

The Book of Proceedings: Peeling the Onion

by Sophia Blake, Facilitator, 14-Feb-2008 Peeling the Onion

How does Subud's communal culture help and hinder us, and what can we do about it? ...and the resulting discussions from the workgroups...

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Only four workshops are included here. For the complete paper, contact Leonora Raven, Office Manager for Subud Australia, at leonora01@gmail.com]

A) WHAT CHANGES AND/OR EXPANSIONS IN TITLES OR PRACTICES help make Subud more attractive to new seekers? – Bavali H and Gavin D

15 people took part in discussions.

Summary

Honesty

- avoid “bait and Switch” ploy where dishonest statements are used to sell Subud, but then aren't delivered
- use clear, simple honest statements that reflect the actual content and vision
- communicate what Subud IS, not what it IS NOT

Language

- language needs to be fresh, alive, communicate using the seeker's own choice of words and beliefs so it appeals and is understood
- some language in Subud is inbred – is so exclusive it has no meaning to a new person
- Islamic and Javanese terms are from Subud's beginnings but not culturally relevant for Australians and so are now outmoded when talking to others
- however, one person argued that every practice has its own words and language
- so why not have alternative words, that accurately describe the practice, but that are more inviting and easily understood. These words could be additional to what is already in use – so people have choice depending on appropriateness of situation

- much discussion about meditation – using words as an approximation for latihan to help explain this practice – “its like a type of meditation”, a “moving meditation”
- we must not be stuck back in what was relevant in 1957; cultures move on and we have a right to change words such as kejiwaan, latihan etc (Abdullah)
- language is alive – it changes and grows
- even Subud as a name should be looked at – Come from Buddhist terms (sic) Susila, Budhi and Dharma and we have changed the meaning of these root words

Helpers

- much discussion about helpers alienating new people by imposing words , “Almighty God” or by saying that some of the new person’s religious practices aren’t suitable (meditation, yoga)
- yet Bapak has stated that the new person’s own choice of words should be used in the opening statement
- need for an applicant’s bill of rights, so they know what to expect and have grounds for complaint and an avenue for complaint

Three month probation

- suggestion for more flexibility in 3 month waiting period – group had much discussion for and against

Retention of new members

- lack of love and harmony, of acceptance – leads to new members leaving
- need more awareness around this, better “buddy” system if helpers not fully engaged

Superiority

- several members mentioned that the notion of Subud being ‘special’ and Subud members having exclusive access to ‘grace of God’ being unattractive to outsiders
- the Subud community can be unfriendly and unkind to new people

Action

- a glossary or layman’s dictionary on the website – so “user-friendly” alternatives can be listed for words that are confusing or ‘Subud-exclusive’

- help members to have additional words and phrases available to use when describing Subud to non-members
- Murray C also mentioned the idea of a competition (1 to 1.5 pages limit to explain and its practices to non-members
- this idea also being taken up by Ludmilla S from another discussion group

S – secret, shy, suspicious

U – under exposed

B – backward looking

U – under-staffed, under-funded

D – drum, still banging on the same old drum – Gavin S

B) WE ARE FOCUSED ON THE INNER SUBUD – we do not have a means to facilitate the finding of the outer Subud – the talent or the visible things where our small numbers can be seen – let's explore – Sachlan F

Participants: Renee G, Alexis G, Rohana F, Marcus M, Ramzi A, Hussein R

- think about the mirror image of inner and outer and how there is no real forum for finding outer talents etc.
- talk about identifying talents in our young people in Subud. Helping others in our community find their talents
- identifying the process that young people go through to get to their talent
- staying open to possibilities, but also recognising that sometimes something has to ripen within the person before they can really proceed down the right path
- power of trusting talent, inner indication, guidance for life and work, even if unclear how to do it. Trust and take one step at a time and things open up – others in group support the process (the Yes Quest follows this)
- having faith and hope that our inner strength will guide us to our true talent – show in the outer the fruit of the inner latihan
- what is a healthy Subud community?
- identifying deep-seated differences and putting them on the table

C) WHAT IS SUBUD'S BIG HAIRY AND AUDACIOUS (and worthwhile) GOAL? – David W

Participants – a big group of over 20 changing people

David introduced the topic by suggesting that in order for individual spiritual and Subud Group growth to occur, what is needed in any organisation is a goal that is able to stretch and challenge. Such goals are called "BHAGs", a term coined by the authors of *Built to Last*, a study of long-lived companies which were acknowledged as leaders in their industry. He also cited his recent readings on Kierkegaard, who felt that meaning in life comes only from 100% commitment to a cause, finite and tangible enough that failure is possible.

He felt that this is what was most important about the Bank and other Subud enterprises was the challenge they presented to members, rather than their actual success or failure, although of course we'd prefer to also succeed. The transformative power of a BHAG comes from the commitment, not the success or failure. In fact, the possibility of failure—the risk—is important.

David proposed as an example of a BHAG that was a stretch, but yet potentially achievable: "To become the most respected host for Inter-faith gatherings in Australia, within 10 years." It's achievable, in that Subud does have some skills in inter-faith respect between members, and in putting together great meetings and Congress. It's a big stretch, in that Subud does not currently know how to communicate itself public, and is not always unbiased in the way it deals with religions and theology. Another example given was that the goal of the moon launch program, depicted in the recent documentary "In the Shadow of the Moon". Although initially 50% of the rockets were blowing up and the expertise was not present at that time to achieve the goal, it was having the goal that pushed the program to success and that drove the inner transformation. We need a goal that confronts us on a daily basis with every flaw that we have, in order for us to be inspired to achieve.

Comments from the group:

- Recently there was a meeting of the Abrahamic alliance, a meeting of major religions, including Jews, Muslims and Christians. 300 people attended. I'd like Subud to be part of this group and it could help us achieve this goal.

- To do this we'd have to learn how to talk about Subud, in ways that were easy to understand and that captured the essence, 'what it can be and can achieve', letting Subud become more widely known.
- The goal has to be big enough so others can also find their own vision in it.
- We'd have to confront the bias towards one or two religions, words, practices.
- Having a big hairy audacious goal keeps a forward motion in action, in individuals, in the group and in the world.. e.g In Christchurch, they firstly got a house, then halls, 1 hectare of land and are now building a second hall.
- We need to break the goal into small steps. E.g. everyone firstly being comfortable explaining what Subud is.
- Another goal could be to target young people, such as having 5000 young Subud people in Australia involved and active by this time next year.
- Subud is largely white, middle class, Anglo-Saxon with not many other cultures included. In proportion to population numbers we should have 6 Aboriginal people, yet have only 1.
- The way we do things is very Western. To reach out to other cultures, we will need to go out and invite them in, possibly through Ethnic TV and radio and we need to make sure all of our policies have an inter-faith flavour.
- Vote taken on whether this topic is a useful notion or not: 20 Yes; 0 No; 3 Unsure.
- 'Unsure' - maybe, if it was a clear and concrete goal. I feel it must be realistic and within a realistic timeframe.
- We don't have to achieve the goal, other forces will come into play, (we just need to aim).
- Brainstorm on possible projects that would fit this topic:
 1. build a town in Kalimantan
 2. world sustainability, between countries and religions, caring for the earth and soil, producing food and also reducing conflict between religions, people, countries.
 3. Interfaith and inter-cultural, or maybe we could absorb the notion of interfaith into intercultural.
 4. environmental
 5. bring in more young people.
 6. what are the Australian values, philosophically? Bring inter-religions and inter-cultural into Australian notions of 'multi-cultural'.
 7. develop our own identity
 8. 500% growth in numbers in 2 years.

9. Subud symbol in each capital city, associated with innovative and best practice.
10. for Subud culture to become known in our community through creativity, inter-religions, inter-cultural, non-discriminatory.
11. World leader is looking after the earth
12. Subud Internationally – to have international preparation and training of helpers, clear communication skills, to know the Helpers book, to review, improve, change.
13. 21st Century vision for Subud Australia
14. To recognize the parallel between the Inner and Outer Organisation in Subud – finding your talent
15. Subud Australia to understand the concept of ‘cultural competence’.
16. 10 groups in Sydney by 2020.
17. a Subud Hospital, Subud School, theatre, University.
18. get SICA and SIHA up and running and effective in our communities.
19. for Subud to stop focusing on taking over the world.
 - In Cultural awareness, the onus is on the individual, while in cultural competence the onus is on the organization. We need skills and knowledge, not necessarily know of the working of every culture/ S change is needed to transform the culture we already have, the way we do and organize things. We need self reflection so change is an evolving process via communication, skills, knowledge. (David E)
 - Respect for others, principles, all members to sign up (Savana)
 - Why Aboriginal people? Can't they just chill? (David E)
 - Mental health. (Sachlan)
 - If the Cronulla riots ... a good indicator. (Chad)

D) HELPER TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE – Francia R

Participants: Halina F, Chairani P, Rosamund D-S

- being tested as a candidate, attending latihans and meetings, and presence at 3 openings doesn't seem to be enough
- members seem to go (leave Subud) often because of helper behaviour
- dewan harmony sets the tone of the group
- the helper handbook should be given to each candidate and read and discussed

- there needs to be training re: communication skills – possibly outsourcing trainers to come in
- the national helpers will be approached for discussion assistance with these issues raised here today
- Marcus M was asked if he would come to the Melbourne group and work with the helpers and is willing if the invitation is genuine
- dewan harmony brings/draws people to Subud – lack of harmony keeps people away
- regular (at least annual) testing “how is it for me to remain a helper? How is it for the members?” as well as testing regularly to become active if inactive
- “what is my perception of how I fulfil my role as helper?”
- “what is the reality of how I fulfil my role as a helper?”
- “what is my true role as a helper?”
- “what is my perception of the harmony of the group?”
- “what is the reality..”
- “what do I need to contribute to the creation of the harmony of the group?”
- the out-going of Subud has been discussed a lot
- Bapak’s helpers can make or break what follows an enquiry into Subud

Open Space Workshop attended by:

Ramzi A, Hilton B, Bavali H, Rohana F, Sachlan F, Hussein R, Laurentia K, Minh S, Matt V, Hermina S, Chad f, Simon B, David W, Ruth M, Anisah F, Matthew T, Luqman W, Murray C, Salamah P, Alfiah B, Gavin S, Joy O, Alexis G, Ian J, Mursalin S, Sebastian N, Marcus M, Howard B, Halina F, Savana S, Sophia R, Natasha O, Ludmilla S, Susannah R, Francia R, Rosamund DS, Kenneth C, Renee G, Rohmana F, Liliana J, Lydia S, Emilie L, Murray C,