assimilating and responding to environmental data. In evolutionary terms, it held sway a short time ago, but with regard to the development of society, it paved the way for humanity's modern systems of communication and thought. Whatever its character, it probably lacked that 'magical filter' of language, conceptual imagining and abstract reasoning that appears to both bless and curse people today. This, on the plus side, affords the capacity for us as individuals to manipulate linguistic symbols, sharing and jointly processing arbitrary information.

While there are various theories, in the end we can only speculate about the precise nature of humanity's rationality that preceded the current form, and which took our ancestors all the way to complex vocalisation and stone-age technology. It might have been comparatively 'graphic', with profound implications for how 'attention' — our focus on what seems important — was directed. There's theoretical cause to suspect it was more of an empathic, big-picture pattern-matcher, mostly simplifying reality by approximation. Our modern version of rationality would in contrast be more of a 'logoic', small-picture pattern-maker, inclined to simplify reality by encoding it. To this extent it's equipped with the upgrade of symbol manipulation abilities and consequently far more powerful data processing.

Section 3:   What happened — the possible cost of becoming human

It's really not hard to suppose that the previous system remains present, constantly supporting our conscious, symbolic rationality 'behind the scenes'. In fact, there's a fair chance that our creation of symbolic reality depends on maintaining a comparatively concrete template or substructure 'underneath' — some primary map of reality that's more immediately 'perceptual' and less 'conceptual' or interpretational. It would be always working within each of us, while not necessarily participating in our subjectively aware processing of worldly data. This raises the matter of how deeply integrated any newer, conscious system might be in relation to any older system, which could be relegated to a different status.

Whenever evolutionary change occurs, a species naturally limits its investment in organisms to the sorts of biological infrastructure that supply some ecological or reproductive advantage, and that reduce disadvantage — as demanded by natural selection. With humanity, however, something unusual took place — an adaptation leading to the capacity for extraordinarily pervasive environmental ascendancy. This must have dramatically re-focussed the factors that drove evolution down-the-line, giving greater precedence to 'sexual selection' without necessarily compensating for minor drawbacks buried within the context of individual psychology. In other words, provided that a species as a whole can thrive on the strength of a certain add-on facility, this need not be most efficiently integrated, as long as any residual, trivial unease among individual organisms can be accommodated with negligible impact.

Therefore we have cause to suspect that our older and newer models of reality may not mesh all that well. The resulting misalignments, and the possible foibles inherent to any system upgrade (like the latest 'beta version' of recently released software), might go far toward explaining our strange inclinations to believe in higher powers and preternatural realms. This could be thanks to experiencing a range of psychological phenomena that are culturally disposed to be interpreted as mystical, spiritual or religious, at the same time having to cope with degrees of subtle psychological dysfunctionality. I don't insist there's any particular problem in having supernatural and/or religious beliefs, but it's conceivable that our species' newfound capacity for symbol manipulation is related to our verbal-cultural reality maps entertaining a certain range of 'exotic' components. After all, symbol manipulation supplies not just language, imagining, abstraction and the ability to reflect on memories. It also permits the suspension of disbelief through the sharing of powerful descriptions, lessons and stories which tend to influence us in profoundly emotional and transformative ways. While lending itself to stupendous cultural riches, this set-up also means we readily become befuddled as memories get modified, perceptions get altered by strongly held beliefs, subjectivity is confused with objectivity, and imagination gets mistaken for reality.

Section 4:   Better connections — adjusting to the system upgrade

I think the older mode of rationality must constantly have input into any context within which it isn't actively overruled by the dominant newer mode. Perhaps the older scheme can be conscious only to the extent that the newer mode, which emphasises labels and symbolic representations, is not. For instance, whenever someone is engaged in a mainly physical activity, and it's impractical for bodily movement to be guided by conscious reasoning, the older mode might undertake almost all

immediate decision-making in combination with a background, 'strategic' understanding of broader aims and purposes, which may be consolidated consciously as well. ('Automatic' motion appears to be a separate affair involving no 'rational' data processing.) However, are there any other decision-making occasions when our non-symbolic mode, instead of our symbolic mode, would be worth following? And if so, how might such 'inner guidance' be recognised?

First, the older mode is likely to be the more useful whenever the data processing of the newer mode depends on some part of its symbolic reality-map that's evidently askew or awry in terms of reflecting reality. In this case, for the sake of the whole human being, the older mode of rationality might be moved to step in, assuming that its alternative guidance had a chance of being followed. The probability might be boosted if and when the symbolic mode is relatively relaxed or somehow preoccupied such that another context becomes available to 'intervention' by our non-symbolic rationality. A further possibility might involve the newer mode actively 'listening' for prospectively useful guidance to arrive from the older mode — provided that it had some innate or learned capacity to tune-in accordingly.

One thing that could help here is an exercise like the latihan, which appears to be initiated non-consciously rather than by a conscious act. The first time anybody practises the latihan, their older mode could activate it subsequent to simply observing (visually through body language, aurally or otherwise) what's happening among other practitioners. It would then engage in activity of the same nature by (non-consciously) entering that same mental state. Humanity's older mode of rationality most likely had significant capacity for imitation, but exactly how the non-conceptual world-model shifts the brain into that activity or state is necessarily unknown to the conceptual world-model; this being the big mystery of the latihan. All that the consciously conceptual rationality has to do is relax and let that state be engaged in.

Or perhaps, to start the exercise, the older mode only needs to be inspired. This may well happen indirectly via thought, whose symbolic meanings would be translated into suitable terms for the non-symbolic mode to grasp. Conversely, the latihan might allow our conceptual mode, in time, to become familiar with feelings or signals arising non-conceptually — and heed them more whenever these come across as 'urgings'. The latihan may give our non-conscious mode practice at prioritising and so influencing attention, while the conscious mode practises 'letting go' — detaching or disassociating from all the motivations that it's usually busy prioritising. In the same process, as the newer rationality affords the older one authority to 'move' and guide the human being, the exercise may diminish some of the acquired misalignments that inhere between the two reality maps. The conscious one is founded on the non-conscious one. While our non-symbolic mode tends to be naturally subliminal, calling it an 'inner' self seems inappropriate given that it must nevertheless take part right up front in everything we do. Metaphorically, I'd describe it as more of a 'between the lines' self.

Section 5: Human nature — analysing and maybe tweaking it

For the sake of clarity, I will avoid referring to 'the mind'. I separate 'rationality' from 'motivations', and propose that humans possess the two forms of rationality described above. Non-symbolic rationality is probably rather old in terms of human evolution, whereas symbolic rationality is a fairly new sort of supplementary scheme overlaid on the other. Each corresponds to a semi-independent approach to how the world works and how people fit into it, but the key point is that the older form has never left us. It's always at work, almost invisibly, underneath the new, conceptual rationality. These are obliged to work together, but have different mechanisms that are typically not all that well integrated. In fact, they frequently disrupt, impair and distort each other, although the overall value to the species of symbolic rationality is so considerable, with regard to information sharing capacity, that its advantages easily outweigh its few disadvantages.

The rest, 'motivations', are our instincts, drives, passions, feelings and emotions. Of course, these can be categorised in many ways. One is the material-vegetal-animal-human system. I don't consider that system 'wrong', but find it not very useful. Some motivations are of course oriented toward physical maintenance; others toward biological relations; others toward social standing; others toward noble causes like self-sacrifice or whatever; but I don't see a great deal of value in listing them that way. We all possess much the same types of motivations, but with subtly different mixes and balances determining our individual 'prioritisations', amounting to personality. Various systems of personality-typing have been invented to categorise people. Maybe the oldest system is the one connected with astrology, but today we also have the Myers-Briggs and Jungian systems,

the Big Five system, the Enneagram system, the Psychoanalytic system and others.

Rationality, however, is the servant of all human motivations. It functions to satisfy them, but the clarity or strength of rationality is not the primary factor that makes a person any more or less compassionate or self-sacrificing. The issue is which motivations, within an individual's world-model, get the top priority in terms of rationality's services, and which come first in guiding attention and behaviour, especially with respect to our own social groupings — where all personal identity arises. While the latihan might help integrate our two types of rationality, I suspect that, overall and as a result, it also automatically tends to re-prioritise our motivations in directions that are gradually more altruistic, compassionate or community-oriented. This may happen just because our older, non-conceptual rationality comes pre-equipped with a deeper appreciation of personal identity — something like conscience.

Pak Subuh's view differs greatly from mine. His system categorises motivations into various levels, and postulates each having separate and autonomous access to the attentions of rationality. It also hypothesises only one form of rationality. In terms of the proverbial human condition, this leads to the notion of a solution through purifying one's prioritisations and attaining 'higher levels', with everybody potentially connected to these through a theoretical entity called the soul. For me, no levels are involved. There are just the two types of rationality, both functioning to resolve motivations, but not very well integrated. Another area for improvement is that catering to our needs and desires in socially useful ways could be better prioritised. It appears to me that though the latihan assists in alleviating both of these problems at once, the development of spirituality isn't about lifting us closer to divinity. Rather, it's more like remedial therapy.

Section 6:   Instinct versus intuition — and higher guidance

Instinct is inherent or inborn behaviour involving unlearned, fixed responses to stimuli. Intuition is different, although it also apparently helps us to make efficient decisions on the basis of minimal conscious information. Conceptual thought involving conscious reflection is more cumbersome than either instinct or intuition if and when it involves weighing up abstract consequences. Abstractions are generally complex concepts that get mapped out or created over and above the objects and properties of the physical world. In this light, our pre-human and human rationalities vary with the types of reality-maps they are based on. Pre-lingual rationality could be viewed as a kind of intuition. While devoid of symbolic reasoning, it is far more than instinct, even so. Otherwise my cat, for instance, would be unable to learn about her world and make discretionary decisions. She displays curiosity, is prudent in caring for offspring, observes towards inference, and visibly takes time to make choices, assessing the outcomes — yet she's a non-lingual creature. Scientists who study horses, wolves, dolphins, primates and so forth nowadays discuss the diverse cultures of separate groups within various species. The societies of our pre-human ancestors were certainly rich with culture — sharing food and shelter, caring for the hurt and the old, playing together — all activities of non-humans, but very much socially and collectively oriented.

Instincts represent one kind of motivation, but rationality responds to all kinds. Pre-human rationality could have been more creative in some ways, satisfying needs and desires by weighing up indexical signifiers, instead of manipulating discrete symbols according to rules. It wouldn't have reasoned via abstractions like causal principles or morals. It may have had a more holistic prioritisation scheme, less bound by conditioned responses — interpreting data and assessing situations on a more case by case basis. It may be seen as more instinct-oriented insofar as it did not involve layers of symbolic connections, but its underlying map would still have incorporated sophisticated, acquired wisdom. Our new rationality mode, on the other hand, may be more procedural in mapping reality — taking relations between first order elements (which the older mode operates with directly) and labelling them as second or third order elements — thereby building a hugely intricate network of concepts. We rely heavily on both rationalities, even though they often conflict with each other, and only the lingual version typically involves conscious states. Neuroscience offers strong evidence that various subconscious processes work constantly behind the scenes to shape our actions, thoughts and feelings. Of course, what all the latest research means is subject to much more investigation, but to me it indicates that, depending on context, perhaps just a superficial and relatively small fraction of human rationality is ever conscious.

Some people consider that, because practising the latihan is supposed to enhance decision-making, it must incorporate 'higher guidance' or a 'higher power'. I accept that the premise might be statistically valid — that decision-making might be somehow enhanced on average — but I think

this is more likely to be simply because our ordinary decision-making processes are substantially regenerated or rehabilitated by whatever takes place through the latihan. I see no necessity for explanations invoking mysticism, since merely subconscious or non-conscious intelligence would appear to suffice as a useful and frequently wiser adjunct to our conscious intelligence. 'Inner guidance' could emerge from information being gathered and processed by non-conscious observation and rationality, which later on slips through the separation between these two domains of knowledge. It would depend on recording processes that were non-conscious just at the time when the relevant perceptions occurred. Whereas conceptual thought tends to depend on word-like representations, our older style of normally unconscious information processing would be non-verbal. The obvious differences between these modes of recording and assessing data go a long way toward accounting for the 'barrier' that divides them.

Section 7:   Rationalities may compete — yet work together

By 'rationality', I mean the sort of situation-analysing cognitive system that most mammals (at least) use to guide their interactions with their surroundings, to fulfil their needs. (Sociopathic murderers may be rational in terms of how they go about behaving, yet be classified as clearly insane.) Both kinds of human rationality conduct analyses, but while the newer one uses symbols, concepts and syntax to do so, the older one would rely mainly on graphic representations.

It's necessary to distinguish between the innate, full capacity for symbol manipulation and an ability to merely connect symbols with particular outcomes through reinforced association. The latter operation, performed by many animals, is basically 'indexical' rather than symbolic. It could be called 'thinking', depending on your definition, but I propose that, while facilitating presumably conscious problem-solving and reasoning, it's essentially non-symbolic. Among humans, the usually non-conscious mode I'm talking about does all these things, albeit without genuinely linguistic ingredients.

I've said that our generally non-conscious world-model is the more graphic one, although it's plain we can manipulate not only symbols consciously, but mental pictures as well. This conscious activity, however, generally remains under the guidance of the symbol-equipped rationality, rather than the non-conscious mode. The main point here is that they have different 'priority templates'. With respect to acting in the world, which aspects are most crucial (and why) to the newer mode differ from which aspects are most crucial (and why) to the older mode. They have differing grounds for and manners of dealing with the innumerable motivations that the organism constantly develops and/or maintains.

Because rationalities can have different characters, the world that a person knows is a product of both 'what is out there' and 'how it gets registered'. So, according to my view, each person simultaneously lives in (at least) two worlds. For the sake of establishing a stable perspective amidst the minutiae of complicated prioritisations and decision-making, one's older mode tends to preserve a broader appreciation of the background relevance of situations. Alternatively, the newer mode codifies things, but is disposed to pigeon hole them into narrow contexts which are normally defined according to socio-cultural conditioning. The upshot is that each mode of rationality has its own means of determining how attention should be prioritised, and therefore how the world seems, and therefore how attention should be prioritised, and so on.

Section 8:   Rationality's motive — needing to be useful

Rationalities 'serve' motivations whether noble or mundane, but they too must have some underlying drive of their own. While their job is to restore equilibrium to the organism by resolving general needs, they themselves have to be in some 'disequilibrium state' for that to occur — as they are essentially mechanisms. Their equilibrium gets restored if and when the organism's other equilibrium states are restored, so they need to be useful in this sense. However, our non-symbolic rationality seems to 'appreciate' the situation, and express its need to be useful, a bit more naturally and directly than the symbolic rationality. Taking a 'big picture' view, it appears to more clearly model the fact that its own usefulness could be significantly enhanced by developing smoother teamwork between the two modes. Moreover, it possibly has greater capacity to answer the call for this prospectively closer integration — via certain exercises such as the latihan.

So neither mode can be fully, objectively value-free. Each is foremost a kind of map or guidance system, but maps vary greatly in how they are constructed and deployed. A street directory is used rather differently from how you'd follow a GPS, for example. Both forms of rationality constitute

world-models, even though one of them is built upon the other. In this sense they both embody 'beliefs', which are often naturally about emotions. For the usually non-conscious mode, beliefs are basically relations between sensory data, including direct recognition of the body's various metabolic states, inferred and represented iconically. For the linguistic mode, however, beliefs mostly correspond to relations that stand among more basic relations, amounting to concepts, labels and ideas that are inferred and represented symbolically.

Why doesn't the newer mode map the world in as broad a context as the older perspective? As discussed in Appendix 3, I see 'free will' as an illusion — a model of something that's not real — which results from the appearance that motivations arise out of nowhere. In response to this disconcerting incongruity, our usually conscious, newer world-model employs its conceptual skill to invent a hypothetical entity labelled as 'the self', and maps this into the situation. However, doing so greatly blurs the reality that the map itself, the symbolic rationality, is independent of the needs and desires which it has the job of dealing with. It consequently labels itself as the self — the imaginary source of motivations — overlooking the circumstance that it's there simply with the task of resolving all those wants and necessities.

Section 9:   Practising the latihan — how it compares

The latihan appears to be unusual and potentially useful, but nonetheless natural. It provides for possibly profound and subtly transforming experiences whose character depends on each individual who engages with it. I regard Pak Subuh as having naturally interpreted this phenomenon according to his own cultural and religious background. However, are its supposed effects genuine or only imagined? Perhaps neuropsychology will answer this question in due course. The latihan seems to be somewhat psycho-therapeutically beneficial, depending on each person once again, just as various different spiritual practices similarly appear to be. There are persuasively credible links between the latihan and other 'inner energy' processes or practices with spontaneous manifestations, as reported in traditions such as (but not limited to) Sufism, spontaneous qigong, kundalini, Kriya yoga, shamanism, Zen (well, maybe) and, of course, Pentecostal and Charismatic phenomena. These all involve pursuing no goal and hence no use of 'the mind' during the practice-time.

Meanwhile, Subud members understandably tend to suppose that the benefits of practising the latihan are accumulative or progressive, but there's no clear evidence of this. Even if the perceived benefits were somehow accumulative, there's even weaker evidence that any progression comes with objectively distinguishable stages of development (as per levels of the material, vegetal, animal, human and more). Moreover, I suspect that there's no deep-down feature of the latihan to distinguish it from outwardly similar-looking exercises. In any case, contextual differences make it pretty impossible to compare these things rigorously — especially considering how the context must affect a person's attitude or approach toward any exercise of this general type, which is apt to be central in terms of how the exercise then proceeds.

The Subud exercise is presented as more or less inherently beneficial, and (of major significance) progressively more beneficial — leading to the proposal that it should be practised many times over on an ongoing basis. In other scenarios, such as a self-awareness group or theatre improvisation workshop, for example, any similar exercise is far more likely to be presented as a one-off, possibly enlightening exploration of an individual's human nature, rather than intrinsically useful. It's also notable that latihan sessions typically go for thirty minutes. So, as somebody practises this sort of exercise regularly, which Subud members tend to, it's conceivable that its character will alter in such a way that the practitioner senses the development of a particular, distinctive, inner relationship with it. To the extent that the brain is 'plastic', its neural pathways may well develop accordingly over time in response to any regular exercise, much like muscles.

Section 10:   Dissociation — letting the non-conscious be revealed

The latihan apparently involves what could be called 'dissociation'. Psychologists use this word to refer to the feeling of one's conscious self being detached from one's own physical surroundings, bodily sensations, emotions and maybe even attitudes and thinking processes. In normal everyday life, these tend to be naturally integrated, but certain occasions can result in a weakening of this interconnection. Such instances are well known to include traumatic or stressful situations, when the dissociation is involuntary, although the state of withdrawal itself might be further debilitating. In these cases, it's likely to be symptomatic of an impending threat to the conceptual world-model's coherence, when dissociation's role is to suspend the symbolic modelling of metabolic or sensory

input that is potentially destabilising. However, it appears to be also induced through deliberately adopting certain mental states. During the latihan it seems that one's conscious, conceptual rationality deliberately disengages itself to varying extent, but in a relatively smooth way, from involvement with other facets of subjective experience. For me, one consequence is that the latihan underscores who and/or what my conscious, conceptual rationality is not! That is, any component of my humanity from which it can dissociate is plainly not 'it', given that it is the component that's instigating the dissociation — in traditional Subud jargon, 'surrendering'.

Why might this be useful? Well, as I mentioned at the end of Section 8, the symbolic world-model has a conundrum to deal with; the invisible source of the motivations which it has the job of resolving. Needing to somehow represent this, it generates the symbol of 'free agent' and nominates itself as corresponding to the result, which is a reality distortion. Although the symbolic world-model is indeed affected by socio-linguistic interactions and environments that strongly condition personal motivations, this occurs in relatively narrow and superficial ways. The naturally integrated human, on the other hand, is far more complex; rich with instincts and emotional responses of much broader and deeper origin. For a species characterised by collective information processing, the social and biological features cannot be separated readily. Notwithstanding this fact, unless the socio-linguistic and pre-linguistic influences are disentangled within one's symbolic rationality, it will be liable to prioritise attention on the false premise that, as a free agent, it is inherently self-conflicted and accordingly in need of self-suppression. One possible bonus of dissociation during the latihan, therefore, is that the symbolic rationality comes to appreciate how there is actually no free agency or 'selfhood' of the sort which it's been inclined to represent. It gradually gets to see that it is not the body or instincts, not the emotions or cognitions, nor even the socio-linguistic affectations that help to shape it — which all sounds rather Buddhist, doesn't it?

Does the latihan show me anything on the positive side regarding who I am? Well, the issue seems to involve personal identity, and I suspect that mine has changed because of practising the latihan. In this context, I interpret identity as the sum of whatever matters to an individual. Whatever is most important to someone is where his or her identity resides. Accordingly, I think someone's identity changes as their values or personal priorities change. It's possible that changes in personal identity go hand-in-hand with dissociation, but possibly not. These psychological and/or spiritual concerns are extremely subtle and slippery to grasp and dreadfully prone to over-simplification. However, I like to suppose that, aside from helping me understand who I'm not, practising the latihan has blessed or burdened me with different values than those which I previously incorporated, making me a slightly different creature. This isn't necessarily something to be thrilled or excited about, as there's nothing immediately either good or bad about being whoever one happens to be. Good and bad are relevant only with respect to prioritising the resolution of one's motivations in the context of society.

In the sense of comprising a second-level world-model that is 'once-removed' symbolically from the analogue or 'real' reality, the conceptual rationality is unsurprisingly equipped to dissociate from its circumstances. Taking advantage of this, as a spiritual phenomenon, the latihan would seem to intrinsically incorporate a particular variety of dissociation. During the latihan, for example, an intense emotion may arise so that, for a few seconds maybe, a major proportion of my whole being seems engaged with it. For those seconds, that emotion effectively is 'me' — dominating the attention prioritising procedures of both my conceptual and non-conceptual rationalities. If I dissociate from the state, however, with attention being governed minimally through my conceptual rationality, then that emotion may well be even more maturely expressed. As I sojourn within conceptual reality, my humanity unfolds its own real reality. Again, this is an issue of identity; of who is present. As long as my linguistic self remains not 'identified' with it, the state is allowed to be expressed as 'me', though independently of the conceptual me, and thus can be experienced deeply as never before. For most of us, latihan experiences are generally not too disturbing or disorienting, but at times it may be quite useful for practitioners to be aware of the roles of other kinds of dissociation in everyday life. Dissociation is something that all humans, but possibly more often latihan practitioners, spontaneously encounter in daily activities at various levels without necessarily recognising it as such, albeit with pathological connotations in some situations.

Section 11: Experiencing the latihan — what it's like

In relation to spontaneity, the exercise seems deeper when the source of movement (or motivation) is more completely non-conceptual. If this is the case, then it might be highly significant whether

the exercise is consciously associated or connected with any aim or goal. It's very plausible that approaching it with an essentially aimless or goalless attitude — perhaps by viewing it as 'worship for the sake of worship' (or whatever metaphor might suit each individual) — would enhance the results by circumventing, sidestepping or at least dampening any participation or manifestation of symbolic rationality. Then attention remains present, but engaged in no conceptually mediated process of monitoring, assessment, feedback or moderation that might be intended to enhance things, but ultimately interferes with the moment-to-moment direction. In other words, by more thoroughly adopting the passive mental state that's commonly recommended for the latihan — 'trust, patience and sincerity' — it is possible that one's symbolic rationality somehow allows the non-symbolic jurisdiction more freedom to move the whole being, with perhaps useful or healthy consequences. While it seems to be unnecessary to regard the exercise in any religious terms whatsoever, seeing it as a divine dispensation is one approach which appears likely to cultivate an attitude that's amenable to entering this 'receptive' mental space.

How do the latihan's spontaneous movements, feelings and inner experiences show that attention has been handed over to the non-symbolic mode? Well, attention is never directly controlled by either mode. It simply follows priorities that the two rationalities set differently. The latihan entails the conceptual mode stepping back in this regard, though usually not entirely, with the result that attention has to be 'shared'. Nonetheless, in the relative absence of prioritisation coming from a symbolic world-model perspective, the movements and feelings that arise during the latihan could well represent expressions of the older rationality's prioritisation processes. Other emotional and mental experiences which arise might similarly represent which facets of life and the world are highlighted as critical within the non-symbolic world-model.

Attempting to surrender in the latihan is weird. In the broader scheme of things, after all, it's impossible not to connect some sort of goal with an optional exercise like practising the latihan — which corresponds to the reason why someone goes along to latihan sessions in the first place. In this regard, a person must have some personal concept of what good the latihan is — adopted from some explanation or other. During an actual latihan session, however, the less immediate one's agenda, apparently so much the better. Nonetheless, any intention to allow the exercise to be intention-free is still a form of intention. It's hard to be certain, but during the thirty minute exercise, any feeling of complete 'agenda-lessness' for three minutes, or maybe even thirty seconds, is something I doubt that I've ever truly encountered. The latihan is evidently quite 'forgiving' in allowing me to vacillate up and down among the depths of intentionality while imposing no obvious 'switching-off' threshold. It merely continues to wait for my brief returns from either shallow meanderings of attention or bizarre efforts to be present while making no effort. In the meantime, the latihan seems to gently shake out, clean up and gradually re-integrate my perceptual and conceptual processes at pretty deep levels, helping to establish what feels like a bit more coherence and equanimity toward life and relationships.

Section 12: Evolution's legacy — summarising the situation

From what I've heard of the current consensus on human evolution, the evidence points to little physical change since around 200,000 years ago, but before that a significant genetic change may have occurred with regard to the brain and our capacity for fully-fledged language. Complex vocalisation may well have already existed, but this conjectured add-on facility would be what permits mental abstraction — which is the freedom to assign symbols to the relations standing between more basic meanings, which amounts to generating a reality that's filled with concepts. So our species gained something quite unusual — language. This is based on the symbolic manipulation of meaning by allocating new, freely selected labels to the ways in which more primitive signs, such as 'icons' and 'indices' (semiotic terms; see Appendix 5), are linked. Our ancient ancestors must have already possessed some animal-conscious system for navigating everyday life, but as this new development explicitly involves conceptually labelling or symbolising each mental representation of experience, it very conceivably submerged our older system of rationality into non-consciousness.

The acquisition of this capacity, introducing Homo sapiens, may have been relatively sudden, heralding what would eventually become a remarkably overwhelming environmental dominance. The evolutionary survival-benefits that it conferred must have dramatically overridden any drawbacks. Since it offers such a very powerful edge in coping with our environments, there could not be any further evolutionary pressure for its operation to be refined past the point of mastery to which it led us. Therefore no surprise that its manner of integration with earlier forms of rationality

(based on non-symbolic data processing) remains a bit ragged and wrinkly. This would surely help to explain why individual human beings occasionally feel just a little uncomfortable with who we are — confronting inner conflict, angst or even 'divine discontent'. All of us occasionally suffer from various neuroses, inhibitions, compulsions, delusions and other debilitating psychological imbalances that can arise from the awkwardness of reconciling our formal, civilised, socio-linguistically defined reality (burdened by verbally derived labels, norms and customs) with the more fluid, analogue reality of social and physical relations that are more directly accessed without intermediary conceptualisation. For me, the latihan offers a way to better assimilate the older and newer modes of rationality so that I feel more comfortable!

Like those animal cousins which are also cognitive, we constantly rely on our portable, mental reality-maps, but if this account of mine is valid, then humans possess a lingual map that's overlaid upon a pre-lingual map (assuming genuine language is defined by symbol usage). The two systems operate together seemingly in synch and adequately well most of the time, but inevitably with points of inner conflict or tension. These crop up especially when the rules and niceties of linguistic social conditioning grate disturbingly against our far older, non-symbolic mapping, constantly functioning with vital importance. (Concepts like 'sinful' and 'impure' come to mind.) Practising the latihan may help to realign and reintegrate the systems, progressively coordinating the non-symbolic and symbolic processing of priorities and mental subroutines to form a more coherent, cohesive 'joint' map of reality. It irons out some of the wrinkles left by evolution, which didn't bother about being neat and tidy. A smoother integration of the rationality modes is sure to be beneficial, and the latihan might simply be an exercise aiding that — just as jogging may assist in coping with a sedentary lifestyle. And just as jogging is only an aid towards healthier living, the latihan might not be any form of end in itself. While its practitioners tend to 'turn off' their thinking in favour of 'feeling' during the actual exercise, the sheer ability to achieve this general state of being is not a sensible aim, in my view. A reasonable hope is just for the conceptual mode of being and thinking to eventually become more productively engaged with the non-conceptual mode throughout everyday life.

Some say that the latihan's nature can't be understood, since its effect is to raise us 'higher' than conceptualisation goes, to a level beyond dependence on conceivability — which is ipso facto 'divine'. A consequent dilemma is that, by putting this whole assumption to the test, one risks appearing impudent. Rebuffing this deterrent, however, I conclude that the latihan's nature may be conceptualised. My conclusion might be wrong, but its flip side is that the latihan doesn't lift us higher at all. Rather, it just re-wires the connections between the conceptual and non-conceptual faculties of cognition.

Afterword:

Returning to explanations about the latihan in general, I particularly object to one aspect of Pak Subuh's description – that it lends itself to an unhealthy attitude. It suggests that some people are somehow more spiritually advanced and so 'higher' than others. It's easily taken to imply that gaining spirituality, especially through the latihan, is about becoming a nobler sort of person. This means practising the latihan would be good for virtually anybody, and that it's therefore a shame if more people aren't attracted to it. It also means the growth of Subud would necessarily be good for humanity. Readily reinforced by Pak Subuh's Javanese-Sufi account, such assertions are distressing. Wanting our organisation to grow most likely signifies pretentious egotism based on supposing that Subud is divinely blessed or special. The same goes for imagining that 'the right people' will be drawn toward it. The concept that latihan practitioners are privileged, or that some people can be holier than others, is terribly conceited. Maybe it's fair to say that some individuals appear more compassionate, knowledgeable, creative or at peace with themselves than others seem, and that aspiring to such qualities is legitimate, but it's offensive to identify particular people as inherently superior human beings. This kind of thinking is poisonous, and it's sad that the latihan is occasionally entangled with perspectives along these lines.

So if the latihan doesn't lift anyone up to purer, higher or wiser levels of existence, then what is it good for? I suggest that it's preferable to describe the latihan as essentially no more than a certain psychological and/or spiritual exercise from which some people say they find individual benefit. Outwardly, it's a spontaneous, dynamic form of meditation that involves no sense of goal or aim while in progress, but which generally appears to offer some personal benefit — according to each practitioner's own interpretation. Furthermore, it's important to recognise that practising the latihan might actually be of no benefit or use, and could even be detrimental, to any particular person. It's

therefore extremely inappropriate to coax or persuade anybody to practise it. In my opinion, the latihan should in fact be advertised so that more people hear of it, but with absolutely no claims about specific benefits of any kind — merely with the observation that it has many practitioners who obviously must feel that they get something useful from it. This approach may seem pathetically deflating to some Subud members, but perhaps our egotistic Subud balloon needs to come down to earth.

It's good for the latihan to be made more available in case other people would like to try it, but it is very presumptuous to say that anybody should be interested. Based on Pak Subuh's explanation, the latihan comes from God and so it must be a grace or blessing which improves people's lives. In the light of other accounts, however, the latihan is much more akin to practices such as, say, aerobics, yoga, flying a kite, push-ups, tai chi, crosswords, Sudoku, bushwalking, poetry, pottery, massage, celibacy, disco dancing, archery, hacky sack or singing in the bath — potentially beneficial exercises that each might be suitable for some of us but clearly not others, and which are rather plainly not the sort of thing that ever makes a person intrinsically better than anyone else.

Yes, the latihan really needs to be made more available, but not because it makes anybody special. It needs to be made more available just because some of our fellow human beings might also be glad to practise it.

* * * * * * * *

Appendix 1: Physicalism — without trying to prove anything

I don't call myself an atheist, as it seems nuts to identify my worldview or spiritual belief system in terms of what it isn't — as non-theism. It's physicalism — the notion that all that's real is the stuff studied in physics. This means I disbelieve in an individual afterlife. As I see it, just as an organism's existence is clearly 'confined' within space — which never seems to raise many complaints — it is also confined within time — complaints about which seem equally unjustified in the end. Physicalism is philosophical, not scientific. Science is technically about proposing and refining 'reasonably approximate models' of mechanisms that generate the patterns observed in nature's phenomena. To qualify as scientific, such models must be 'in-principle-falsifiable' or testable, but physicalism isn't very testable. It's kind of scientific in spirit, in relation to Ockham's Razor, and while it's not provable, neither is any scientific hypothesis. Anyway, I don't go around asserting that theism or whatever is wrong. All I say is that physicalism looks to me like a more satisfying model — and also more 'potent'. Potent explanations are those that, if falsified in any respect, tend to be overturned entirely. Physicalism can be seen as automatically pantheistic and mystical. It entails that, despite everyday appearances and our built-in perceptions of personal selfhood, this whole universe and every person are always 'one'. For me, the latihan seems to confirm that.

Some may argue that physicalism is indeed falsifiable — like if it were revealed after death that we were always spirits residing only temporarily in the material realm. I find this image incoherent, since if there were two or more literally, wholly separate types of reality-stuff, such as matter and spirit, then logically they could not interact. They would be mutually intangible, and thus non-existent with respect to one another. On the other hand, if they could interact at all, then there would be no justification for calling them distinct types of reality-stuff. They would be mutually detectable, making them all part of physics. Brain activities while dreaming, for instance, mean that 'the stuff of dreams' is really physical. This is an age-old philosophical argument for discarding dualism. (Incidentally, when describing one's own views, I assume it's unnecessary for each statement to be prefaced with 'in my opinion', as it stands to reason.)

It's arguable that levels of being exist in line with the ideas of people like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, E.F. Schumacher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Pak Subuh (influenced by Sufism — so indebted to Neoplatonism). The evidence resides in certain distinctions which seemingly correspond to grades of complexity, such as non-living vs. living, non-cognitive vs. cognitive, non-linguistic vs. linguistic, and (speculatively) mortal vs. immortal. This idea of hierarchical progression may offer to make some sense of life by imbuing it with 'higher purpose'. However, the scheme suffers under scrutiny. Mother Nature yields exceptions to any pattern of life forms that one might

try to pin down. Moreover, it is misleading to insist that animals in general embody some crucial feature that plants lack, because many plants possess remarkable features manifested by no animal, nor any other plant. Similarly, though humans alone have a clear-cut propensity for speech and symbolic imagination, many animals have faculties entirely absent in humans. Stemming from our symbol usage, the development of the dominance of human societies over local ecologies does appear unusual in terms of the biosphere, but there's no objective warrant for counting this as some specific stage in any pre-ordained cosmic process. In other words, the traditional demarcation of levels emerging over time seems likely to represent a biased perspective. Evolution by natural selection has no intrinsic end-goal. It is basically opportunistic, ecological continuance where the persistence of each species depends on the ever-changing character of the whole, integral system of species in relation to the biologically modified physical environment. 'Higher' evolution is simply a common illusion.

Appendix 2: The experience of whom — or what?

Take away the world, and what remains? To be more precise, take away all experience of the world, and what remains? Some say it would be the soul. There is an independent 'experiencer' in that cognitive organisms process environmental data within 'portable world-models' or 'maps of reality' according to their immediate priorities, as established by internal states of disequilibrium. On a basic account, it seems reasonable to speculate that the experiencer just is the organism's map of reality, which is physically constituted. This map is constantly cross-checked against the world (via attention), whereby its contents are modified or updated, and the activity at this map-world interface often gets falsely interpreted as a rather odd kind of substance — the ever enigmatic 'consciousness'. The conjecture goes roughly as follows.

(1) When consciousness is occurring, one's world-model directs attention to elements of reality that are sensed as either external or internal (to the body or else to itself). This directing of attention is determined automatically, depending on the organism's current situation and contextual priorities (ranked from among all of its possible motivations, emotions, instincts, interests, anxieties, concerns, and so on). With narrow to wide-open focus, attention is turned to whatever has the highest priority, fundamentally for the sake of restoring some aspect of metabolic equilibrium — in relation to which there's almost always one or another aspect of disequilibrium calling for attention. The sources of disequilibria need not be consciously recognised as they appeal for resolution, adding up to constant, often subliminal demands for prioritising of attention. The 'monkey mind' incorrigibly checks all around for anything to worry about.

(2) When attention is directed externally, this happens thanks to the world-model generating an internal representation of the relevant external situation — complete with modelling of 'possibilities' or 'expectations' (which are also weighted as probabilities) — but what does attention get directed to exactly? It gets directed to the features of any situation about which there is some element of doubt — where the resolution of that doubt is currently prioritised. Thus, the function of attention is to make a comparison between the relevant 'in-doubt elements' of the situation and the relevant 'contingency components' of one's world-model. In other words, based on its current priorities, the world-model is in the business of actively checking 'what's out there' — comparing itself against external reality and updating itself, and/or filling in gaps — thereby to more expediently guide the organism's actions in its environment.

(3) When attention is directed internally to the world-model's own components, we have 'imagination' and/or 'thought' and/or 'communication'. Particularly when a person engages in speech, attention's focus darts around in the network of concepts and linguistic codes which constitute the symbol-rich, thought-sustaining higher orders of their world-model. Thought involves very powerful symbolic or linguistic modelling and representation of elements of reality as concepts, making it a function within the world-models of people, but much less (if at all) within those of animals. Thought and imagination both facilitate processes of analysis and inference, however, which involve the modelling of relations that appear to exist between more basic 'sensory' components of the world-model. Thought and imagination also allow the world-model to compare sets of its components against one another — essentially cross-checking for self-consistency.

(4) The world-model's own prioritisations are part of the internal reality that it models. This involves becoming aware of and comparing alternative courses of action in terms of the outcomes of mental simulations. As disequilibria occur among thought processes (from curiosity to anxiety) attention

may be reflectively directed to the contextual weighting of priorities itself, especially with regard to 'higher order' consequences; strategically valuing imagined situations that are conducive to basic, first-order equilibrium. This refocusses attention in terms of longer-term or broader priorities, including morals and social norms; the whole procedure being modelled in conjunction with the concept of free will.

In summary, suppose that a modelling mechanism is suitably equipped to map its environment, including the 'possible' relations it's currently in. Suppose it has overall situational priorities, and that to resolve these it progressively updates itself (while cross-checking the contextual consistency of its priority weightings) against the most relevant features of its immediate environment; in order to act effectively to restore internal equilibrium. Such a mechanism delineates the 'interesting' from the plausible, narrowing the modelled possibilities of what's present. I'd say it has genuine subjective awareness, whether rudimentary or profound, depending on the organism. 'Consciousness' appears to be often intuited incorrectly as a passive, data-receptive state of being. I submit that it is really an active, data-inquisitive state of doing. Rather than a pure, sublimely poised, autonomous property that is somehow innately possessed by conscious entities, it's an extremely specific, powerfully coordinated, integrated process happening imprecisely inside conscious entities. Moreover, as the brain embodies the model's activity, it's incapable of modelling the activity itself other than through inference, and so infers that its own activity is self-originating, whereas the activity arises from the physical universe. The puzzle is how physical stuff could ever 'feel', but I think all feeling is ultimately just the prioritising of attention.

Appendix 3:   Reflecting reality, self-reflecting — and free will

As cognitive organisms, we possess numerous, ever-present disequilibria that are queuing up to be rationally resolved. Since our cognitive mechanisms can't deal with them all at once, however, a prioritisation system is needed — focusing rationality on the issues of disequilibria that have the highest priority, which can be called one's dominant motivations at any given time. As these arise, they serve to focus or prime attention, which thus gets continuously redirected to the most contextually relevant contents of consciousness. (The most workable meaning of 'conscious' gets widely debated, but I accept the notion that we perform thousands of actions and process millions of data every day non-consciously — with or without attention being directed to them — as opposed to engaging in 'deliberate' behaviour or thought.)

Whenever somebody pays sensory or mental attention, it's because, due to their current priorities, they are interested in certain aspects of the respective environment (physical, metabolic, emotional, mental, social or cultural). These would inevitably be aspects that, to the individual, are relevantly uncertain or at least subject to variation — since there is little purpose in paying attention to what matches or is wholly consistent with the contents of one's world-model. Due to the presence of uncertainties, we benefit from scrutinising our surroundings, informing ourselves in order to respond more effectively to the circumstances that we are liable to find ourselves in, and duly recording 'equilibrium relevant' issues. According to this theory, attention gets directed by automatic prioritisation processes. Given the organism's situation and its pre-existing world-model contents, the issue comes down to which contingencies, embodied by both physical (external) and mental (internal) environments, possess the highest personal priorities for being cross-checked. This is addressed by the world-model providing a schematic sub-model of the organism's current situation, incorporating the uncertainties of relevance. These uncertainties (by which I also mean 'possibilities' or 'known unknowns') are exactly the facets of the situation that attention is paid to — and which the organism is consequently conscious of.

In fact, the environments which we explore include those of our own world-models, as we discover or re-confirm the myriad abstractions formerly established among their contents. Self-reflection means attending to one's metabolic or mental states in this context — comparing their conceptual relations from a 'higher order' perspective. This comprises secondary representations of primary representations — schematic sub-models of schematic sub-models and so forth — with attention flowing from one to another, depending on the weightings of uncertainties between them. I wonder if many 'mystical' (not to mention perhaps schizophrenic) phenomena could be attributable to non-symbolic rationality subconsciously 'straying' into the symbolic domain so that concepts get confused with percepts. Although real reality isn't directly accessible on conceptual terms, our somewhat unreal socio-linguistic constructs, which we're obliged to inhabit, are never entirely divorced from the real world, anyway. They can also be fascinating, expansive, rewarding and socially valuable. On the other hand, the fluidity of our symbolic worlds means they need to be

firmly grounded both in the bodily senses and through ongoing communications with a broad range of other people.

World-models have at least two main kinds of building blocks — icons and symbols (described below in Appendix 5) — forming vast networks of weighted links between mental states. While these sets of connections are based on neurones, no state necessarily entails specific neurones firing. Icons are approximated 'sensations'. The registration of how these link up affords their semantic interpretation as 'perceptions', and non-symbolic rationality has an iconic, analogue basis. This puts it more directly in touch with reality, but for managing large amounts of data it's less efficient than its modern counterpart that uses discrete symbols. These are constructed from icons; links between icons; other symbols; and links between other symbols. Imagination recombines both icons and symbols in modelling explorative simulations of reality, but the symbolic mode's reliance on abstractly categorised 'conceptions' makes it prone to distortion in mapping reality.

Symbolic information-processing is normally so effective that we employ it almost all the time. It's the foundation of human speech and of monologue thought, but our underlying pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual world-model still has vital functions beneath the linguistic one. Out of these two mechanisms of rationality, we tend to be conscious only through the latter. The non-linguistic one, probably millions of years old, provides a sensory basis for the latter, grounding it in reality, but operating at subliminal levels of which we're usually not aware. The linguistic world-model, meanwhile, is full of socially framed beliefs and story-based symbols and concepts. These allow us to efficiently share huge sums of information, but are prone to distort reality. In the latihan, as the conceptual world-model takes a back seat, attention's prioritisation seems to switch over (incompletely and intermittently) to a non-conceptual mode. This delivers a chance for the non-linguistic, more picture-oriented world-model to pay attention to the symbolic substructure that it provides and on which the linguistic one depends. Through a kind of iconic review, re-construction and re-consolidation of this platform, it gradually diminishes any reality distortions among the linguistic world-model's components, helping us to function better. In the process, it actively engages with lots of those story-based symbols and concepts. These include our culturally derived interpretations and depictions of morality and spirituality, along with their emotional impacts.

Prioritisation factors may be incorporated (to arbitrary accuracy) in the overall world-model as features of the person's own physical and psychological nature, but no currently operative attention-prioritising factor can itself be prioritised for cross-checking. To do so would involve a sub-model (representing part of one's character) embodying uncertainty, leaving nothing for it to be cross-checked against. Attention exists only because the organism's immediate path toward resolving some disequilibrium incorporates a range of situational possibilities, and attention's function is to reduce this range in order for more efficient action to be taken. As a result, whenever somebody self-reflects, their in-the-moment, innermost motivations can never be immediately and directly scrutinised. In other words, it must always appear to the individual that he or she is spontaneously directing attention based on an undetectable, intangible locus of autonomy — which is symbolically labelled as free will. This conceptualisation is essentially a shortcut means of ignoring the reality that attention gets directed in the way described above, via automatic internal prioritisations, established in the context of the person's relevant uncertainties and pre-existing world-model. Within the narrative of the resolution of disequilibria, this illusion is likely to be helpful for attention to operate. As prioritisations are continuously reconfigured, attention's focus and direction constantly change, but it can never be directed toward its own current prioritisation processes.

Appendix 4:   A skeptical aside — the glamour of the guru

Some say the latihan is divine in origin, and the notion of Pak Subuh's talks being latihan-guided creates an impression of them as divinely inspired. Some say that just by reading or listening to the talks in a suitably receptive state of being, our inner lives can be nourished; and if the talks were divinely inspired, it's gravely held that they simply must be true. Though there's no objective evidence that Pak Subuh's talks are spiritually special, a sense of earnest gratitude lingers, inducing the pious acceptance of his tale of becoming the conduit for the exercise. However, there's no good reason to abandon our modern tradition of questioning contentious ideas with respect to evidence. In skeptical terms, it's likely that aspects of auto-suggestion are in play whenever people solemnly and humbly attend to 'sacred' texts in a tranquil, contemplative, yet non-analytical frame of mind with the preconception of privileged access to a precious revelation.

Whichever half-venerable guru it might be, anyone entering into such a deep interaction with his or her words, heeding them in a deeply receptive state, is liable to come away with self-fulfilling confirmations of spiritually edifying benefit.

Intense disciple-guru relationships involving certain charismatic qualities and levels of devotion can generate what are loosely called mystical experiences. These may readily take on forms that match the guru's accounts of spiritual reality, including the value of the relationship. This effect varies greatly among people, but if even a few disciples report such phenomena, then social reinforcement of the disciple-guru relationship can occur across a wider population. As gurus typically encourage disciples to engage in inner practices, the propensity for mystical phenomena is enhanced and the reverence factor is compounded. The guru may be expected to supply some spiritual theory based on suitably mystical terminology. He or she may profess to be intimately familiar with relevant spiritual realities that are inaccessible to the disciples, who accept the details of the relations between theoretical entities on trust. Provided that the overall account is basically self-consistent, this will satisfy the more reverent followers. The guru's authority is amplified, however, if the disciples are led to understand that, through their humility, sincerity, diligence and merit, they too could eventually become directly acquainted with the realities as described. This echoes the Emperor's New Clothes. The weavers of the cloth claim it's invisible to anyone who's incompetent, but magnificent in the eyes of everyone else — at which all of the courtiers are intimidated into obsequious adulation. Weavers of spiritual theories may likewise placate doubt by saying, 'You'll be unable to verify these truths for a while, but they'll become clear as your spirituality advances.'

When physicists, say, use Einstein's tensor equations of General Relativity to explain inferences of Dark Energy, we're free to be skeptical. On the whole, however, we tend to trust that they know what they're talking about, despite our not recognising their technical terminology; neither the entities referred to, nor the mathematics relating them. Our trust is based on the scientists' reputations. We also observe that, at least in principle (given enough textbooks and free time), their mysterious pronouncements are checkable by anyone. Similarly, a spiritual leader may promise followers that a doctrine is checkable provided that they commit to the disciple-guru relationship, are patient in their practice, and are blessed with sufficient spiritual capacity. That's good enough for many, but another option is to investigate the theory. Scholarly research, wrestling with the cultural, religious and esoteric technicalities, may cultivate an informed view to at least authenticate the theory's credentials and relevance to the inner practice. Unfortunately, this is inclined to look like seriously hard work, especially since, via the recommended inner practice alone, one supposedly has the prospect of automatically gaining acquaintance with these matters in conjunction with spiritual progress. Besides, as the guru may have mentioned, inner reality is beyond the mind's ability to grasp, so no amount of study can ever shed light on the explanation presented. Needless to say, as a strategy of boldness goes, this is convenient with respect to securing unquestionability. It demands no mental labour, offering an interpretation of spirituality which is claimed not only to transcend the intellect, but to manifest itself to anyone who humbly, sincerely and diligently undertakes the practice.

Appendix 5: Semiotics, explanations — and having faith

The study called 'semiotics' draws a useful distinction between three possible ways of transmitting or communicating information — icons, symbols and indices. An icon is some direct, physical form of association to represent something. For instance, a photo of my cat sleeping on the bed pillow tells me that she's been there (again). A symbol is a wholly indirect indicator for representing something, perhaps chosen by social conventions lost in history, or even arbitrarily. For instance, a handwritten note concerning my cat might afford the same information. Most linguistic sentences and ordinary words are symbols. An index is in-between — somewhat iconic, but also requiring some process of inference that's based on the situational context. For instance, had the bedroom door been open, cat hair on the squashed pillow transmits the same message as before. Among humans, however, relevant information might be conveyed indexically only thanks to some non-symbolic social convention. For example, my cat being locked in the garage, along with her water, food and litter tray, could be a message to me about closing the bedroom door before leaving the house. As in this example, metaphors use symbols to represent ideas, including other symbols, on the basis of icons and indices.

The significance of symbol manipulation is immense to the point that it virtually defines our species. A major advantage of it is that, employing metaphor, we can describe, name and record

things, processes and encounters that have not been previously described, named or recorded. Whether a culture is comprised of a hundred people or a billion, it will change profoundly as its 'concept set' develops; similar to an individual person. Taking full advantage of symbol use, however, may require some readiness to uncritically suspend disbelief – to 'see through the eyes of another' as he or she describes what they have seen. Combined with our natural curiosity, this is a blessing when, say, children are guided by the words of a parent or other trustworthy adult, but credulousness, or perhaps 'faith', may cause problems if a trusted story-teller's narrative is perhaps misleading, deceptive or unusually exotic. Explanations can easily come to be accepted as absolute truths, despite the conceptual meaning of truth itself being determined by socio-cultural conditioning and expectations.

Human communication is chiefly about words and phrases. A species using a symbol-based language assigns meaning to these through some form of social agreement. However, it's practically impossible to do this (especially as children) unless each individual recognises that others also possess portable, mental worlds within which they too are capable of freely assigning meanings to symbols, as well as modelling others' world-models. Symbol-based language implies thus appreciating that other people have their own separate viewpoints, and an ability to imagine oneself in somebody else's shoes. Moreover, if a narrative or account concerns experiences that the listener hasn't had, then allocating meanings to words and phrases is likely to take place more efficiently if the listener tends to automatically adopt or identify with the perspective of the speaker or protagonist. With good story-telling, we tend not to participate as passively disinterested bystanders, but actively visualise ourselves wearing the shoes of the person portrayed as having the experiences.

I suspect that evolution made us very receptive to coherent stories, whether or not these are intended as explanations. For hundreds of thousands of years, humans listened at the fireside to others' tales of 'what is out there' — anticipating edification and/or entertainment. During the last few thousand years, this process came to include reading, where the story-teller is physically absent. Now it covers cinema, TV and video games, but it's always about our willingness, or even eagerness, to suspend disbelief and put ourselves in the hands of some narrator or advice giver — trusting him or her to suitably stimulate our imaginations with scenarios that we find pleasure in visualising, creating mental worlds that can be wider and richer in significance than familiar environments. Such receptivity can backfire if and when the stories replace direct experience of life — which seems to occur, sometimes sadly — but it lets individuals and societies benefit massively whenever it adds enlightening perspectives or understanding to our direct experience of life.

If our receptivity is hard-wired by evolution, then it must be conducive to our species' survival. This may seem trivial, as it's easily taken for granted, but every primordial human social group, on the whole, would have benefitted from its members attending to narratives, absorbing both information and 'feelings'. While language transfers learned wisdom among individuals, human communities also formalise it to establish cultural institutions. Anthropology scholars talk about the commonality of certain 'mythic' themes among diverse societies. These may have local motifs but universal benefits in relation to expressing natural laws, supporting the social order or conceptually guiding individuals through the stages of life. The image of the hero, for instance, as developed and conveyed to young males (sexism noted) over the course of some half-a-million years – whether verbally or graphically, via narrative, metaphor, allegory, ceremony or ritual – should be expected to have inspired them 'to boldly go' and achieve useful outcomes for their social groups.

So it would appear that we are primed to respond to narratives as motivating forces — potentially valuable for building social cohesion. The solidarity of human communities often plainly hinges on a common sense of identity, reinforced by joint trust in a particular source of stories or explanations — and hence mutual trust. This is because seeing through the eyes of the same narrator or advice giver is to share that perspective. Our innate capacity for symbol manipulation therefore supports the tendency to cleave tenaciously to any systems of concepts which characterise our social groups. Moreover, our emotional interdependence may incline us to buy into socially endorsed, 'manufactured' realities based on good story-telling, which may elicit communal hope, but also possibly conceit. There can be a lot of peer-pressure alongside, and shrugging off that collective investment could well be interpreted as a sign of individual unreliability.

Appendix 6: Pak Subuh — Caracas — 1 April 1959

Ladies and gentlemen, this evening Bapak would like to explain about the spiritual

training of Subud, our worship of the One Almighty God, which all of you have experienced.

The spiritual training is a training of the content of our human self, whose working in our being we have long been unaware of. As you know, when we were new-born babies we were still in contact with the state of our inner self. That is why, as babies, our face would often show expressions of happiness or sadness, or sometimes disappointment. The fact is that those expressions of a baby reflect a state of reality; but we grown-up people, who are able to use all our five senses, are unable to know what a baby is feeling and what a baby knows at such moments.

However, as the days, weeks and months go by, the baby's senses begin to get closer to the influence of the world. For example, the baby begins to be able to see the shapes that are in this world and to hear earthly sounds. The baby's contact with its soul gradually closes. So when the baby has become a grown child, the child is more familiar with the condition of the world outside than with the condition existing within its self.

The bigger the child grows — the more the child sees and studies and experiences things in this world — the closer he or she comes to the influences of the world and the further from influences from within the self. You could say that what comes from inside has been closed up completely. All the five senses: the heart, the desires, the brain and the thoughts have become filled with influences of the world, and obtain no spark or content whatsoever from the child's soul.

Consequently, when such people come to think and ponder about the nature of life after death, they can only do so by adjusting it to experiences they have had in the world. It's not impossible that they may think or wonder, 'What is paradise like? What is God and what is He like?' When they think about and consider such things, their imagination compares them to what is in this world. In reality however, we cannot compare life after death and God to anything that exists on this earth. Yet that is really what people do when they grow up and become adults, because they have long forgotten the way of knowing that they possessed when they were small and still closely connected to the life before they existed in this world and the life after death.

Now you are just beginning to experience how you were, when you were a baby. Now, tonight, that ambience has begun to open up so that, little by little, you can connect with your soul again, and you can connect with states from before the world influenced your physical parts or your five senses. That is why when you receive this latihan it is not necessary for you to think. You should not use your brain, heart or desires, lest they form a block or obstacle to your receiving from the contact with your soul, which the power of God is bringing back to life.

It appears to me that Pak Subuh spoke most directly about the latihan back in the 1950s. He indicated many times that the latihan could raise its practitioners to a purer, higher level of being — which is typically supposed to be desirable — whatever 'higher' might stand for. In this relatively early talk partially presented above, he was more explicit about the latihan's possible results, but still didn't say 'how' it is supposed to work. Maybe Pak Subuh didn't know, or maybe it's just an unfathomable 'divine gift', or maybe its best chance of being effective is if one simply doesn't theorise about it. In any case, the religious style of language he used to describe the latihan can readily be replaced by psychological or philosophical talk, while keeping the pragmatic meaning intact. Each person's reaction to this will depend on just what styles they're familiar with, and how flexibly they can recalibrate the medium of the message. Paragraph by paragraph (skipping the introduction), the above highly metaphorical passage is more satisfactorily understood by me as follows.

The Subud exercise involves our non-conscious human nature. As you know, when new-born, we are devoid of symbols and their effects. We are more like our ancient, pre-linguistic ancestors were for their whole lives. That is why as babies we show expressions of feeling like animals show — with these feelings not being motivated or determined by socio-linguistic influences. Such expressions reflect a state of reality that is free from conceptualised thought, a state that is based on mental representations that are much more direct than those that come later, when symbols and abstractions,

including words, ideas, descriptions and conceptual systems, come to dominate our perceptions of reality.

However, as time passes, the baby's own senses become mediated by language. For example, a baby begins to see shapes as having labelled identities that are presented by parents and other family members around them. These identities come to be symbolised by gestures, signs, signals, words and various other linguistic elements. The baby's contact with its original socio-iconic, analogue representation of reality is gradually superseded by many socio-linguistic levels of interaction and understanding based on communal processing of verbally discretised information.

The bigger the child grows, the more it sees and studies and experiences worldly things in socio-linguistic terms, and the closer it comes to the influences of linguistically founded social norms and rule-oriented methods of thinking and conceptualising. You could say that the socio-iconic level of perceiving the world becomes thoroughly submerged beneath the vast complexities of syntax-based rationality and symbolically rule-based living. Perceptions, emotions, ambitions and thoughts all become concept-driven and constructed, with the result that the emergent, semi-autonomous processes and pressures of verbal society become dominant among the child's motivations.

Consequently, when older people come to think about the meaning of life, they arrive at all sorts of ultimately implausible, quasi-mystical notions that actually derive mainly from accidents of social history, geography and culture, and the individual's socio-linguistic dependence on the contingencies of widely variable social norms. In reality, however, one's life as an individual in the world of socio-linguistic labels and concepts is very different from what life would be like without such a syntactic-symbolic emphasis — corresponding to a way of knowing reality that babies have, and which our pre-linguistic ancestors had.

Now you are just beginning to experience how you were, when you were a baby. That contact with your more iconic, less symbolic way of thinking and being in the world is beginning to be made available to you, and you can connect with states from beyond the socio-linguistic world's influence upon your being. That is why when you receive this latihan it is not necessary or useful for you to conceptualise. In the latihan, you should not indulge your intellect or emotions or goals or beliefs because these have been already shaped and directed by the socio-linguistic world of conceptualising things symbolically, and will form a block to your sense of that pre-linguistic appreciation of life which continues to reside deep within you.