

# Sufism and Subud

By Dirk Campbell

**Subud** is a spiritual association founded by Muhammad Subuh, a Javanese Muslim born in 1901. Surprisingly for a movement originating in a country without an international reputation for spirituality, in 1957 Subud attracted attention and spread all over the world, drawing in previous followers of other spiritual paths, including members of all the main religious faiths, as well as seekers of no previous persuasion.

**Sufism** is the transformative interpretation of Islam. Many of the foremost figures in classical Sufism, however, espouse doctrines which orthodox Muslims regard as foreign to their religion. Its area of operation centres on the Middle East and Asia. Certain aspects of it have attracted attention among spiritual seekers in the west, largely due to the pioneering efforts of one of its most well-known 20th century exponents, Idries Shah (d. 1996).[1]

Some authors have placed Subud and Sufism in relationship with each other. Ann Bancroft's book, *Modern Mystics and Sages*, for example, has a chapter on Pak Subuh in the section 'Masters with a Sufi Background'. Other authors have made similar assumptions.

It is also the line taken by Idries Shah. Muhammad Subuh, on the other hand, has flatly denied any causal link between Subud and Sufism. The question of the origin of Subud cannot therefore be said to be unequivocally established in the way that the origins of other movements are established. There is some justifiable doubt about it.

Subud claims to be a spiritual phenomenon in essence unconnected with any previously existing vehicle, representing a new paradigm in which a power beyond human life is authorised to be directly accessible to all, not only to the prepared few as in the past, and in which the old methods requiring specific training and dependence of the pupil upon the teacher are superseded. But if Subud can be proved to be no more than a Sufi spin-off, then we must — at least in this case — question the idea of an entirely new dispensation or new model of spiritual transformation.

To anyone embarking on a comparative study there does in fact appear to be a good deal of overlap between the Subud method and Sufi teaching and practice. The shared territory consists in certain concepts and terminology, and in the spiritual practice itself.

In Subud the constant and active element is the exercise of submission known as *latihan kejiwa'an* — an Indonesian expression which translates roughly into English as 'training (*latihan*) of the content of the inner self (*jiwa*)'. The *latihan kejiwa'an* is a voluntary state of submission in which an inner energy is felt. This energy motivates the participant in a way that corresponds to his or her condition at that moment. In contrast to the religious concept of submission which is linked to external factors such as belief, teaching or the adoption of a certain prescribed attitude, submission in Subud is held to be directly to the power of God without effort or intermediary. To introduce any effort or intermediary is counterproductive in this context.[2]

In Sufism, direct submission to God is also the central theme. Although this factor is not much mentioned in Idries Shah's anthologies, it is of paramount importance in all the Sufi classics from which he draws. What the Sufi writers allude to, in this context,

is a state represented by such terms as 'drunkenness', 'abandonment', 'absorption into the infinite' and so on, which come about as a result of complete surrender, and not by means of one's own effort. A key concept is that of '*fana*' (annihilation) and '*baqa*' (remaining); the idea being that when everything is given up — all desires, expectations, fears and imaginings without exception — then what remains is the true inner self.[3]

It should be added that neither in Sufism nor in Subud is spiritual experience the final aim. The shared doctrine states that from the practice of surrender will arise inner guidance, which must be followed, otherwise the practice is without value. It is no use praying, doing exercises or holding certain beliefs all your life on the assumption that this alone will 'get you into Heaven'. What is received must be put into effect otherwise there will be no inner development. There may even be an inner deterioration.

The principle of submission to the highest universal power gives rise to many parallels between Subud and Sufism in theory and practice. They do, on the face of it, have so much in common that it would be quite reasonable to suppose that they are connected, and that in all probability the more recent (Subud) is derived from the more ancient (Sufism). This is the impression given by Idries Shah.[16]

Shah states that Subud is a Sufi popularisation and that the Subud latihan is a Sufi exercise. He likens the Subud exercise of surrender to one practised by the great Sufi teachers Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband and their followers.[4], [5]

Pak Subuh's position is that the latihan exercise was not learned by him from anyone nor given to him by anyone. He claims that it came to him in a completely unexpected way from a level beyond that of human life. At the age of twenty-four, after many years of spiritual study and discussion which by his own account was leading nowhere, he was walking along the street late one night when a ball of radiant white light descended out of the sky and entered his body through the head. This extremely startling experience was the beginning of a further series of intense experiences for Pak Subuh which he described in terms already familiar to him, but the purpose of which he did not as yet understand. He continued throughout it all to try to lead an ordinary outward life and observe the Muslim religion in the normal way.[7]

Shah's first published mention of Subud appears in his book *The Way of the Sufi*, first published in 1970. Having stated that Subud is a Sufi popularisation whose technique is of Naqshbandi-Qadiri origin, he goes on to say that what is valued in Subud is the experience rather than the process of development, with the result that the opportunity for inner transformation is missed. People leave the movement when they cease to have strong experiences, the rest remaining as 'stalwarts'. [16]

Shah seems to be saying that the latihan exercise of surrender to the power of God is a valid developmental exercise, only that it originates in Sufi practice. If Shah is right, we are left with the question of how Pak Subuh acquired it from the Sufis. Nowhere in any of Shah's references to Subud does he explain this question, and neither do any members of his group in their published work, although they echo Shah's disparagements.[6] Ernest Scott (the pen-name of retired journalist Eddie Campbell) mentions Subud several times in his book *The People of the Secret* (Octagon), and although he gives detailed accounts of how various spiritual initiatives in the west can be traced back to Sufi origins, he does not do this with Subud.

Pak Subuh's own account of the origin of the latihan is described in his brief autobiography, posthumously published.[7] He states that what he received was

directly from a higher source, not through the medium of any teacher, and that Subud of itself contains no teaching. In his talks he sometimes mentions the Sufis. He refers to them on one occasion as 'experts in the *tariqa*'. (Islamic tradition divides religion into four levels: *sharia*, strict observance; *tariqa*, path of study; *haqiqa*, reality; *marifa*, higher knowledge.) Although this seems to be damning with faint praise, Pak Subuh is known to have held the 12th century Sufi teacher Abdul Qadir al-Jilani in high esteem, saying that he had received the latihan on an equivalent level to Subuh himself. Which accords with Shah's attribution of the latihan exercise to Sufi origins. Pak Subuh also mentioned, among others, George Fox, the English founder of the Society of Friends (who lived five centuries after Jilani), as having received the latihan.[15] Fox is not known to have been in contact with Sufis. Independent accounts exist of latihan-like phenomena occurring without Sufi connections; for example among Eskimos.[12]

Pak Subuh's autobiography contains accounts of meetings during the period of his spiritual search with benevolent beings possessing unusual powers. Apart from Kiai (spiritual master) Abdurrachman, referred to below, these personages were not reputed to be Sufis. The important point is that Subuh denies receiving any transmission from them, or even any regular teaching, and claims that he received contact with the power of God in a supernatural way, without any human intermediary, at a moment when he was not concerning himself with spiritual matters at all. In effect, he denied absolutely any origin, Sufi or otherwise, for the latihan other than God alone.

Pak Subuh attested that the dynamic experience known in Subud as the latihan is actually far older than Subud, and has been with mankind from the very beginning — 'since Adam', in fact. He says that it is a potential present in every single person, and that there is no group and no path to which it 'belongs'. It exists now and has existed in the past in many groups and individuals, with or without a label. So no-one can have any claim over it. In Shah's work much the same position is taken regarding higher knowledge and Sufi techniques of spiritual development, the source of which is the birthright of all human beings and has existed 'since Adam'.

Shah's emphasis on the selective nature of Sufi recruitment therefore appears in contrast to the position taken by the majority of Sufi teachers, until one reflects that all spiritual progress is really self-selection. The path is always in front of every individual, but only a few are able to recognise it and, having chosen it, to remain on it. Nevertheless, there is a delineation in Shah's mind between genuine Sufism and what he calls imitation or popularisation.

Subud is clearly not a Sufi imitation, since it does not aspire to be Sufism. Nor is it very effective as a popularisation, since there are (according to Shah) literally millions of people involved in the genuine Sufi enterprise, whereas Subud members are numbered only in thousands. Shah's own successful popularisation of Sufism in his books and lectures has brought Sufi ideas before millions. Subud, by contrast, has reached relatively few people — perhaps 200,000 at most. This makes Shah's description of Subud look a little disproportionate. Nevertheless the implication remains that Subud is a Sufi derivative.

I would like to look at how, from the Sufi perspective, Pak Subuh could be seen to have come by the contact which appears from the literature to be the central principle in classical Sufism, bearing in mind his denial of any Sufi involvement.

In *Journeys with a Sufi Master* (H. M. Dervish, Octagon) accounts are given of a number of Sufi operational methods. These include both overt and covert work. Overt work consists of observable activities such as the publication of books, the giving of lectures, the teaching of exercises to groups and the like. Covert work consists of the

introduction of ideas and practices into society at large, the transmission of *baraka* (a beneficial power), telepathy, 'teaching at a distance' and so on. Now, as a Javanese living at a time when the esoteric ideas of Islam still exerted influence among the general public, Pak Subuh would almost certainly have come into contact with Sufi methods. And it is known that he did. As a young man he was enrolled into a Naqshbandi group under the tutelage of Kiai Abdurrachman. He did not remain with the group long, but it could be claimed that here was the source of transmission of *baraka* which led to Pak Subuh's later spontaneous receiving. That would be an example of covert Sufi action operating in the context of overt Sufi activity. Covert work by definition, of course, includes all manner of things to which no external evidence attaches. However, there are several points in Pak Subuh's life at which 'mysterious strangers' appear. The most significant of these is shortly after his birth. Interestingly, this is claimed to be a standard Sufi operational method occurring in both history and folk-lore.[8] A sage/fairy/mysterious stranger appears soon after the birth of a certain special individual and confers *baraka* on him or her by means of a certain intervention or gift. (One thinks immediately of the Sleeping Beauty and of Jesus!) In Pak Subuh's case the mysterious stranger contrived to have the infant's name changed from Sukarno, the name his parents had given him, to Muhammad Subuh. ('*Subuh*' is the Indonesian form of the Arabic '*subh*' meaning 'dawn'.)

There are other instances in Pak Subuh's life that could be pointed to as likely examples of Sufi contact, but it is not necessary to go into them all. Suffice it to say that there is enough circumstantial evidence to make a convincing case for the Sufi origin of Subud.

Unfortunately one would then be faced by another problem: the question of why Pak Subuh refuted any connection between Subud and Sufism. That he was involved for a time with a Naqshbandi group and even learned some ideas and terminology from this source is indisputable, although Sufism in general left him unimpressed.[9] As for the origin of the latihan exercise, he stated that it had not come about through any teaching or preparation. He said that he did not know why he personally was selected to receive it, but that he had always trusted only in God and wanted to meet God, and had never been interested in gaining spiritual experiences for their own sake. Having been sent the latihan, however, and followed it faithfully for some years, trusting only in the guidance and protection of God without any clear idea initially of its purpose, he was given the understanding and the inward command to supervise the spreading of the contact and to help and advise those who received it.[7]

How well he carried out his task is for history to judge, but that is Pak Subuh's position on the matter. There is the possibility that he was lying about how he got this power, but such a thing is hard to credit for a number of reasons. He was a simple and modest man who did not strive after effect. His appearance and behaviour were unexceptional, and his talks were in colloquial and straightforward Indonesian. Secondly, he was not interested in making propaganda. He was, as head of the Subud movement, invited many times to attend world conferences of religious leaders, but always declined. He was nevertheless a confident public speaker, able to address gatherings of upwards of a thousand people, including prominent political and religious figures, with complete fluency for hours at a time. Thirdly, the latihan which originated with him and which he passed on is acknowledged to be a genuine developmental technique — not something easily acquired, if we are to believe Sufi doctrine, and especially not by someone motivated by self-interest or prone to delusion.

It seems unlikely, then, that Pak Subuh was a liar or that he was deluded. Another possibility is that he was a 'receiver',[8] an unwitting passive instrument of covert Sufi activity. He could in this case have been recognised as possessing a certain sensitivity which could be useful for the Sufi work but only so long as he was

unaware of the mechanism acting on him. The question then facing us is: Was this an experiment which did not work? In other words, was Pak Subuh intended to play a part in the Sufi work but failed to do so? This explanation would be the most plausible, given that one accepts the idea of hidden Sufi enterprise, were it not for the lack of any specific information to this effect from the Sufis themselves. If books such as *The People of the Secret* can prove the Sufi origins of influential European esoteric movements from the middle ages to the present day, one cannot help wondering why, if like information exists about Subud, it has not been made available.

A different theory altogether was proposed to me by Eddie Campbell, a former Subud member and erstwhile pupil of John Bennett,[10] whom I approached with this question. He told me that he believed it possible, through contact with even deteriorated Sufi groups, to come into contact with *baraka* left over from genuine Sufi influence. Pak Subuh, he said, was a simple-minded but extremely sensitive individual whose contact with Abdurrachman's Javanese Naqshbandi group had sparked off a spontaneous reaction taking the form of his subsequent extraordinary experiences. (The fact that Abdurrachman apparently considered himself Pak Subuh's spiritual inferior, and eventually expressed the desire to receive the Subud contact himself[11] would not, according to this theory, preclude the possibility of his having been a channel for the appearance of the latihan phenomenon.)

Abdurrachman is recorded as having stated that he could not teach Pak Subuh anything, and that what he (Subuh) was to receive would be 'directly from God', and not from any teacher.[7] Abdurrachman apparently knew in advance what was going to happen (something that even Pak Subuh did not know) so it is unlikely that he would have transmitted the requisite *baraka* accidentally. If, on the other hand, he was using a conscious ploy in order deliberately to transmit *baraka* 'under cover' by lying to Pak Subuh about it, then the Sufis are directly responsible for the existence of Subud, which causes the difficulties I have mentioned above. Secondly, as attested by Eddie Campbell himself, from his own experience, Pak Subuh was a humble man of impeccable character who was able to bring about dramatic healing miracles, to practise autokinesis and perform paranormal feats of an unusually high order. These powers, if he possessed them, mark Pak Subuh out as a formidable spiritual presence. Pak Subuh's own explanation of the origin of the latihan ought therefore to be considered at least as plausible as any competing one, including the theory of surplus *baraka*.

It seems that Subud cannot really be regarded as a Sufi popularisation. For that to be true, the spiritual technique of the latihan would have to have been deliberately appropriated from Sufi practice, which it clearly was not. I have no doubt that exercises of surrender of various kinds are practised in certain Sufi groups, though whether they are experienced exactly the same way as the Subud exercise it is not possible for me to say. From my contact with the group attached to Idries Shah's brother, Omar Ali Shah, and from conversations with former pupils of Idries Shah, it is clear to me that such a practice is not in fact part of the repertoire of the Shah groups.

A factor which might contribute to Idries Shah's opinion of Subud is, as mentioned earlier, the quantity of Sufi terminology used by Pak Subuh. The avowed spiritual aims of Subud and Sufism are closely similar: development of the individual spiritual nature to the point of the complete human being (*insan-i-kamil*). Among other Arabic terms used both by Pak Subuh and by Sufis are *nafs*, *haqiqa*, *tawwakul*, *alam lahut*, etc. etc.; both refer to the 'four essences' (earth, water, air and fire), the 'four states of life' (material, vegetable, animal and human), jinns, angels, and, of course, God. It should also be pointed out that there is a great deal of Sufi terminology and conceptual material which is not used by Pak Subuh (wine, intoxication; *fana wa*

*baqa, hal wa maqqam*; the prophet Khidr; *zaman, makan, ikhwan* (time, place and people); *murshid, shaikh, naib, abdal*, etc. etc.). In fact the bulk of Pak Subuh's material is not shared with the Sufis. It is mostly his own, but there is much Hindu and Javanese tradition there too.[14]

The solution to the problem of shared terminology seems fairly simple: Pak Subuh was a Muslim. Consequently he used Arabic terminology which comes from the Qu'ran and the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet) and is used by all Muslims, including Sufis. He did not very often employ terminology which comes from non-conventional sources within Islam, such as, for instance 'zikr' or the syllable 'hu'. Hence much of his terminology coincides with that of Sufism where it accords with orthodox Islamic teaching, but not where it refers to the more esoteric aspects of Sufi practice.

Nevertheless, it is possible for the Sufi expert to detect in Pak Subuh's talks some elements foreign to the Qu'ran and the Hadith which are commonly found in Sufi teaching. I quote the following as examples:

In your ordinary state of being, you are not. So even though you live, actually you don't exist.

Man can be changed only if he is changed entirely.

The real Qu'ran is not a book. It is a living movement within the being of man.

Draw close to people with ability, draw close to good-hearted people, draw close to people who remain patient, trusting in God and sincerely submitting to Him. Draw close to people with insight, and finally draw close to the power of God.

The idea exists in religion that if you want to get closer to God you have to pray all the time. But this is still wrong, because it is something that you are forcing, which is not natural.[17]

These statements could be taken as evidence that Pak Subuh used Sufi ideas. The assumption would follow that he got them from Sufis (particularly from the famous Naqshbandi teacher Kiai Abdurrachman) despite his denial of such a suggestion, which in any case would be to assume a linear cause-and-effect relationship between human beings where the acquisition of true knowledge is concerned. Sufi teaching states that this is not necessarily how it works:

There are two kinds of search. One is by tradition or transmission. The seeker who follows this way enters the world of manifestation and must return to the source by the same path. The other is the way of purification, which is the way of the Masters. In this way the tradition counts for nothing; all that matters is to keep one's intention exclusively fixed on the Supreme Being.[18]

Regarding the acquisition of knowledge, Pak Subuh said, 'It is not possible for the thinking mind to plumb those depths unless it is the will of God Himself. Then there will be a pouring from the fount within and the door will open wide from within the real inner self.'[17] According to this view there are two types of understanding, the lesser or shallower that comes from the thinking mind and the greater or deeper that comes from beyond the thinking mind and for which the thinking mind only plays the role of willing servant. In the introduction to his *Futuh al-Ghaib* (Revelations of the Unseen) Abd-al Qadir al-Jilani says, 'From among such statements as the tongue is enabled to utter, the power of speech to express, the fingers to record and the eloquence of language to explain, here are some words that arose and emerged for me as "Revelations of the Unseen". They alighted within my being and occupied its inner

space, till the energy of the experience brought them forth and made them outwardly apparent.' (Trans: Mukhtar Holland, Al-Baz.)

For Idries Shah to say that Subud is a form of Sufism may be correct in the broad sense that at the core of Sufism lies the same principle as that which lies at the core of Subud, but not in the specific sense that the energetic experience of Subud is, or ought to be, acquired by engaging in Sufi activity. Equally, when Pak Subuh says that Subud has no link except to the power of God, this should not be taken to mean that the central principle of Subud cannot be part of any other spiritual practice, a claim which he was in fact careful to refute.

I have touched briefly on the role of the spiritual teacher, and I think it is worth discussing it a little further.

A teacher is considered indispensable by the Sufis, at least because unless one is taught, one cannot learn. There are other, higher reasons for the existence of a teacher, such as the transmission of *baraka* and other hidden functions. But from the Sufi perspective, people who imagine that they can learn without a teacher, or can teach themselves, are likely to be suffering from vanity and arrogance, in which case they will only lead themselves into fantasies. The Subud approach is rather different. Pak Subuh maintained that a teacher is not necessary when one can receive directly from God, and will, on the contrary, only act as an obstacle. The Subud belief, consequently, is that if one has a tendency towards fantasies, or indeed any other concealed psychopathology, practice of the latihan will eventually bring this to the surface.

For Pak Subuh, God is the only real spiritual teacher. In Sufism it is held that a teacher is necessary at the early stages of the path, but later on, when one has been brought into contact with the inner guide and has received the inner command, one can do without a teacher, and can begin to teach others. In Subud no-one teaches anyone else, but contact with the 'inner teacher'[19] happens gradually on its own by means of regular practice of the latihan. No external direction is required, and it is up to the individual as to how far this process can go.

The teachings of the Sufis are held by Sufi students to be of the highest importance in the course of spiritual transformation. The explanations of Pak Subuh are held in equal regard by the majority of those who follow the Subud latihan. But Pak Subuh's position is that no teaching or explanation, however lofty, can by itself bring about spiritual progress. The words are not the means, they are the description. This point is significant, for if the capacity is not there to understand what is really intended, all teaching is of no use and is even counter-productive, resulting perhaps in the belief that the teaching is the truth and that no change in understanding is ever necessary.

But how is capacity to be produced? For the Sufi student, the teacher, by his example, his instructions and especially his *baraka*, provides the means. For the Subud member, the means are provided in the latihan exercise by passive inward attunement and active co-operation with the resulting guidance. I do not believe there need be any conflict between the two methods, since both acknowledge the same goal: that of returning to Source, and of undergoing fundamental change in order to become a human being able to act with vision, wisdom and compassion.

In this short investigation, in speaking of Sufism I have confined myself to the non-exclusivist perspective of Idries Shah. Although Shah claims that his presentation is that of the 'real Sufis' as opposed to the imitators, it is far from being the only credible one; there are many Sufi groups and orders with impeccable pedigrees who do not share it. One of them is the Naqshbandi group under Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani, a pupil of Abdullah Daghestani. (Daghestani was the Sheikh whom Ronimund von

Bissing recommended to John Bennett before the arrival of Subud and who told Bennett to expect an event of great importance, something which would bring together Islam and Christianity, which Bennett took to be the coming of Subud.) Having spoken to members of Sheikh Nazim's group I have been given to understand that Daghestani's line of Sufism is of the exclusively Muslim variety, and that it traces directly back to Bahauddin Naqshband. Shah's line, they say, is different. Another Sufi leader that I have spoken to is Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, head of the Iranian Nematollahi order, who told me that he was not in direct contact with Shah.

All Sufi groupings appear to regard themselves as autonomous, a fact noted by Bennett.[13] This casts doubt upon the information given by Shah that there is a centralised Sufi organisation able, among other things, to decide what is correct Sufi practice and what is not. There is evidence, however, of such an organisation currently operating[8] whose titles correspond very accurately with those referred to in the Baghdad lectures of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani given in the 12th century AD.[5] This correspondence supports the idea that some kind of centralised Sufi organisation does in fact exist, and has existed for at least eight hundred years.[20]

Returning to the question of the actual origin of the Subud latihan, there can unfortunately be no conclusion of the sort that may be stated in hard factual terms. Since we seem to be in the politicians' and preachers' domain of unverifiable claims, we can at best look at the reputations of those whose words we are being asked to accept. An important element of progress in spiritual matters (as in law and business) is that one does not simply take on trust what one is told, no matter who is saying it. A fact should be demonstrable. An opinion, until it becomes demonstrable, remains just an opinion. In the absence of any evidence in support of his claims that Subud derives from Sufism as currently practised, Shah's case does not hold very much water. His students and sympathisers, however, will tend to accept his view. Pak Subuh's account of the supernatural origin of the latihan is beyond factual authentication, by definition. Nevertheless, anyone who has experienced it in any depth will be predisposed to believe him.

For the follower of Idries Shah, Subud will be what Shah implies it is: a deteriorated form of Sufism — until he or she has personally verified whether the higher knowledge through direct experience which Sufism aims at is available in Subud or not. (Ex-Subud members who have joined the Shahs do in fact regard the Subud latihan as valid, but see the Subud movement itself as defective partly because it lacks the Shahs' style of leadership.) For Subud members, Sufism will be what Pak Subuh says it is: a theoretical teaching system without access to the reality of what it teaches — until they have studied the actual texts and discovered whether or not they provide evidence to the contrary, or until they have placed themselves under a real teacher and experienced the transmission of *baraka* by means of the teacher's instructions. They may then conclude that Sufism's espousal of teachers does not necessarily invalidate its teachings!

Whatever the facts of the origin of Subud are, believing what one is led to believe is, in my experience at least, far less important than gaining what is there to be gained. Followers of spiritual movements may be attached to their group in such a way that they cannot benefit from it, because their beliefs are too fixed. It is unfortunate that, while one must entertain some beliefs in order to approach a spiritual path at all, those very beliefs often lead to inflexibility.

Both Idries Shah and Pak Subuh, despite their differences, are alive to the problem of fact versus fantasy and the role of belief and doubt in spiritual matters. Idries Shah, drawing on Sufi psychology, has many helpful things to say about prejudice and conditioning. Also, since spiritual experience operates in a sphere beyond that of

the ordinary mind, it is possible for people to have unusual feelings, flights of fancy or even hallucinations and take these for evidence of higher reality. Such people are likely to be highly suggestible. Alongside this danger is its opposite: the cynical attitude which refuses to entertain any higher experience on the grounds that it is likely to be fantasy, and 'I don't want to be taken in'.

Pak Subuh maintained that the latihan provides the proof that people are searching for, since personal experience is the only means of authenticating anything, and that on that basis evidence is not dependent on him or anyone else. His position is that in the latihan what one believes in or doubts is one's own self, and it is only through our own self that we ultimately find God.

Idries Shah asks us not to depend on others but to work things out for ourselves; he demands that we do not 'approach Sufism empty-handed', by which he presumably means that we must have something of our own to build on, some awareness of truth to contribute, before we start. He warns us constantly to be on our guard against Sufi imitations, but lays the blame at our feet if we make the wrong choice; 'Like calls to like.' The difficulty that many would-be students of Sufism encounter here is the apparent impossibility of 'adopting the correct posture' towards Sufi study by means of one's own efforts, so that one can 'become acceptable'. Those who have approached Shah and been ignored are more than likely to have lost heart on this account.

Pak Subuh, on the other hand, says that we cannot approach the spiritual life with anything other than a faulty motive; 'to search for God is wrong and not to search for God is wrong'. His answer to this conundrum lies neither in searching nor in refusing to search but in surrendering to God who is there anyway, whether we search or not.[21] When one has experienced something unmistakable in this way, one's difficulties may not be so much to do with gaining acceptance as with attaching sufficient value to what one has actually gained.

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## SUBUD AND SUFISM/NOTES

1. Though his literary skills and influence are undeniable, Idries Shah's credentials are not universally accepted either by Muslims or non-Muslims (see e.g. Elwell-Sutton, L. P. 'Sufism & Pseudo-Sufism', *Encounter* vol. 44 no. 5 and James Moore, 'Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah' *Telos* vol. 6 no. 4). It is also alleged that he wrote many of the books eulogising him, using pseudonyms.

2. Muhammad Subuh, *The Meaning of Subud* (Subud Publications International)

3. cf Jalal-ud-din Rumi, *The Masnavi*; Hakim Sanai, *The Walled Garden of Truth*; Mahmud Shabistari, *The Secret Garden*; Saadi, *The Rose Garden*. Versions of all these are published by Idries Shah's company Octagon Books.

4. I have not come across any mention in any written records concerning Bahauddin Naqshband of a specific exercise of surrender corresponding to what exists in Subud. In common with other Sufi teachers, however, he does speak of surrender

and self-emptying in terms of a constant and continuous practice, rather than a Subud-type exercise which is specific and of limited duration. Regarding Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, I am indebted to Ruslan Moore of Al-Baz for drawing attention to latihan-like activities taking place during al-Jilani's meetings as recorded in contemporary accounts. For example: 'Then the Shaikh would say: "Now the talking [qa] is over, and we are ready to receive the spiritual state [ha]!" The people present would immediately feel an intense vibration, and they would experience the spiritual state and the rapture of ecstasy [wajd].' And, 'Finally, Shaikh Abd al-Qadir said: "Let us have done with the talk [qa], and let us now return to the spiritual state [ha]: There is no god but Allah! [la ilaha illa 'llah]. Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah! [Muhammadur rasulu 'llah]." All the people in the audience were shaken with an intense vibration, and Shaikh Jamal ad-Din ibn al-Jawzi was moved to rip his clothes to shreds.' (From *Necklaces of Gems*, trans. Muhtar Holland, Al-Baz). It appears from these accounts that the 'spiritual state' [ha] was dependent in some way on the presence of the Shaikh, whereas the Subud latihan to which Shah compares it is not dependent on the presence of anyone else except for the initial transmission.

5. Most of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's recorded lectures, faithful on-the-spot transcriptions by his pupils, have been translated into English by Muhtar Holland and published in the USA by Al-Baz. The most reliable account of the deeds and sayings of Bahauddin Naqshband and other famous teachers in the line of the Khwajagan Hanedani are contained in a book which has not to this writer's knowledge been translated into any European language, the *Rashahat ain al-Hayat* by Fakhr ad-din Ali Husain al-Waiz Kashifi. Extracts from this book appear in J. G. Bennett's *The Masters of Wisdom* (Turnstone, 1977).

6. In *The Way of the Sufi*, Idries Shah relates an account of Abd-al Qadir al-Jilani advising his pupils to watch out for accidental transmission of the 'opening of potential' to unprepared individuals, taking the form of trembling, crying out, heavenly visions etc. This, says al-Jilani, is highly dangerous and must be stamped out wherever it occurs in a disorganised and spontaneous manner among uneducated villagers. Followers of Shah will, in the absence of information such as that contained in note 4 above, draw the conclusion from this that all such phenomena are to be avoided, even when properly authorised.

7. Muhammad Subuh, *Autobiography* (Subud Publications International)

8. H. B. M. Dervish, *Journeys with a Sufi Master* (Octagon)

9. 'All of this teaching, like that of the Naqshbandi, these matters that are explained in such detail — man cannot know these things, man cannot explain them. If they can be explained, then it is only God Who can explain them to man. But the point is, when God explains them He does not do it in that way, the way explained by the Sufi teachers... Do not mistake these teachings for the reality; the reality is what is contained in the latihan.' (From a talk by Pak Subuh given in Hamburg in 1983. Translated from the Indonesian.)

10. A prominent teacher of the method of G. I. Gurdjieff and one of the most influential early advocates of Subud.

11. Abdurrachman intended to receive the latihan contact from Pak Subuh, but died on his way to Pak Subuh's house. See Rohana Mitchell, *The History of Subud* (Al Baz)

12. The report of the Fifth Thule expedition by the Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, published in 1927. The report gives the historical background to a well-known Eskimo poem. Apparently an ordinary Eskimo woman named Uvavnuk had a spontaneous experience almost exactly like that of Pak Subuh: a ball of brilliant light came down out of the sky and entered her, suffusing her body with light. She began to receive movements and song and was able to pass this capacity on to the rest of her tribe, which then enjoyed a generation of unusual happiness and good fortune. It would be rather surprising to learn that there was a Sufi group in the Canadian Arctic Circle which had brought about this event, as the *baraka* transmission theory requires. From the evidence it would seem rather that such things happen spontaneously from time to time to individuals of a certain type.

13. J. G. Bennett, *Journeys in Islamic Countries* (Turnstone)

14. See *The Complete Recorded Talks of Muhammad Subuh*, Subud Publications International.

15. Matthew Sullivan, *Living Religion in Subud* (Subud Publications International)

16. Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*

17. Quoted in *Glimpses of Reality*, ed. Dirk Campbell, Pathway (Subud Publications International)

18. Mawlana Jami, *Nafahat al-Uns*, quoted in J.G. Bennett, *The Masters of Wisdom* (Turnstone)

19. The term 'inner teacher' is not cognate with God, although Pak Subuh refers both to God and the inner self as the 'teacher within'. A more complete formulation would be 'the guidance of God whose power is present and manifests within the inner self when the influences of thought, feeling and desire are set aside'.

20. I learned from Kingsley Dennis, a member of Omar Ali-Shah's London group, that the governing body or 'Foundation' behind the worldwide Sufi network is known as the Mu'assisa. Something of the function of this spiritual directorate is revealed in the following true story. An emissary from the Mu'assisa was sent to the Mevlevi dervishes in Konya in the middle of the twentieth century in order to deliver a message. Simply, it stated that their performance, the Sema or whirling, was no more than a tourist spectacle and that they were to stop. Furthermore, that there was no spiritual content either in their activities, or in the music or dance. The message quoted Rumi's own words that the Sema ritual was intended only for local people of that specific time and that the whirling was not in fact for the benefit of the participating dervishes but actually was limited to a specific, targeted audience. Since such conditions no longer existed, what remained was merely an outer shell — a

spectacle. The emissary, in his report, stated that the response from the troupe of dervishes was anger! The report continued to say that the old Chelebi Sheikh, who was the head of the order, replied that 'in a world where there is no light at all, even a false gleam is perhaps something to have', and that 'I have been here so long, and so have my ancestors, that we cannot change'. The old sheikh continued with his refusal by further adding: 'We may well be wanted, and believed to be the possessors of secrets... we are here, after seven hundred years, not because of our value or viciousness, but because people want us. They want magic... many can follow a harmless path and feel better, elevated. That, in any case, is what they imagine spirituality to be.' (From the *London Newsletter of the Tradition*, March 2003)

21. Despite Pak Subuh's theological language, he clearly states that belief in God is not a prerequisite for spiritual experience. Nor is atheism a disqualification for joining Subud. The Indonesian word latihan (which simply means 'exercise') refers, in the Subud context, to a type of experience which anyone can have, whatever they believe, and whether they happen to be Subud members or not. What is required in any context, however, whether Subud, Sufi, religious or otherwise, is sufficient relaxation of the familiar mental and emotional apparatus for receiving to take place. This requirement is what Subud is designed to provide.