

Anwar, Anwas, and Subud Prejudice

By David Week

There are two types of people in the world:
Those who think that there are two types of people in the world;
And those who don't.

Subud's stated values

In Subud, our ideals suggest that we should — as a community — be free of religious prejudice. Subud is supposed to be an interfaith community, open to all. For instance, on the Web we advertise that:

Thousands of people from all cultures and backgrounds are Subud members today: Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and even atheists and agnostics practise the latihan alongside one another.

— Subud Indonesia's website [1]

Susila Dharma work originates from an awareness of a common humanity that transcends differences.

— Susila Dharma International website [2]

Subud is not a religion, nor a sect of any religion, nor is it a teaching.

— 'What is Subud?' website [3]

Implicitly, we cannot contradict someone's religion, since we have no teachings with which to contradict them. Religions are often centred on a set of beliefs. Subud is instead centred on an experience — the latihan — which is, according to the same 'What is Subud' website:

A unique experience for each individual. [4]

Given these good values and good intentions, this public commitment to being undogmatic, and open to all... Could Subud be contaminated by systemic religious prejudice?

The currents of history

This paper will show that Subud is indeed subject to systemic religious prejudice. This prejudice is not the result of the individual views of the founder or of the members who joined, but is structural, arising out of its history as a movement.

The path by which the prejudice has entered Subud is as follows:

- Java had a long history of inter-religious conflict, and of one religion succeeding another through imperial expansion and warfare. In the course of this warfare, one empire, of one religion, fought bloody battles to wrest power from another empire, of a different religion. As people passed from the rulership of one empire to the next, they converted — not out of conviction, but out of fear.
- In this way, the history of Java is not so different from the history of Europe; feudal lordships have long been associated with particular religions; the religions have fought, and the losers have converted to the religion of the victors.

- Each new religion, and each new empire, needed to construct a story that explained the existence and relationship of these different religions, and clearly put the victor (and his religion) on top.
- One such story was the story of Anwar and Anwas, which divides the human race into two types of people:
 - followers of Anwar: being Jews, Christians and Muslims;
 - followers of Anwas: being Hindus and Buddhists. [5]
- Pak Subuh, as an *abangan* Muslim living in Java, was given this story as part of his cultural heritage.
- He tells this story in his talks, where it is picked up by helpers and the general membership.
- Members and helpers act on the message in the story.

Mark Twain once said: 'In religion and politics people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners....' [6]

This is how culture is transmitted: without examination. Sometimes we pick up a bit of what is being transmitted through us, examine it, and say, 'Hey, wait a minute!' — but for the most part it just flows: the volume exceeds our capacity.

Anwar and Anwas, as told by Pak Subuh

A few Subud friends of mine were engaged in a debate: Was Subud biased against Buddhism? Two said yes, and two said no. One on the 'no' side, however, suggested that though Subud was not biased against Buddhism, we must be mindful of Pak Subuh's advice, given through the story of Anwar and Anwas. Later, my 'yes' friend told me: 'What no-one wants to talk about is the way in which the Anwar and Anwas story is biased against Buddhism.'

I'd not heard this idea before, so I thought I'd look more carefully. I examined two talks in which Pak Subuh told the Anwar and Anwas myth: 'Talk to men and women,' San Francisco, U.S.A., 01 December 1977, [7] and 'Talk to men and women,' Buenos Aires, Argentina, 20 October 1977. [8]

These passages are appended in the Notes to this paper, as Notes 7 and 8, and I invite you to read them carefully yourself, before proceeding.

The story tells of humanity being divided at its root (Adam), into two lineages. As Pak Subuh tells it:

- Adam had two sons: Anwar and Anwas.
- Anwar was surrendered to God, and he was the forefather of the lineage of the Abrahamic prophets, including Abraham, Christ and Mohammed. In other words, Anwar is the primogenitor of all the Abrahamic religions.
- Anwas, on the other hand, did not want to die. He practiced asceticism and self-denial. Anwas went through various name changes, leaving behind the Islamic honorific Sayid, adopting instead the honorific of the Hindu devas: Sang Hyang. (In other words, he changed from being a Muslim to being a Hindu.) The Hindus and the Buddhists are followers of the way of Anwas,

and:

- they followed the direction of the material forces (which in other places he calls 'the Satanic')
- the objective of their practice is to become invisible and not to die
- the Buddha claimed to be God
- meditation is associated with spiritualism, hypnotism, magnetism and so on.
- people like that torture themselves with spikes, and otherwise act abnormally.

Furthermore, according to Pak Subuh, the followers of Anwar go to heaven; the followers of Anwas don't go to heaven. This, according to him, explains why the Abrahamic religions have stories in which their prophets ascend to heaven, and the Hindu-Buddhist religions have stories instead about reincarnation.

This story thus told:

- says good things about the line of the Jews, Christians and Muslims
- says derogatory things about Hindus and Buddhists — which are just not true (for instance, that the Buddha claimed to be God; that they torture themselves; that they want to live forever; that they act abnormally)
- finishes with advice against getting involved with the central practices of Hinduism (yoga) and Buddhism (meditation).

There are 6.5 billion people on the Earth today. Of these:

- a little over a 50% are of the Abrahamic traditions (Jews, Christians, Muslims)
- about 20% are of the Hindu-Buddhist traditions.

This story is disrespectful to a large number of people.

What kind of story is this?

As noted earlier, the history of Java, and the archipelago, is the history of one religion succeeding the other. In each succession, the new religion both replaced and absorbed the earlier ones, in this order:

- animism
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Sufistic Islam.

As Islam supplanted Hinduism and Buddhism, the Muslim rulers needed a story for their subjects that would explain the reasons for the existence of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, and at the same time clearly put Islam on top. Thus, the court poets produced the myth of Anwar and Anwas.

The form of the story is a genealogy, a common form of story in those days. We find genealogies in the Bible as well. Some Bible scholars suggest that these genealogies also had a political motive: to allow Israel to subjugate the Canaanites by defining them as the lineage of Ham and thus carrying the curse of Ham. In the 18th and 19th century, pro-slave politicians and clergy in the United States and the UK used Biblical genealogy to justify slavery, suggesting that Africans were of the lineage of Cain, and had been 'blackened' by sin. Understandably, the Coptic Christian churches in Africa did not share this view. [9]

In short, Anwar and Anwas is a political story, written by politicians, with a political motive: Our religion is better than your religion. Your gods are subordinate to our

God. Your old empire has been subordinated to our new empire.

The state of this prejudice today

In Indonesia, this prejudice has been evident right into the 20th century. For instance, according to law, every Indonesian citizen has to have their religion printed on their ID card. However, it was not until 1962 that Indonesia even recognised Hinduism as a religion and Hindus were free to declare their religion. After Suharto's dictatorship ended in 1998, conversion (or rather re-conversion) to Hinduism accelerated dramatically: this indicates the removal of suppression. [10]

But the prejudice continues. In January of 2009, Indonesia banned yoga for Muslims, a move that is eerily similar to Subud's 'advice' against yoga for members. As with Subud, '...Indonesian Muslims were still allowed to do yoga strictly as exercise.' [11]

In Subud, the legacy of the Anwar and Anwas myth is the denigration of the practices of yoga and meditation. They are misrepresented in Subud literature, and oddly singled out.

Consider:

- Yoga is central to Hinduism. One of Hinduism's most important works is the Mahabharata. At the heart of the Mahabharata is the great war: the Bharatayuddha. And at the commencement of Bharatayuddha is a passage in which Arjuna stands in his chariot surveying the battle ahead, and is heartened by his charioteer, the god Krishna. This discourse is the Bhagavad Gita, and it describes not just the meaning of the dharma (that Hindu word that we use in our name), but all the varieties of yoga. 'The word 'yoga' literally translates as 'yoke' or 'union'; it is the means by which union is achieved with the Supreme Being. Rather than warn people that yoga might interfere with the latihan (as Pak Subuh did), a more appropriately humble approach might be to warn Hindus — members of a 6,000-year-old religious tradition with a billion adherents from which we happen to have misappropriated, misspelled and mistranslated key religious terms — that latihan could interfere with their yoga, their union with the Supreme Being.
- Not all Buddhists meditate, but meditation is central to Buddhism. It was through meditation under the Bodhi tree that he became enlightened, and realized the Four Noble Truths. Why target meditation?
- Even more striking is that the same practices are okay, if practised in the Abrahamic way. One of the practices that Pak Subuh singles out among the 'followers of Anwas' is asceticism, including going without eating or sleeping. Ramadan, however, is considered commendable. Mantra meditation is not okay, but the Islamic mantra meditation known as the 'dhikr' is considered commendable. Meditation is not okay, but quiet time before latihan is considered commendable.

In short, it is only the Hindu-Buddhist tradition that is targeted in this way. There are no warnings against Jewish, Christian or Muslim practices; only yoga and meditation are singled out for mention. Similar or even identical practices within the Abrahamic tradition escape mention. Furthermore, injunctions by Subud helpers mirror injunctions by Indonesian Islamic scholars.

This is prejudice.

Conclusion: End religious prejudice in Subud

The invented genealogy of Anwar and Anwas was born of political conflict between

Islam and Hindu-Buddhism. It carries with it a human prejudice, which we can see acted out today both in Indonesia, and in Subud.

We are all prejudiced by our background, education, culture and the time we live in: you; me; Pak Subuh — everyone.

So why should we continue this particular prejudice, which is not from our background, is contrary to our education and culture, and is the last thing we need to build interfaith respect and understanding in the time in which we live?

And why, in a movement that claims to develop a direct understanding of the dharma, should we do what someone says, instead of what's clearly right?

Notes

[1] <http://subud.or.id/aboutsubud/whatissubud.html>

[2] http://about-us.susiladharm.org/mission_princ_affiliat/index.shtml

[3] <http://www.whatissubud.net/whatissubud/about.html>

[4] <http://www.whatissubud.net/whatissubud/experience.html>

[5] See: Jaques, R. Kevin (2006). "Sajarah Leluhur: Hindu Cosmology and the Construction of Javanese Muslim Genealogical Authority". *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2006 17(2):129-157; also: <http://epress.anu.edu.au/islamic/itc/pdf/ch03.pdf>

Throughout this paper, I will use Anwar and Anwas as Pak Subuh used them, with Anwar representing the Abrahamic tradition, and Anwas the Hindu-Buddhist tradition. However, as the story is told elsewhere in Indonesia, including in books such as the *Serat Sajarah Leluhur*, the two characters are reversed:

- Anwas represents the Abrahamic lineage
- Anwar the Hindu-Buddhist (the opposite of how Pak Subuh uses them).

Furthermore, they are grandsons, not sons of Adam.

Is this just a variant story? In this case we can say 'no' and that Pak Subuh was confused (easily done with two such similar names) — for the following reasons:

- Anwas is an Islamic prophet: in English, Enoch
- Sis, whom Pak Subuh presents as one of Anwas's name-changes, is in fact Anwas's father: in English, Seth

The Islamic genealogy from Noah back is: Noah was the son of Lamik, son of Matusalkh, son of Mahnaukh, son of Yardukil, son of Yarid, son of Mahkail, son of Qinan, son of Anwas [Enoch], son of Sis [Seth], son of Adam.

[6] http://thinkexist.com/quotation/in_religion_and_politics_people-s_beliefs_and/167562.html

[7] Extract from: *Talk to men and women*, San Francisco, CA, U.S.A, December 1, 1977

QUOTE

Amongst the sons of Adam there were two, of whom one was called Sayid Anwar

and the other Sayid Anwas. It seems that Sayid Anwar followed what his father Adam had experienced and done and this continued to be transmitted to his descendants, including the line of the prophets Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and the other prophets. And this is an ordinary and normal way, which can be said to be the way of normal people. But Sayid Anwas did not accept that, and it appears that he was not satisfied to live like his father Adam, who lived out his life and then died. It seems that he did not want to do that. He searched for another way, so that he practiced asceticism for many years; not just for one or two days, but for many years. How he did this is told in the story, brothers and sisters. First he practiced his austerities on earth, on land, When, after many years of doing this, he was able to obtain grace from the One Almighty God, he still went on doing this in the water, in the sea, so that again he could receive grace from the One Almighty God. Still he continued. Where now? In the air. The story tells that he was able to receive grace from God, but it was still not enough, so he practiced still further austerities. Where now? In fire. Thus the cycle of his austerities was complete: earth, water, air and fire, so that eventually he succeeded in obtaining results. Yes, God always allows human beings to do what they want and is always generous and merciful to them, so that eventually Sayid Anwas achieved what he hoped for and was able to live and never die. It is said that he will only die with the dissolution of this world. Then he changed his name; changed it for himself. He changed his name, and Sayid Anwas was no longer Sayid Anwas, but became Sanghyang Sis. Sanghyang means god in the Sanskrit language. Then he changed his name again, to become Sanghyang Nurcahyo, because he was as bright as the noonday sun. This is how it was, brothers and sisters, so that eventually Sanghyang Sic or Sanghyang Nurcahyo gave rise to the line of the dewas or demigods. There were the dewas of earth, water, air and fire and so on.

These practices are still followed up to the present time in India, by the people who are called Buddhists and Hindus. There are also many followers of these religions in Indonesia as well. Thus it is clear, brothers and sisters, that there are now still people who practice meditation, samadhi, spiritualism, hypnotism, magnetism and so on.

Bapak does not blame them, because these are people who are taught to do that. But Bapak cannot say what will happen if they follow that example. Although Sanghyang Sis had so much power that he was immortal in the sense that he was free from aging, but would only disappear with the disappearance of this earth, that is the direction followed by the material forces. That is the death of the setans. The satanic or material world is not a low one, brothers and sisters. No; it is also a high one. It is high. That is why the prophet Solomon is said in the stories to have been the richest man in the world. Those dewas, those gods, are invisible beings. Thus if you wish to be invisible and not to die until the death of the earth, that is the way to follow. That is why there is no mention of a mi'raj or ascension in the story of the Buddha. There is no ascension, which means being called by God, when there is a meeting of the inner-self with God. There is no mention of that. In the time of the Buddha, Buddha claimed to be God. That meant that a human being was God, or that God was a human being, a Man-God.

Well, these things are still being done in India and elsewhere. Indeed, brothers and sisters, this sort of knowledge can produce astonishing results, as in Africa and in India too, where people are able to live under water for up to forty days, for months — really under water. They are dead, but not dead, dead, because although they seem to be dead they are really still alive in the water. There are others who sit or lie on nails, on pointed spikes, and it has no effect on them. There are people who torture themselves, piercing their flesh with sharp spikes or daggers, from here to here. They stab themselves through from here to here. They pierce their noses. Oh yes, they really do torture themselves. But they say that this is the way to obtain something different from other people, which means something strange and

abnormal. That is why there are no abnormalities in Subud, brothers and sisters.
END QUOTE

[8] Extract from: Talk to men and women, Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 20, 1977

QUOTE

Adam had two sons, of whom one was called Sayid Anwar and the other Sayid Anwas. The first of these two sons, Anwar, continued to hand down the practices which Adam had followed, and his line was the line of the prophets. That is the nature of the prophets not only of Abraham but of all the prophets, of whom there have been not a few; there have been about a thousand. But it seems that Sayid Anwas was not satisfied with what his father, the prophet Adam, had done, who only surrendered to God and behaved as people normally do in carrying out their work. But he, Sayid Anwas, very much wanted to feel what life was like and what life was and what it would be like in the future and how strong human beings were. So Anwas did something about it; that concentrated his mind, he meditated, so that after a long time of doing this he was able to find the way to know about inner content, his jiwa. He could see his jiwa; his jiwa could see itself. Then he was able to enquire into that spiritual world which is called the *alam nirwana*. The *alam nirwana* or the *alam nervana* is the world of emptiness. And from there Anwas could encompass the whole of this world. He is said to have been able to go to the north, to the south, to the west or to the east; just like a plane flying swiftly to any and every place. After Anwas was able to do that, he changed his name and was no longer called Sayid Anwas but Sanghyang Zis. So he was not a Sayid but a Sanghyang. Sanghyang means dewa or demi-god; he was the chief dewa and his name was Sanghyang Zis. He had power throughout the realms of this world and he called himself Sanghyang or Dewa Besar (the great dewa) or the Guru Sanghyang Jeyhyo. Then he gave rise to the line of the dewas, who then caused his way of life to become widespread. His wishes were everywhere, and from this source there arose Buddhism, Hinduism and various other isms, such as spiritualism, magnetism and hypnotism.

Thus it is no mistake and one should not be surprised if there is also something in the spiritual field which is separate and different from what was received by Adam and by Sayid Anwar and subsequently by the prophets, such as Abraham, Moses Christ. And this, brothers and sisters, is the difference. The spiritual world which can be thought about, so that these thoughts can enter into the spiritual world and eventually create a heaven and hell called the *kahvangan tiruan*. It is not genuine. That is why in Buddhism, Hinduism, spiritualism and so on there are no stories which tell of an ascension or mi'raj. The meaning of mi'raj is that a human being makes the journey to the One Almighty God and is asked into the presence of the One Almighty God. There are no such stories as that.

This mi'raj or ascension was experienced by Christ and Muhammad, and what these two prophets experienced, what these two messengers of God experienced, is what happens and what exists in the latihan kejiwaan which is what you have received. Thus if you come to a moment when you are no longer influenced by the lower forces and after you are able to see with the truly human jiwa, then you will be able to see clearly what exists in the latihan kejiwaan of Subud; that is, the light of life which is like what human beings themselves have pictured. Why is there a light above Christ. Why was Christ, even when he was still a baby, always portrayed with light to right and left of him always illuminated by a light shining from above? Yes; human beings can only think that far. That light is not from above or from below, not from the right or from the left. No; it is all-enveloping because it entirely surrounds someone who has been granted grace. That is how it is, brothers and sisters, so it is not surprising if there are still some human beings who meditate, who still like to meditate, still like to search for samadi, still like to do this and that through ascetic practices and so on, so

as to be able to encounter great and beautiful things which are astonishing to these people themselves. For indeed there are stories about this.

It is thus clear, brothers and sisters, that one part of mankind has wished to follow in the footsteps of the prophets, the messengers of God. Their story is written in the holy books, and what they did must have been like what we do in the latihan kejiwaan of Subud. That is why Bapak calls the latihan kejiwaan of Subud a receiving. It is the same as what the prophets received; the same as what was received by the prophets Abraham and Moses and the rest of the prophets, and also by Christ and Muhammad.

END QUOTE

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curse_of_Ham
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curse_and_mark_of_Cain

[10] <http://www.hinduyuva.org/tattva-blog/2007/01/hinduism-in-indonesia-a-brief-history>

[11] <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/news/world/indonesia-bans-hindu-yoga-for-muslims/2009/01/26/1232818295451.html>