

Subud at Middle East Spirituality and Peace Festival Edinburgh, March 2008

By Stefan Freedman

This was a twelve day programme of talks, workshops and concerts. I was invited to come and lead Israeli peace dance sessions and was also offered a slot during the following day of participatory workshops, called Pathways to Peace through Spiritual and Musical Practice.

Bahais were singing songs based on their sacred texts. A Sufi was introducing a simple Zikr prayer/chant. The festival organiser (Prof. Neil Douglas Klotz) was introducing Aramaic songs. The familiar and safe thing for me would have been to offer vocal harmony songs with a peace theme or a peaceful effect.

But I wanted to see if I could add Subud to the 'spiritual practice' map. On a participation day I didn't want to be just blabbing and was (obviously) unable to offer a latihan taster. I devised an hour-long series of activities around which I could make some introductory remarks about Subud tailored to this multi-faith peace/spirituality gathering.

I reported that I practiced a simple exercise with a group called Subud, done by members of many different faiths. That all statements about Subud are personal, as each participant has their own unique experiences.

I deliberately used the word participant rather than 'member' because many present were (are) dedicated members of a faith or spiritual group such as Sufis, Mystical Christians, Buddhists, Bahais and I wanted them to understand that practicing the latihan would not require them to turn away from their highly valued practices or peers.

I summarised the Subud process (in my experience) with 5 points:

- inner vibration
- movement and sound arising unbidden
- discarding 'psychic baggage'
- connection with that-which-is-beyond-words (transpersonal)
- peace and fullness (peace-fulness)

The results of Subud over a period of time, in 5 points:

- unfolding of potentials
- inner directed life
- release from self-harming habits (often)
- pushed to edge of capacity and stretched
- regular contact and renewal from unifying source

I led them through some group exercises including:

- **Walking Blind** – The group divides into pairs. One of the pair (leader) hums a short repeated phrase while their partner (follower) follows the leader with eyes closed, trying not to get distracted by other leaders singing all around them.

While emphasising that this was not the Subud exercise itself I said it could give just a hint as to what one aspect of it felt like; as with the group process below:

- **Unplanned Harmonies** – Beginning with silence in a circle of seated people, gentle singing arises like a gift, or a 'sound massage' as several people sit, eyes

closed, in the centre.

- **Many Faiths Round** – I taught a round where a few words are taken from many faiths. Sung together they create exquisite harmonies.

At Subud congresses I'm very moved when I meet people of many cultures and faiths so this provided a means of tasting that pleasure.

I offered participants a one-page handout, which gives a Subud website plus details of the local group. I used an explanation of *susila budhi dharma* I enjoyed seeing online - 'guided from within to take action in the world'. I added my own playful summary:

- Simple
- User-friendly
- Beneficial
- Uplifting
- Development

One night near the close of the festival there was a Subud-hosted meal. The valiant Edinburgh members have offered this to the festival for several years. It's a deliberate strategy: interface with the public in a warm and informal way. Subud members, despite self-professed shyness in some cases, mingled with festival participants over a four-hour period, sometimes chatting and listening, sometimes responding to questions about Subud. I had the impression I was among open-minded folk who would respond flexibly to people of different faiths.

One Subud participant there from Newcastle (called Marina) is a longstanding Buddhist, doing an MA on Buddhism. I found myself at a table with her and a Buddhist man living in Edinburgh. This seemed like serendipity, and as my son is a Tibetan Buddhist monk I could also participate in the sometimes specialist sounding conversation.

A very worthwhile evening. Even if nobody present were to become an applicant, the value for us is to 'be among' and to practice talking about Subud as part of a *regular mealtime conversation*, just as one man I spoke with described his yoga practice and a woman talked a bit about her 'spiritual journey'. All thirty-five or so attending are likely now to include Subud on their map of possible avenues for spiritually inclined people. I think they'll associate Subud with a pleasurable evening and interesting conversations. This thought makes me happy.

I want to point out that although I've used the word 'spiritual' several times here, it was a public event about peace and spirituality. In another context, depending who I was speaking with, I might prefer a term like 'integrative practice' or 'inner directed process'.

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