

# Belief and Unbelief

by Leonard Priestley

There is a widespread belief among Subud members that it is not necessary to believe anything to be in Subud. And that seems to be true, at least in the sense that no belief is actually required for membership. At the time when I was opened (longer ago than I care to recall), one could join Subud simply by talking to some helpers and expressing a wish to be opened, waiting for three months while perhaps having further talks with the helpers, and then coming on the appointed day to be opened. Later we were told that there should be a declaration of belief before the opening: the applicant was supposed to say, 'I believe in the One Almighty God and wish to worship only God,' and then the opening could proceed. But it was made clear that if the applicant felt unable to make that declaration, the opening could proceed anyway. The declaration was a desideratum rather than a requirement.

There is also a widespread belief that belief is a Good Thing. Believing in God is assumed to be better than not believing in Him. People who do not believe in God are welcome in Subud partly because the experience of the latihan is expected to give them the evidence they need in order to believe. So although unbelievers are accepted in Subud, it is with a certain air of condescension or even pity. The believers feel it is not really the fault of these people that they cannot believe; this is an age when the lower forces are powerful and belief is very difficult. But even though unbelievers and so presumably materialistic, they have felt drawn to something higher, and with the latihan they have a chance of being cured of their unbelief.

The unbelievers tend to see it all rather differently. They do not regard their lack of belief as a disability; in fact they are likely to consider themselves more enlightened, or at least more thoughtful, than the believers. They see no evidence sufficient to justify a belief in God, and without such evidence they find it hard to distinguish between belief in God and superstition. Nor do they particularly want to believe in God. For they feel that belief in God can too easily be used (as we all know) to justify the most appalling atrocities, and though they will admit, if sometimes grudgingly, that belief in God is also associated with some of the highest moral ideals that humanity has achieved, they deny that morality and ethics are in any essential way dependent on belief in God. In fact they are likely to object to the belief in God, at least as generally represented in the Abrahamic religions, precisely on moral grounds. How can they respect a God who may choose to intervene to save his creatures from suffering and death if they pray to Him, but then again may not; who will give victory in battle to those who pray to Him, but then again may not; who is all-powerful and merciful and yet will let His creatures, human and animal, believer and unbeliever alike, suffer all the terrible agonies that can result from injury and disease for hours, days, weeks and years?

And then there is the question of Heaven and Hell. The promise of Heaven is attractive (so long as it does not involve too many clouds and harps), but if we are kind to our fellow human beings merely in order to get to Heaven, what sort of kindness is that? What might have been a genuine moral impulse becomes something selfish, a calculated strategy for the acquisition of eternal beatitude. The prospect of Hell, if believed in, is truly terrifying. But again, if what we do for our neighbour is motivated solely by our desire to avoid punishment after death, what kindness is there in that? And what are we to think (they will say) of a God who will punish any of a considerable variety of sins by subjecting the sinner who dies unrepentant to tortures in Hell that are

worse than anything we can imagine, and not merely for a long time, but for all eternity? If crimes deserve punishment, is there any crime, however terrible, that would deserve a punishment like that? Could such a punishment be just? They will see a God who would inflict such a punishment for any reason at all not as just, but rather as infinitely vengeful. And then there is the Christian doctrine of original sin. What are we to think of a God who has ordained that infants who die unbaptized, even though they are entirely innocent except for the sin of our remotest ancestor, are at best relegated to limbo and at worst condemned to eternal suffering in Hell? Would such a God be deserving of our worship?

What I have briefly outlined here are problems that theologians in the Abrahamic religions, men of great intelligence, good will and sincerity, have struggled with for centuries. Some of the believers among us will likewise have struggled with them; some may have simply accepted them as a mystery beyond human comprehension; and some may never have thought about them. But some will not recognize in what I have said here anything at all of the God they believe in. Some of them long ago rejected the orthodox conception of God that they were brought up with; others come from a less orthodox tradition or perhaps from no tradition at all, and such a conception never formed part of their religious awareness in the first place. Often, I think, whatever conception of God they have is quite indefinite, and may amount to little more than a vague notion of an infinite and benevolent Being whose presence is manifested in the world and especially in the latihan. But it is hardly surprising that the unbelievers, whenever they hear the words 'Almighty God', tend rather to think of a supremely vengeful God who above all is to be feared.

The unbelievers are no less diverse in their beliefs than the believers. I think it unlikely that any of them are materialists in the strict sense, though there may be a few; even these may regard the latihan as a purely physical process and still believe it to be a profoundly beneficial exercise, physically, mentally and morally. There are probably some who are unwilling to believe anything for which there is not reasonably good scientific evidence, but who would not rule out the possibility that there are important realms of experience still awaiting systematic investigation. There are likely to be some, I think, who believe that nothing is supernatural, but who are quite open-minded about what might exist within the natural world; they may feel that their experience justifies a belief in spiritual realities, but would regard such realities as essentially natural. And there are some for whom the whole notion of belief is suspect, at least if belief is taken to involve a commitment to the truth of something that we do not, and perhaps cannot, actually know.

In fact we are all believers and all unbelievers, in the sense that we all believe in some things and not in others. There may be believers who believe in God, but a God who is manifested as many gods, or believers who believe in a God Who is not a person at all, but something like the spiritual essence of the universe. There may be unbelievers who do not believe in a creator God, but who believe in a universal principle of enlightenment and compassion, or unbelievers who believe in a creative and benevolent power pervading the universe, but do not think of it as God. Even the sceptics believe that truth is an ultimate (perhaps even a sacred) value and are unwilling to accept any belief, and especially one that claims to represent some kind of ultimate truth, as a substitute for it.

We all have our beliefs then, not only in God, or Nirvana, or the Dao (Tao), or Vishnu, or Brahman, but also in such things as evolution, special creation, global warming, the imminence of an ice age, human rights, human obligations, the sanctity of life, the certainty of death, the regularity of the seasons, and (not least) the value of the latihan.

But we recognize that beliefs may be sound or unsound, well founded or superstitious. Not all beliefs, we believe, are of equal value. And if they are not of equal value, then of any two conflicting beliefs one is likely to be better than the other. If one person believes that the Earth is spherical and another believes it is flat, it seems clear that the first belief is sounder, and in fact better, than the second. But what about belief in God, or belief in Nirvana? If someone believes in God but not in Nirvana, and someone else believes in Nirvana but not in God, it is natural to assume that in this case also one of the beliefs will be superior to the other. And to most Jews, Christians and Muslims it will in fact seem obvious that the first belief is superior to the second, and to most Theravada Buddhists it will seem no less obvious that the second belief is superior to the first. Now in the case of the Earth, the evidence seems overwhelmingly to support the belief that it is spherical rather than flat. But what is the evidence in the second case? Why should we believe that God is real, or that Nirvana is real?

Some might claim that their belief is not a matter of evidence, but of faith. But most, I think, would argue that their belief is based on evidence, though not necessarily the kind of evidence used in the physical sciences. And in fact it is hard to see why one would believe in God, Nirvana or anything else without some kind of reason for the belief. We do not believe things at random. Some might say that their belief is not based on any interpretation of evidence, which can only be imperfect and fallible, but on their faith in the authority of the Torah, the Gospels, the Koran or the Tripitaka; they accept the reality of God or Nirvana on the strength of what was said by the prophets or the Buddha. Yet these authoritative books are in fact evidence of what is supposed to have been said by people divinely inspired or supremely enlightened, and the sayings in them are then accepted as truths beyond the power of ordinary human intellects to attain. But why are these books accepted as authorities? That too must be on the basis of some kind of evidence; we do not grant authority to books at random.

That evidence may be as weak as the mere fact that our parents and grandparents accepted the books as true revelation, or as strong as whatever has been established with relative certainty through careful analysis of the books and their history. Or the evidence may rather be personal experience which can be interpreted as confirmation of what is taught in the books. But it will still be our own judgement, on the basis of whatever evidence we accept, that the books are authoritative and that what they assert should be believed. Authorities do not replace our own judgement except in the sense that once accepted they become evidence on which we base further beliefs. And in no case is the evidence conclusive. At best, we can judge that there is a high probability that a particular book is authoritative, and a high probability is all we need to justify our belief. But it cannot justify an absolute and unquestioning belief.

Many Subud members are likely to believe that their belief in God or some other transcendent reality is based not on books or teachings, but directly on their own personal experience. This may be experience outside of the latihan (often before the member joined Subud), or experience during the latihan, whether in regular latihan, in spontaneous latihan, or in testing. Such experience is often profoundly impressive, and can bring with it a strong conviction that something higher and purer than the ordinary world is shining through, as it were, into our awareness. How we interpret such an experience, and perhaps even the form it takes, will naturally be influenced by whatever beliefs we already hold or are familiar with. If we are familiar with belief in God, we are likely to relate it to God; if we are Buddhists, to Nirvana, or to the Buddha-nature; if we are Daoists, to the Way of Heaven. The experience will then seem to be the basis for the belief. And in a sense it will be: the experience itself is real and important, and it can indeed be understood in terms of any one of those beliefs. But no matter how natural

and obvious such an interpretation may seem, there is nothing inevitable about it; someone else with what is essentially the same experience may see it only as evidence of a significant alteration in consciousness, to be understood purely in terms of one's own inner development. In every case we have to decide in recollection how to interpret the experience, and even when it seems to include its own interpretation, we still have to decide whether to accept and how to regard that interpretation.

But sometimes belief is based not on evidence in any ordinary sense, but on the feeling we get when affirming a particular possibility as certain, or some idea as true. The risk with this kind of belief is obvious: we may feel much better if we can believe that there is a safe way to get rich quick, or that under a tree is a good place to stand in a thunderstorm, or that our testing is infallible; yet the consequences of these beliefs are liable to be at the very least unfortunate. There are others, however, which are apparently benign. Consider, for example, the belief that someone can be rescued when rescue seems out of the question, or that someone is alive who has been given up for dead. At worst, the belief gives the believer courage and a sense of purpose, and occasionally the person is in fact rescued, or is found alive. A belief maintained because to be without it seems unbearable may thus be beneficial in any case, and in some cases can make the difference between life and death.

All these examples of belief are also examples of unbelief, since to believe one thing is not to believe its opposite. To believe that someone is still alive is to disbelieve in that person's death. A team playing at a disadvantage will still try to believe that it can win, or even that it is certain to win; but that is equivalent to not believing in the possibility of defeat. If it can feel good to believe in some things, it can feel good not to believe in others. Moreover, the same belief can feel good to some people and bad to others. Many people feel better if they can believe that there is some kind of life after death; some feel better if they do not believe that. The feelings that accompany a belief are not in themselves a criterion for its soundness.

And even when the belief or disbelief in question has a beneficial effect, making us more confident, more enthusiastic, more determined, allaying our fears and filling us with hope, to choose that belief or disbelief purely for the sake of the feelings that accompany it must surely indicate a rather casual attitude to truth. How can we choose to believe or disbelieve simply according to what suits us? It seems a little strange that we can choose to believe or disbelieve at all: why would belief or disbelief not arise spontaneously on the basis of what we know and understand? Certainly we can in fact choose to believe this and not to believe that, with little or no regard for what might actually be the truth of the matter; but in doing so we seem to be moving in the direction of self-delusion. I believe that the concern for truth is naturally rather tenuous in most of us, and we need to protect and foster it as much as we can.

But there is one kind of feeling that can accompany a belief which is not irrelevant to its soundness. That is the feeling of rightness, a pleasant, satisfying kind of feeling which is something like a feeling of wholeness or health. This is the feeling we have when a problem has been solved, or a pattern perceived, and it sometimes arises when we have realized something intuitively, without any explicit process of thought. Conversely, a feeling of wrongness, a kind of vague cognitive discomfort, can indicate an unrecognized gap or flaw in our understanding; it was just such a vague uneasiness that led me to review the evidence in a book that I was working on (on early Buddhist thought) and then to abandon the quite plausible interpretation I had arrived at. But in every case the feeling of rightness or wrongness has to be investigated rationally if at all possible, for something may feel right and still be wrong, or feel wrong and still be right.

This feeling of rightness is closely related, I believe, to the sense of wholeness that we can experience when we listen to music or contemplate a work of art or a poem. To perceive harmonies in sounds, in forms and colours, or in words and images seems to create within us a corresponding harmony of feeling and awareness, and this we intuitively recognize as something both pleasant and beneficial. But the harmonies that we perceive in music, paintings and so on are harmonies not only of sounds and forms, but also of meaning: at their best, music and the other arts are full of significance, and as we experience them, we feel that we are seeing more and more deeply into reality. Religious rituals and myths can likewise be both harmonious and charged with meaning, offering us healing and revelation.

But in what sense can we be said to believe in a work of art? Not in the sense that we would accept any information it gives us as factually correct; even if it seems to give information, the information is important not for its correctness, but for the way it functions in the world created by the work of art. A figurative painting may distort or otherwise misrepresent its subject; a novel may, factually speaking, be a pack of lies. Yet each may be thoroughly believable, but in its own terms, as a painting or a novel, not as a factual representation or account. We believe in them, it seems to me, by accepting them, entering into them, giving ourselves to them, and we can do that only to the extent that they ring true for us. For there is a kind of truth that we look for in a work of art, a truth not consisting of facts and generalizations, but of something deeper and more elusive. Where the work of art seems to illuminate our own nature and the nature of the world around us, we accept it and believe in it. But where the work of art fails to ring true, we find it unbelievable.

Religious ceremonies, narratives and doctrines are to a large extent like works of art and can be believed in when they deepen our awareness of life and meaning in the world. But if we are to experience that deepening of awareness, we have to be open to the experience in the first place. We have to begin not with belief, certainly, but with a willingness to believe, or more accurately, in a state that is simply receptive, free of both belief and disbelief. But religion also differs from art in that religious doctrines typically include injunctions which the religion's adherents are supposed to follow, and also what purport to be statements of fact. Art of course may be didactic, but we generally recognize that the artistic value of a work does not depend on what it may teach or how well it teaches it; our own nature and the world's may be illuminated by a work whose teaching we reject. But a religion is something to be accepted and practised. To believe fully in a religion, then, would involve not only a deepening of awareness, but also the belief that its injunctions are sound and deserve to be followed, and that its statements are true.

Belief based on a deepening of awareness will be well founded if the teachings and rituals of the religion actually contribute to a deepening of awareness. Although we recognize that what has that effect for one person may not for another, we are unlikely to question whether a person for whom it seems to be effective has really experienced a deepening of awareness. No doubt here as elsewhere error is possible; the insight might be less than one imagines. But although the quality of the insight is open to question, it is hard to see how a belief of this kind could be entirely mistaken. Belief in a religion in this sense seems to require no justification beyond a person's own experience of meaning. But the injunctions and statements of fact that typically form part of a religion are another matter. Injunctions can work well or badly, and may either support or conflict with our highest principles; to accept them without examination would seem irresponsible. And statements of fact, no matter what authority is claimed for them,

surely ought to be investigated if at all possible; if a religion makes historical claims about the life of its founder, for example, these claims deserve to be considered critically. The more important the statement, the higher should be our standards in trying to assess its truth.

The adherents of a religion will often not feel obliged to believe in every detail of its teaching. They may believe deeply in the religion as something that illuminates and enhances their lives and yet reject some of its injunctions and disbelieve some or many of its statements. They are likely to feel that some aspects of the religion are essential, while others may have been appropriate for some time in the past but are no longer suitable in the world we live in. So believers in a religion tend (quite properly, I believe) to be selective in their belief. Moreover, the apparent statements of fact can often be interpreted as metaphorical, and in that way they can still be accepted even without a belief in their literal truth. The tradition of interpreting apparently factual accounts in scripture as parables conveying spiritual truths is in fact a very ancient one.

We believe in a work of art, then, if it rings true, that is, if it seems to illuminate our own nature and the nature of the world. Some works offer more illumination than others, and to that extent may be considered finer works; but a work of art that is quite limited may still be thoroughly believable. The idea that one could somehow choose one painting, one piece of music, or one novel or poem, and regard that alone as believable, dismissing all the rest as false art or as not really art at all, would seem utterly absurd. Yet it is not unusual for the believers in a religion to claim that theirs alone is the true religion. And even if they acknowledge that all religions may in some sense be true, they are still likely to feel that their own religion is truer, more worthy of belief.

But if they believe that their own religion is superior to all the others, what is their belief based on? Are they claiming that their religion is more illuminating and more conducive to harmony and peace than any other. But what is the evidence for that? Do they speak from experience? Have they themselves practised all of the religions in question? And even if they have (which seems very unlikely), how long did they practise them and how deeply did they enter into them? To evaluate something as rich and complex as a whole religion would surely require more than a casual acquaintance with it. Perhaps they have read about them. If so, what have they read? Much of the popular literature on religion is inevitably superficial, and to read the specialist literature is usually difficult and time-consuming. And would we expect to be able to evaluate a work of art simply by reading about it, without any direct experience of the work itself? Perhaps they have read translations of some of the sacred texts. That certainly would bring them closer to the religions themselves; but texts are not by any means the whole of a religion, and any translation of them will necessarily be imperfect and potentially misleading. Though immensely valuable, the texts have to be understood in the light of both traditional commentary and modern scholarly inquiry. Perhaps people of authority within their own religion have told them that those other religions are inferior. But on what do those people base their opinion? On the opinion of others before them? Or do they claim to have some special insight into the spiritual deficiencies of the other religions? But why should any such claim be accepted, particularly if it is associated with a general ignorance of the religions in question? And in all the religions there seem to be people who feel confident in their ability to discern the shortcomings or even the dangers of other religions. Why should we accept such claims from one religion rather than another? Is it because some of these people are supposed to be infallible, or virtually so? But then where is the evidence for that?

Nor do I believe that there is any sound basis for the assumption that belief in one

religion or another is better than belief in none. Certainly there are people who have been irreligious and have then found wholeness and illumination, together with a deepening of their moral consciousness, through the practice of a religion. But there are also people who were initially religious and have then found in a life outside of religion a spiritual openness and freedom that was impossible for them within the confines of religious doctrine. Certainly there are religious people who are truthful and conscientious, compassionate and fair-minded, in whom we see an embodiment of the highest ideals of their religion. But there are others who seem to have gained nothing from their religion but a degree of social respectability and an excuse for self-assertion and bigotry. Certainly there are irreligious people who are thoroughly self-centred, greedy and materialistic. But there are others who will have nothing to do with any religion and who may describe themselves as atheists and materialists, but whose lives are characterized by a simplicity and purity, a concern and love for human beings, animals and plants, and a sense of the profound beauty and sacredness of the world and everything within it, that puts many of us who are religious to shame.

What do we know of what anyone believes? People say that they believe in God or do not believe in God, but what do they actually mean? If they believe in God, what is it that they believe in? A huge man with a beard sitting on a throne in the clouds? Almost certainly not. Yet some may believe that God has something like a human form, since they have learned that God created man in His own image. But they probably also believe that God is omnipresent, as He could not be if His existence were confined within the limits of a human form. God's human form, then, must be simply a form in which we can picture Him, not God Himself. And in fact every conception we have of God and every experience of God necessarily falls short of the infinite Reality. To identify a concept, a name or even a vision with God Himself surely amounts to a kind of idolatry. So the believers may believe in God according to one concept or another, as a Person, as a Trinity of Persons, as a Creator, as infinite Love, as the Being seen in a vision, as the Being whose presence they can feel in themselves and in the world around them, or as the source of the latihan; but in every case, unless they have been trapped by the concept, they recognize that what they believe in is beyond their knowledge and understanding.

And if they do not believe in God, what is it that they do not believe in? They do not believe in God as defined by any of the concepts or doctrines by which believers define Him. Nor are they willing to speak of anything beyond such definitions as God. Yet they may have the same or virtually the same experiences as the believers: they may feel a deep and timeless reality in the world around them, or a vast wisdom working mysteriously in their lives, or an infinite benevolence radiating down upon them, or the presence in a dream or vision of a person of transcendent power and goodness; but they will not relate any of these experiences to God. Perhaps they consider any conception of God too limited and too compromised by doctrines they find unacceptable; they may feel that the reality they have glimpsed is utterly beyond any such conceptions. Or perhaps it is simply that they have a lively sense of the limitations of human understanding, and so will not presume to judge the ultimate significance of their experiences. There is a humility that can arise from our acute awareness of the mysteriousness of the universe and our own being.

Nowhere in all this can I see any justification for either absolute belief or absolute disbelief. I believe there can be real justification for believing in a religion, if we find it effective in illuminating our lives and its injunctions sound and its factual statements true or likely to be true. And there can also be real justification for not believing in a religion, if we find that it fails to illuminate our lives and that its injunctions are unsound and its

factual statements implausible or actually false. But belief or disbelief of this kind is personal and to some extent subject to revision. If we gain harmony and insight through the practice of a particular religion, the benefit that we receive is surely undeniable. But we cannot assume that anyone else who practised it would necessarily receive the same benefit; human beings and religions are immensely complicated, and a religion that works well for one person may work less well for another. Injunctions that appear sound may with the accumulation of experience and reflection come to seem less sound, and injunctions that appeared unsound may eventually reveal unsuspected strengths. And factual statements that initially seemed plausible may with further inquiry appear unlikely to be true, while factual statements that seemed utterly implausible may turn out to be true after all. Belief or disbelief in a religion, if justifiable, cannot be blind and unquestioning; as in other spheres, belief and disbelief both need to be accompanied and refined by doubt.

Doubt, I believe, is the recognition of uncertainty, of the possibility that we might be wrong. Knowledge in the strict sense of the term is certain knowledge; if we claim that we know something, we are claiming that what we know is actually the case: not that it might be so, or that it is probably so, but that it is so. And if it turns out that it is not the case, we say that we thought we knew, but in fact did not. But if we say that we believe something, we make no claim to certainty; we state an opinion, one that we may hold confidently, but still an opinion; not knowledge. We may of course feel certain in our beliefs, but they are still beliefs, and the strength of our confidence in them is no guarantee of their rightness. It may be comforting to regard some of our beliefs as certain knowledge, but they remain beliefs, and our comfort is bought at the expense of honesty. We need doubt to keep our beliefs and disbeliefs honest.

There is actually very little that we can know with certainty. That may be a worrying thought, at least for some of us; yet we seem to do quite well with our beliefs and disbeliefs, which often seem to be well founded and reliable. And nowhere is there less certainty, I believe, than in the question of ultimate reality, not about whether there is such a thing (though even that is surely open to discussion), but about its nature. Whether we call it God or Brahman or the Dharmakaya or the Dao or the Highest Reality, we think of it as something utterly beyond human comprehension. Yet for all its remoteness from our understanding, we feel that it concerns us intimately, and we seek through religion and also by other means to come closer to it, as it were, and to enter into a deeper relationship with it. All of the great religions offer viable approaches to it; their apparently conflicting teachings can be understood as so many different ways of indicating through suggestive metaphors and approximations something of a reality that is essentially beyond our knowing. Their various doctrines are best taken, I believe, not as final pronouncements, but rather as starting points for a process of deepening insight into a supreme mystery that pervades every aspect of our existence.

Spiritual teachings and guidance, whether within the context of a particular religion or not, can likewise be understood as approaches. (This is the literal meaning of the Buddhist term '*upaya*'.) None of them can be equivalent to any kind of ultimate truth, yet all of them have value, more or less according to the nature and needs of the particular person they serve. We believe in them to the extent that we find them illuminating or otherwise helpful; we disbelieve in them to the extent that we do not. But we recognize that here too what is illuminating for one person may not be for another; what helps one may be a hindrance to another. And we recognize too that what is not helpful now may turn out to be helpful in the future. Since we are all somewhat different, our belief and disbelief, even if well founded, can only be personal. In a world of inexhaustible richness and complexity, there is a need for many approaches.



The tolerance and flexibility which result from this kind of circumstantial and qualified belief, through which we can acknowledge the value of all religions and spiritual teachings as so many different approaches to a reality which is ultimately beyond our knowledge and comprehension, seems to me to be very much in the spirit of the latihan. As Bapak suggested, and as I believe many of us in Subud have found, the latihan seems to make it easier for us to feel the presence of that reality in every religious or spiritual tradition, even in those that outwardly seem quite alien to us. I believe that just as the latihan can awaken in us a consciousness of a kinship with all other human beings, through which we feel at one with them even while recognizing their uniqueness and fundamental difference from ourselves, so it can also awaken in us a consciousness of a kinship with other religious and spiritual traditions, through which we recognize in them, even when their approaches are not ones that we can personally accept, that same reality that we seek and celebrate through our own tradition. Even sceptics, who seem superficially at odds with both religion and science (classical scepticism questions even the fundamental principles of mathematics), can recognize at the heart of both of these a profound sense of the mystery of existence, and the latihan may also make it easier for those who are religious to become aware of the uncompromising honesty and purity that can inspire radical scepticism.

Like many others, I have a vision of a Subud which acknowledges and honours its historical roots, but which is essentially indefinable as a product of any particular religious or spiritual tradition. I believe that if we can recognize that all of our beliefs, whether well founded or ill founded, are simply beliefs, and that all of the religions and spiritual teachings in which we may or may not believe are no more than approaches to a reality which is ultimately unfathomable, then the culture of Subud, developing in ways which we are not yet able to imagine, may eventually come to be a true expression of the openness, simplicity, freedom and universality of the latihan.