

History and Myth

By David Week

All cultures have what anthropologists call 'origin myths': the founders of the American Republic gathering to craft the Declaration of Independence, and later the Constitution; the Navaho myth of Ni'hodilqil, the Dark World, that preceded all other worlds; Alexander Graham Bell speaking into the first telephone: 'Mr Watson—Come here—I want to see you'; the Greek stories of the ocean of Chaos on which floated the Cosmic Egg from which were born Gaia, the Earth, and Uranus, the Sky.

All these stories answer the question: how did we come to be here? Some stories answer this on a vast cosmological scale—how did everything begin? Others answer it on a more prosaic scale—how did our country begin, or where the hell did all these telephones come from?

Now when we look at the origin myths of the American Republic or the telephone, we know that these vignettes are embedded in a broader history. We know that the founding of the American Republic was also caused by religious persecution in Europe, by disagreements over taxation, and by the madness of King George. The invention of the telephone can't be separated from the dynamics of American capitalism, scientific discoveries about electricity and magnetism at the time, and the earlier innovation of the telegraph.

In these cases the origin myth is a nice, memorable story that is radically incomplete. The history gives us the broader, deeper understanding. The myth is also often radically incorrect. Common mythic stories such as 'Columbus discovered America' and 'James Watt invented the steam engine' are known to be historically inaccurate.

When we look at the Greek origin myth, or the Navaho myth of Ni'hodilqil, we know that it would be a mistake to read these myths as literal truth, because if we took the 10,000 cosmological origin myths of all the tribes and nations and read them all literally—well, they don't exactly coincide.

These stories are from ancient or very different cultures of which we know little. What we have come to learn is that while these origin myths tell us very little about the history of the universe, they do tell us an enormous amount about the culture of these peoples.

Part of Subud's origin myth is expressed in these lines:

Bapak explained (in talks to Subud members given beginning in the 1940s) that in 1925 he was taking a late-night walk, when he had an unexpected and unusual experience. Suddenly he found himself enveloped in a brilliant light, and looked up to see what looked like the sun falling directly into his body. His whole body trembled, and he thought that he was having a heart attack. He went directly home, lay down on his bed, and prepared to die. He felt that if it was his time to die, he could not fight it, so he surrendered himself to God completely. Instead of dying, however, he was moved from within—impelled—to stand up and perform movements similar to his normal Muslim prayer routine. This seemed very strange to him, because he was not moving entirely from his own volition;

rather he was compelled or guided by what he interpreted as the power of God.
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subud>>

The problem with this origin myth is that it is told without a history to go with it that might explain the background to this event. And it is told out of cultural context, so that in making a literal reading of it, we are potentially led into the same kind of error that we might fall into when reading the stories of any other culture of which we know little—that is, the error of taking them literally.

I say ‘the problem’—because a myth without a history does pose a problem in presenting Subud to the outside world. Without a history, the origin myth makes Subud sound like a religion. And we are not a religion.

The purpose of this article is to examine some pointers as to what might indeed be the history, and the cultural context, behind this event. In doing so, I’m not questioning in the least that Pak Subuh has given us an honest account of what he experienced. However, there are a number of reasons why we should not take such an account literally, or at face value, as having literally happened (in other words, as a history).

1. *There are different kinds of ‘story’ in different cultures.*

Our idea of history is based on the idea of objectivity: things as seen by a detached, impartial observer. We take this cultural view so much for granted—it is so engrained in our use of language—that we do not see how recent or constructed it is. Both myth-making and history are above all forms of human story-telling. Neither is superior to the other—they just play different roles in different cultures. And ‘history’, with its focus on objectivity, is a particular obsession of the West. It is not necessarily so in other cultures. To take myth and read it as history is the kind of reading the Christian fundamentalists do.

Myth-making is not an activity undertaken in the distant past. It is the predominant form of story-telling in many cultures today, and happens in our own culture as well. So-called ‘urban myths’ are common, as well as many myths about technological inventions and wartime feats. The Kurosawa film ‘Rashomon’ tells the story of a samurai murdered in the forest, from three different perspectives—each one a completely different story from the same event. In the final scene of the film we are reminded that even the ‘three stories’ story we have just been told is but yet another story told from a particular point of view.

2. *All human experience is shaped by expectation and belief.*

We have a naive understanding of human experience as being like a camera: data enters our senses, is then recorded, and only later ‘interpreted’. But anthropology, sociology of science, the science of visual perception, and psychology tell a different story. We do not passively record what we experience: we actively construct it. Part of that construction is due to our biological make-up; another part comes from our cultural upbringing.

As we’ll see below, the story of ‘wahyu’ falling from the sky is no rare event in Java—it is part of a widespread pattern to account for why a person is authorised to lead or to teach. Very many people in Java experience ‘wahyu’ and see falling balls of light. Very few

people outside of Java do.

3. *Memory is notoriously unreliable.*

All experience is experience as you remember it. The experimenter Elizabeth Loftus, investigating 'recovered memories', has shown how simple it is for people to develop memories of things that never happened, including "...for instance, that at the age of five or six they had the distressing experience of being lost in a shopping mall—as well as implausible ones: memories of witnessing demonic possession, or an encounter with Bugs Bunny at Disneyland." [Bugs Bunny is a Warner Brothers character, not a Disney character.] □ <<http://www.rense.com/general45/falsemen.htm>>

Hypnosis is not involved. Rather, when we remember something, we put together various images and fragments from memory into a story. The story we tell ourselves is easily influenced by current context and belief. Moreover, every time we remember something, the story we tell ourselves in becomes itself part of memory, and so memory changes over time, in the direction of our cultural bias.

It is because of evidence of the unreliability of memory, and the way that observations are strongly influenced by preconceptions, that eye-witness testimony is considered very poor quality evidence in the courtroom, unless it is supported by physical evidence.

4. *Neurotheology*

In recent decades, researchers have started to investigate 'altered states of consciousness', including experience generated by religious practices. We know that Pak Subuh was a very active spiritual 'seeker', and engaged in practices such as *prihatin*, *dhikr* (both of which he later recommended to Subud members) and *samadi* (which he did not). Such practices alter one's physiology. Food fasting, sleep fasting, rhythmic repetition and intense concentration have all been shown to create states of mind, perception and experience that are 'otherworldly', even when the practitioner has no particular religious belief. Furthermore, the character of these 'otherworldly' experiences have been shown to depend completely on the culture of the experience. As one researcher put it, Kalahari Bushmen do not have experiences involving polar bears.

All of us experience the world according to the culture frame in which we are raised. We then account for (tell a story about) that experience using story forms that make sense to ourselves and to our audience. In order to understand Pak Subuh's account in its historical and cultural context, we need to understand that context.

The first part of the origin myth concerns a falling ball of light. Now, when we Westerners read this, we think, 'Wow! That's an extraordinary event!!!' But in fact balls of light fall regularly, all over Java—or at least they did at the time, and they continue to do so for rural Javanese. These balls of light are associated with *wahyu*, a word that comes from the Arabic *wahy*, meaning 'revelation'.

I've assembled a set of quotes about how the *wahyu* works in Java (and Malaysia), which gives a broader, cultural picture of how commonplace accounts of the *wahyu* are. The quotes and

their sources are given in full in Note 1. In summary though:

- Sightings of the *wahyu* are commonplace in Javanese culture, and are associated with authorization of people to teach or to govern. Even the appointment of village heads is accompanied by sightings of the *wahyu*, and people sit out at night looking for it.
- Even at the national political level, President Suharto was considered to have '*wahyu*' and was watched closely for any sign that he might have lost it.
- Hundreds of Javanese mystical movements have '*wahyu*' origin myths. They all account for their beginnings in terms of *wahyu* descending upon their founder.
- Even today, people in Indonesia identify getting '*wahyu*' as a basis for claiming their views are 'right'.
- In Java, spiritual power and political power are conflated. Both come from '*wahyu*', which is accorded to certain people.
- Only aristocrats (and Pak Subuh's title 'Raden Mas' indicates he saw himself as such) receive *wahyu*. The peasantry are accorded a lesser form of power called '*warok*'.
- The Javanese tradition of *wahyu* conflicts with Islam. A prime tenet of Islam is that Mohammed was the last prophet, and therefore the last to receive *wahy* (revelation). *Wahyu* is part of abangan culture, not santri culture.
- In Indonesia today, claims to receive *wahyu* can get you arrested and tried, as happened to Ibu Lia Aminuddin, in Jakarta, just a few years ago.
- Researchers on the Javanese mystical schools cite Pak Subuh's *wahyu* experience along with that of others and put that experience in its Javanese cultural context.

So Pak Subuh's experience of a falling ball of light is hardly unique. In Java the *wahyu* falls constantly. It falls on Presidents and village head-men. It falls on hundreds of leaders of spiritual movements, not just Pak Subuh.

What the *wahyu* is supposed to have brought with it is, in Pak Subuh's case, the latihan. And in Subud culture and mythology, the latihan is supposed to have 'arrived' in 1925, from above. Members regularly speak of 'the coming of the latihan', whereas no-one speaks of 'the coming of yoga', or 'the coming of meditation', or 'the coming of Pilates'. The myth is encoded in Subud language.

What Subud culture does not encompass is the possibility that its *wahyu* myth is a very commonplace and understandable Javanese origin myth, and that the latihan kejiwaan may have already existed in Java before Pak Subuh's experience in 1925.

Paul Stange, writing on Sumarah, tells us that *all* Javanese spiritual movements claim that their practices had no precedent. "In every case the images, styles, and practices of new movements are derivative. Yet in Java such movements repeatedly deny spiritual lineage...." [*The Evolution*

of *Sumarah*, downloadable at: <<http://www.sumarah.net/writings.html>> Stange's explanation is that this claim originates in the mystical tradition, which asserts that every mystical experience is a matter of direct perception rather than learning. To draw a Western parallel, it's as though a Western science teacher said that there is no historical chain of influence in science, because every scientific theory is drawn directly from Nature.

So what if the practice of the latihan is 'derivative'—in other words, had immediate precursors and precedents in the Central Javanese mystical melting pot?

Many members I have spoken to find such a notion disturbing. For me, the latihan is the latihan, and (hopefully, at least in Subud theory) is not affected by the theories and explanations we ascribe to it. Whether it came from the sky with a *wahyu*, or was a variant of other mystical practices, should make the latihan exercise neither more nor less: it remains what it is prior to any explanation.

But the very idea that the latihan has a history, as well as a myth, raises the question: what history?

We know that Pak Subuh was an active spiritual seeker in his youth. He studied under a number of teachers, including Kyai Abdurrachman, a Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh, and also Kyai Demang Poncokartoko, the spiritual guide of the Sultan of Surakarta. Most of the cosmology and terminology in his talks comes from the Sufi and Kejawen traditions, and since Pak Subuh did not invent these, his explanations were influenced by these teachers. Some of this influence I've started to document on the website <<http://www.sitecreator.com/demystifysubud/index.html>>.

But Pak Subuh had a third teacher, who to my knowledge has never been named.

Pak Subuh studied Silat. Silat is Indonesia's indigenous martial art. But as with so many aspects of Javanese culture, Silat has two aspects: an 'outer' aspect, concerned with physical prowess and fighting, and an 'inner' aspect, steeped in Javanese mysticism.

Whereas most of Javanese religious and mystical culture came from either indigenous animism or later imports of Hinduism and Sufism, Silat has its roots in China, in the mystical fighting art of Kung Fu. From China, the art spread down through East Asia into Malaysia, then down Sumatra to Java.

There are many different schools of Silat.

Here are some characteristics of Silat schools that may sound familiar.

- Traditionally, a Silat teacher was not allowed to charge fees.
- Many teachers strictly prohibit their students from 'mixing' with other schools: they must stay with one form.
- A teacher will accept a student only after they have demonstrated their sincerity, through a strict probation period.

- Teachers do not advertise. They are highly secretive. Students are supposed to find their way to the teacher.

These are interesting similarities, but they do not bear directly upon the latihan. The following similarities do:

- Central to the 'inner' practice of Silat is the concept of '*tenaga dalam*' or 'inner energy' or 'inner power'. There are two different traditions in Silat, regarding this '*tenaga dalam*':

These are being 'filled' (Ind: *diisi*) and 'opened' (Ind: *dibuka*). Practices involving being 'filled' are linked to concepts of spiritual potency similar to those outlined by Anderson. Power is accumulated in certain individuals or objects that can 'fill' others with it at will. Sociologically such a conception is intimately intertwined with hierarchical and authoritarian social structures. Within the context of *silat* culture this manifests in cult like groups that often centre on a charismatic leader or a particular sacred heirloom. The leader or heirloom, most commonly a sword or dagger, 'radiates' energy, filling the followers with it. The greater one's proximity to the source of power the greater one's own.

In contrast, the concept of being 'opened' suggests a more 'egalitarian' model of power. Rather than being the preserve of a particular potent individual, power exists as a potentiality present in every person. To be opened refers specifically to the process whereby one who has already activated their 'inner power' assists another in doing the same. Consequently contemporary inner power groups such as Nampon, Prana Sakti, Hikmatul Imam and Satria Nusantara exhibit more democratic forms of social organisation, with a greater emphasis upon individual effort and achievement. The role of the guru is more that of a guide.

<<http://www.lib.murdoch.edu.au/adt/pubfiles/adt-MU20040210.100853/06chapter4.pdf>>

(Thus, in the second egalitarian type (*dibuka*) of Silat, we see strong echos of the Subud 'opening' of one person by another, to access their own 'power within'. We see the egalitarian and democratic tendencies. And we see the teacher called a 'guide' rather than a guru.)

- Pak Subuh's colleague Sukino, who started Sumarah, was also a student of Silat. Paul Stange reports of him: 'Sukino's experience of youth involved practice of *pencak-silat*, popular Javanese martial arts (*kadigdayan*) often involving automatic movement rising from inner psychic power (*kanuragan*).'

(We therefore know that there is a form of Silat in which the movements arise spontaneously from within, and that Pak Subuh knew of this Silat. The French anthropologist Jean-Marc de Grave, himself a practitioner of Javanese martial arts drew a distinction between *kanuragan*, concerned with developing invulnerability or exceptional force, and *tenaga dalam*.)

- The movements that arise from *tenaga dalam* are considered 'beyond the heart and mind'.

- In Pak Subuh's story of his personal experience, one of the first things that the latihan did was to lead him through Silat positions and enable him to compose new ones.
- Pak Subuh's explanation of the latihan is couched in terms of forces and power.
- Silat practice is called '*latihan*'.
- Just as Silat derives from Kung Fu, so '*tenaga dalam*' derives from the Chinese '*qi*' or '*ch'i*', which is also equated with the Indian '*prana*'. '*Qi*' is often translated as 'life force', and '*prana*' as 'great life force.' In fact, only in these traditions does the term 'great life force' seem to be used.
- The Chinese version of 'spontaneous *silat*' is 'spontaneous *qigong*', which is considered a very advanced and deep form of *qigong*. Descriptions of 'spontaneous qigong' mirror descriptions of the latihan, with spontaneous singing, crying, dancing, animal movements, etc. Descriptions of a qigong teacher undertaking a mass opening in which the whole hall is moved into a state of spontaneous *qigong* echo stories of Pak Subuh's first trip to Mexico (and other places), where he would from a stage open hundreds at a time.

Individually, any one of these correlations might be explained away. Taken together, and with the fact that Pak Subuh was a Silat student and practitioner, the concordance is very suggestive.

The point here is not to promote this 'explanation' as 'the' explanation of the latihan, but rather to open up our way of considering and speaking about the latihan beyond Subud's limited origin myth, into the exploration of possible histories. Once one has a history, one has a path to connect to the rest of humanity, because at some point in the past, histories cross. In the above hypothesis, we can see avenues through which to connect to all of China, and to explain the latihan to Westerners in terms of *qi* or *ch'i*—with which they are already familiar—instead of the 'Power of God', a term which carries much baggage.

At the outset of the article, I suggested that the 'problem' with Subud's origin myth is that it makes Subud look like a new religion. We don't want to look like a religion. We don't want to be in conflict with religion.

Here then, is what a Subud leaflet might look like, presented from an historical consciousness:

Introducing the Latihan

In the religious traditions of humanity, there are many practices that aim to foster a different consciousness, of benefit to daily life. Some of these practices are: *qigong*, sitting meditation, walking meditation, contemplation, chanting, repetition of a mantra or phrase, *lectio divina*, yoga, and dance. Such practices aim to take us out of the trenches of daily life and provide access to a different state of being. In that state, we can see life differently. We can then take that insight back into daily life, to help us when we are buffeted by the varying demands, sensations, fears and desires which we know so well.

Some of these practices are attached to particular religions. Yoga, for instance, seems uniquely Hindu. Others range across traditions. Repetition of a mantra is called the Centering Prayer in Christianity, mantric meditation in Hinduism, and the *dhikr* in Sufism. Some of the practices have become secularised: they are now practiced independent of the religious framework with which they have long been associated. Meditation and yoga are perhaps the two most famous and widespread examples of practices that are now carried out in their own right, detached from an historical system of belief.

We would like to introduce you to a relative newcomer.

On the island of Java, tens of millions of people have for centuries followed a little-known religion known as Kejawen. It is a 'syncretic' religion, born of the layering and mixing of many religious traditions: animism, Hinduism, Sufism, and—through the martial arts—Chinese philosophy. Within the religion of Java there are many mystical movements, aimed at cultivating the 'inner' life.

Pak Subuh was a teacher in the Kejawen tradition and introduced the West to the practice known today as the '*latihan kejiwaan*'—literally: spiritual exercise. In a very modern vein, Pak Subuh's vision was to have this practice made available to anyone who asks, free of attachment to any particular religious framework, theory, or school of thought.

For those who are interested in practices like meditation and yoga but have not found satisfaction with what is so far available, we invite you to investigate the latihan. The latihan has the following attributes that set it apart in one way or another from meditation and yoga:

- it involves not just the mind, but the whole of your body and being
- it is free and spontaneous — not structured by rules or instruction
- it is generally practiced in a group setting, though can be done alone
- recommended two half-hour sessions per week (no long hours sitting in the pre-dawn darkness)
- no difficult or painful postures or positions
- no fees
- no teacher

As with any such practice, the latihan may bring up difficult psychological material, initiate insights and changes in character, and changes in way of life. These are completely individual, and may not happen at all.

The Subud Association has been set up as the caretaker of this practice, to provide venues for group practice, and to provide avenues for practitioners to communicate and interact if they so wish. There is no official dogma, though of course every practitioner

brings their own culture, history and beliefs to their practice. You are not under any obligation to listen to the views of anyone, and the latihan is best practiced without too much theorising.

... or, perhaps, mythologising.

I've had feedback on this pamphlet from some of my Subud friends. In response to that feedback:

- The pamphlet doesn't convey any sense of excitement. But why should it? What is 'excitement' about, and what does it have to do with a long-term commitment to one's own development as a human being?
- It also violates a Subud taboo, by comparing the latihan to yoga and to meditation. These are the central practices of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions respectively. These traditions have thousands of years of history and heritage behind them; they are the inspiration for extraordinary achievements in art and culture, including the Mahabharata and the *wayang kulit*, which Pak Subuh so clearly admired. If Subud's latihan should ever approach a fraction of such a contribution to human history, it would be a fabulous success.
- It's also true that many people practice yoga and meditation as ways of achieving calmness or physical health. But not all. Others practice yoga or meditation as paths to improving their character, and experience as a result profound changes in their lives. The same variety exists with the latihan. (And 'calming' is not to be dismissed lightly. Much violence and aggression might disappear if people simply calmed down.)

What I like about this pamphlet is that it places Subud in the context of human history. This is in contrast to the mythic, oft-times messianic, secretive and crypto-Javanese tone of so many of our public offerings.

Myth has its place. But it is in history that we need to find our place.

Notes

1. *Wahyu quotes...*

Wahyu is commonplace in authorising people to teach or govern:

'Mas Tapa did win the elections, just as Panembahan Senopati had become king, and both claimed they had obtained divine imprimatur, or *wahyu*, in the form of a star descending from the night sky upon them. This manifestation of *wahyu* in the form of a falling star is not confined to these two stories alone. Such omens of divine appointment to positions of power are a common pattern in Javanese beliefs, which I have encountered in many other similar narratives. On the night preceding the village elections, many people had gathered atop one of the overlooking hills in an attempt to spot the *wahyu* for village-head, and to find out which candidate it had chosen. According to a few rumours, the *wahyu* had indeed been spotted.'

<<http://culturalheritageinternational.org/forums/view.php?>

site=anthrocommons&bn=anthrocommons_section22&key=1109848811>

Even at the National level:

'For thirty years, President Suharto has reigned over Indonesia in the manner of a Javanese king—sure-handed, unchallenged, all-powerful. To many of the country's nearly 200 million people, only a divine mandate can confer such longevity and authority. But in recent months, murmurings in the towns and villages of central Java, the nation's mystic heartland, have bordered on heresy. The whisperers say that the *wahyu*—the gift of power—has left the 75-year-old ex-general, and is seeking a home in someone new.'

<<http://www.pathfinder.com/asiaweek/96/0809/cs1.html>>

Hundreds of Javanese movements have wahyu origin myths:

'Some *aliran kebatinan* (another name for spiritual movements) who lean towards Islam dislike being equated with the more obscure Javanese sects who are not averse towards *guna-guna*, Javanese black magical practices. These groups are formed around a teacher, who claims to have received enlightenment (*Wahyu*). Hundreds of such groups are known to exist. Their gurus usually claim originality for their revelation or intuitive insight while rejecting knowledge from books or the influence of tradition. When the guru dies, the group often dissolves.'

<<http://www.xs4all.nl/~wichm/javmys1.html>>

People argue about who has wahyu:

[Note. This is not a Subud site!]

'Anak Kelantan said... My problem is this: why is that almost every Muslim *is* insisting that their brand/version of understanding or interpretation of Islam is *the* right one. Each put themselves above everyone else as if they got a "*wahyu*" or visited by Archangel Gibrail and be so righteous, including your goodself!'

<http://www.malaysia-today.net/loonyMY/2005/06/knife-cuts-both-ways.htm>

In Java, spiritual power and political power are conflated:

In Javanese tradition, power has an essence of its own, known as '*wahyu*', and is conferred like a mantle on certain chosen people.

<<http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/2001/08/20/0113.html>>

Wahyu is for the aristocracy. The peasantry get warok:

'As far as rural society was concerned, indeed, the *warok* came to be considered as semi-sacred figures. The *warok's* spiritual quest involved a dissemination of the esoteric knowledge associated with the political-spiritual elite to popular culture. The concept of *kekebalan* [invulnerability] attributed to *warok* was especially stressed within rural leadership, and in that sense it constituted a counter-elite value, contrasting with the quality of *wahyu* [divine providence] that was so important to aristocratic leadership as well as to the post-independence Indonesian government. The *warok* was *kebal* to the oppressive powers of the state, and it was because of this invulnerability that he could get away with so much.'

<http://www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue2/Warok.html>

The Javanese idea of wahyu conflicts with mainstream Islam:

'Most members are Muslim, but usually of the sort who would say explicitly, as many other

Javanese also do, that they are “statistical” members of the faith. Sumarah emphasises the autonomous revelatory origins of its practice and leaders use the term “wahyu” for that internally, but soft peddle it in public to avoid offending orthodox Muslims, who hold that term in reserve for Mohammed’s revelation. While the movement has always emphasised that it is not a religion and has no connection with a particular religion, the keynotes of the practice nevertheless resonate clearly with Sufism.’
<<http://151.1.141.55/sumarah/SUMARAH=2=95.pdf>>

In Indonesia today, wahyu can get you arrested:

‘Not surprisingly, Lia Aminuddin and her following (formally constituted as “Yayasan Salamullah”) have caused a sensation, offending many Muslims. The Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) in 1997 repudiated her claims to speak with the voice of the Angel Gabriel,[vii] and neighbours of Salamullah’s property in Puncak tried to evict the group. Nonetheless Lia and her following have been able to function for a number of years without being either shut down or forced to re-identify as *kebatinan*, despite incorporating concepts from other religions like reincarnation into their beliefs and drawing into their founder’s story motifs such as the descent of *wahyu* (the supernatural, power-conveying light) and the ability to handle dangerous supernatural power objects (gatraneews.com/VII/42/cov42-1.html).’
http://www.cesnur.org/2003/vil2003_howell.htm

Researchers know about Pak Subuh’s wahyu:

‘The mystical tradition of Panembahan Senopati formed Muhammad Subuh’s life, but he was also naturally influenced by the Javanese cultural environment in which he had been raised. His mother used to tell him of how a light had appeared when he was born, and of how volcanoes had erupted, all signs he was destined to become something special. Later, the young Muhammad Subuh received a *wahyu* (I-, revelation; A. *wahy*) in a manner resembling that of his ancestor Panembahan Senopati. This *wahyu* was revealed on a decisive night in the mid-1920s when he noticed a ball of radiant white light descending towards and entering his body. This image of receiving *wahyu* is a typical Javanese form of legitimizing a ruler or someone special.... Like other leaders of mystical movements, Muhammad Subuh often referred to his divine personal revelation in order to legitimate his messages and mystical power, especially since legitimization by means of democratic election is irrelevant in the eyes of traditionally-oriented Javanese. For them power is an ascribed quality which is obtained through inheritance or by divine favor. In traditional Javanese societies the power of a leader is enhanced by keeping aloof from the people. Muhammad Subuh possessed of these things since childhood, when he was said to have clairvoyant powers that distinguished him decisively from other people.’
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape10/PQDD_0017/MQ54979.pdf>