

What Lies Ahead?

By Raymond Foster

Bapak once said that there are Subud Members, and “Subud People”, and they are not necessarily the same thing. I think it is fairly obvious what he meant. All Subud Members no doubt would think of themselves as “Subud People”, but many “Subud People” are no longer Subud Members: their names have been struck off the membership list. This is quite understandable, from the point of view of those responsible for making the decision—if people no longer “come in” then plainly they are no longer Group members; but it does draw attention to the fact that the material organization called Subud is not quite the same thing as the reality of *susila budhi dharma*. Perhaps, in future, members who no longer attend group latihan could be asked whether they still consider themselves to be “Subud”, and if so, to be retained on the membership list. They will not necessarily be “elderly” or “isolated”. There may well be other more personal or private reasons for non-attendance.

This is certainly so in my own case. I was opened in Central London during the summer of 1966, and although I found complete fulfilment by way of the *kejiwaan*, I nevertheless found myself, because of overpowering personal problems, very much at odds with the social and thence the organizational side of Subud (I must stress that nobody was to blame for this; it was simply “one of those things”). In the event, I found attending the twice-weekly latihan something of a burden, and after thirty years or so of what to me was real suffering, I stopped “coming in”. So now, instead of saying: “I have been a Subud member for forty years,” I have to say something like: “I have been following the path of *susila budhi dharma* for forty years.” And, indeed, this is much nearer the truth of the matter.

Being quite fond of writing, over the years I have had a dozen or so books published, and two or three of these have been slanted towards the inner self. I have never been interested in writing for Subud members; the readers I have had in mind are those who might be drawn towards Subud. Whenever I have had cause to mention Subud I have described it as an organization devoted to passing on a spiritual contact to awaken the soul to begin the long journey “from the material back to the spiritual”, as Bapak put it. But I’m beginning to wonder if this is still true. I sometimes get the impression that the official Subud description would be more like: “an organization devoted to the worship of God, to following the movement of the *latihan kejiwaan*, and the setting up of charitable enterprises”. In other words, from the point of view of an outsider wondering whether to come into Subud or not, it appears to overlook the essence of *susila budhi dharma*, which is the development of one’s own spiritual dimension; it appears to describe the latihan as though it were some sort of “thing” or “presence” waiting there ready to be sampled once or twice a week, rather than the unwilling or spontaneous exercise of one’s own personal soul (to use Bapak’s terminology: the *sukma*), under the guidance of the impersonal *jiwa*). And as for charitable and money-making enterprises, I cannot help but feel that the rest of the world probably does these things far better and more effectively.

Whether Bapak did so intentionally or not, he did encourage many members to invest quite a lot of money in enterprises which were doomed to failure, and it seems that few people appreciate what I consider to be the real spiritual reason for this: to break the vicious hold that the material (or “satanic”) forces have on the soul, and in the plainest, most simplistic terms, to make some of our members lose their money through an act of faith. It was their good fortune, though they may not see it like that.

As Jesus put it: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven". Only after having shed our attachment to this material burden, can we hope to abandon the satanic material forces in order to "rise" by way of the plant life forces and the animal life forces, finally to attain the truly human condition and what Bapak called the *rochani* forces above that. And if there seems to have been some duplicity involved in bringing this about, we may come to learn that the kejiwaan, as I have discovered, is not averse to a few "little white lies".

Rightly or wrongly, I seem to be in the unusual situation of being able to look at Subud from the viewpoint of both insider and outsider. The question is, or should be, how does Subud appear to those who know absolutely nothing about it? As far as I know, Subud is the only reasonably reliable source of the "opening" of the soul, and yet it seems to be demoting itself: representing itself as some sort of philosophical society devoted to Bapak's sayings, or as a social club devoted to charitable works and cultural missions, top-heavy with acronyms and a plethora of impressive-sounding subdivisions and specialities. Most of it is foreign territory to me, so how will it look to some healthily sceptical outsider searching for spiritual enlightenment? I think it brings us back to Bapak's point about "Subud members", as opposed to "Subud people".

I recall that in some of his early talks, as recorded in the relevant *Pewarta*, Bapak explained the difference between the lower personal soul, or what he called "*sukma*", which has the nature of a subtle or "astral" body of our own personal self, and the higher, impersonal soul, which he called "*jiwa*", and which is brought about and developed through the working of the Holy Spirit. The *sukma*, which could be identified with the heart, is the familiar soul in us which gives voice and takes an interest in our worldly affairs, the part of us subject to the process of purification and eventual death. It is activated largely by the *nafsu* or passions. The *jiwa* on the other hand has no interest in this world; and it is the *jiwa* which is destined to survive death and rise to a higher state. After a while, Bapak presumably saw that this was too complicated for us westerners to understand, so he lumped everything together as "*jiwa*", or "spirit".

Under Bapak's guidance, the Subud practice of testing was of great value, because he was able to point out exactly what was "*nafsu*" and what was not. Lacking that guidance, in my own experience, group testing became something of a farce, with all the participants airing their own preconceptions and prejudices. I know it's easy to mock the practice of testing, and I certainly do not wish to harp on it, but may I suggest that the Subud Brotherhood try to manage without it? When it is given to them to know something of value, that knowledge will be given; it cannot be demanded. The outcome of a testing session is likely to be the decision purely of the *sukma* or the selfish heart, and as often as not, the intellect would do a better job. Group testing often degenerates into a kind of parlour game, and there is probably no harm in that; but may I suggest that as far as official "testings" are concerned, they would be better left to a democratic vote?

Subud members can ask to be given a new name, better suited to their spiritual development. Bapak gave me my present name, Raymond, and I have no doubt that it is the right name for me. Whether the present system works as well now that Bapak has gone, I don't know. But I am sure that many of those non-Muslim members who asked to be given a Muslim name began some time ago to have serious doubts about the wisdom of their choice. Subud is an international organization, with Christians, Muslims, Hindus and all the rest, and this is surely as it should be.

But times have moved on, and to an outsider the many combinations of a Muslim forename with a non-Muslim surname must seem puzzling and misleading. A new

personal name is surely intended to benefit our spiritual and not our religious development. Bapak explained to us that religion is for the heart, so that the heart does not feel left out of things, to keep it reasonably contented and well-behaved. For this reason he advised us to stick with our traditional religion, keeping it quite separate from the spiritual reality of *susila budhi dharma*. If we approach our religions as it were from the inside, with the help of the Holy Spirit, our religion will come alive for us—as Bapak’s own religion of Islam blended with Javan Hinduism came alive for him.

If spirituality is not to be confused with religion, it seems to me that to graft some of the trappings of one religion or another onto an international spiritual organization cannot be right. So I would be much happier with Subud if every individual left his or her religion at home. To do otherwise seems to suggest a touch of hypocrisy. Religions are contentious because, while they can never be other than symbolic of spiritual reality, their followers invariably believe that they are that reality in fact. *Susila budhi dharma*, on the other hand, is spiritual reality actually manifesting itself on earth. As Bapak himself remarked: the time for symbols is past. What sort of symbols could he have meant, if not religious ones? He plainly did not mean figurative symbols such as the Subud motif. It is obviously an individual matter, which religion one pursues, if any; but I am sure it would be much better if Subud, as an organization, left religion and religious symbolism alone. Even the seemingly uncontroversial word “God” can cause misunderstandings and raise hackles.

It is an excellent thing for us all to stand on our own feet, run our own enterprises, fulfil our worldly obligations, and make enough money to keep Subud running, but past experiences seem to show that these things should be made to function privately, quite independently of the Subud organization. Bearing in mind the point I made previously about losing our inner attachment to materiality, Bapak’s vision was for us eventually to control the forces of materiality in ourselves, individually and collectively, and make money to fund Subud enterprises—including schools, banks, even secure hospitals for use when mentally unbalanced people were being opened. But Bapak was Bapak. He lived on the *rochani* level, and he actually did have control over his own forces of materiality, and, as yet, we don’t. Not only that but he was an Indonesian, and we by and large are not; schools, banks and hospitals in the West tend to be government controlled and are not really our thing. So I suggest Subud forget about making money. Is that really the image we want to present to the world: a really effective money-making organization?

Cutting down rain forests to plant crops and dig mines—these things are somewhat out of favour these days, so if Subud has any part to play in anything remotely like this, I suggest we drop it, quick! Bapak, despite his international standing, was a patriotic Indonesian. He saw undeveloped countries as sources of wealth waiting to be exploited, and, like other Indonesians, had little respect for rain forests, orang-utans, or primitive tribes-people, whom he considered lazy and unambitious. And if you are involved in any of the other activities, the cultural and charitable organizations involving all those somewhat perturbing acronyms and mysterious sets of initials which I have described as alien territory: these are all admirable, wholly worthy and well worth doing, but for the reasons I have outlined, and the impression they may give to those searching for spiritual reality, I am suggesting that you run these as separate institutions, rather than tie them to Subud.

So I am suggesting that Subud draw in its horns, try to be much more compact, stop spreading itself wider and thinner, and concentrate on what it is really for; what it is really good at. Subud is the only source on earth, as far as I am aware, of the truth and reality within and beyond all religions: *susila budhi dharma*. And to everyone who reacts by saying: “Ah yes, what is it again: right living according to ...” I say: No!

Forget the “right living” bit; it smacks too strongly of moral rectitude, and morality takes us right back into the minefield of religion: “Be like me, not like you!” For us it has to mean, “Be your own true self and follow your own soul.” Subud is and should be an organization—indeed it is, I believe, the only organization—dedicated to passing on the spiritual contact which allows the soul to be opened and to follow the promptings of Spirit. It is also a repository of Bapak’s divine advice, which as he instructed us, is not to be handed out to all and sundry as some kind of spiritual teaching, but has always been intended only to clarify the experiences of those following the path of *susila budhi dharma*, and explain what is happening to their inner selves along the way.