

About the Latihan

By Ragnar Lystad

An introduction to the latihan experience

A Different Exercise:

The latihan may present an opportunity for some who feel a need for a profound inner change.

'Latihan' is an Indonesian word, meaning just exercise or drill. It is used by the practitioners so that the latihan can be distinguished from other kinds of exercise, spiritual and otherwise.

To exercise means in everyday speech that 'you' are doing an exercise. You do sit-ups, practise scales on the piano or memorize Chinese characters actively and with a deliberate purpose. With the latihan it is different – you do not do anything, but let something be done with you. You let yourself be moved by a force that is felt as emerging from within and is typically manifested in movements of the body, or the voice, the feelings and maybe the intellect. These movements are not taught by or learned from someone else. They are not from one's own volition, not premeditated, but come spontaneously. Still, there is no feeling of having lost control, because control is relinquished consciously and can thus be taken back. Freedom is not lost, as one is free to stop the latihan at any moment. A continuing, deliberate acceptance of what is taking place is required.

The latihan is, in this sense, surrender. It is surrendering to a force that is realized within oneself, through a direct contact. Many feel that it has a very high spiritual origin and regard it as the Power of God.

The Contact:

Many traditions hold that obtaining contact with a spiritual power requires prolonged, strenuous effort. With the latihan, however, the contact is received in minutes in the presence of an experienced practitioner. This is called being 'opened'. When the opening has taken place, the power works directly in the new practitioner without any intermediary.

To all appearances there is nothing special or secret about the opening. The experienced practitioner just stands in the immediate vicinity of the aspirant, who has to ask inwardly for the contact. A ceremony where words are spoken is traditionally arranged, but is not essential. What is required is just that the experienced practitioner and the aspirant are both willing and accepting that the aspirant will be given and receive the contact. No active effort should be made on either side.

It cannot in general be assumed that the contact will be felt with convincing clarity during the opening. It is advisable that the experienced practitioner follow the new practitioner's latihan for some time in order to ensure that he or she is confident that the contact has been made and that it is firmly established. The time this will take varies from person to person. For some a few latihans are enough, while for others it can take longer.

The Practice:

The recommended length of each latihan is half an hour, which seems to suit most practitioners. The number of latihan per week that has proved appropriate for most practitioners and seems to ensure a steady development is three. It is recommended to keep within these limits, at least until the new practitioner has acquired considerably more experience, as an imbalance in one's life can otherwise result.

Once the contact is firmly established the practitioner can in principle do the latihan alone and is no longer dependent on the presence of a more experienced practitioner. Most, however, feel that they benefit very much from doing it together with other practitioners at least once a week if possible – indeed that this is essential (as it is also important to do it alone sometimes). Group latihan are therefore arranged, usually in the name of the Subud organization (see Appendix).

Doing latihan in a group appears to strengthen the effect and make it a deeper and clearer experience. At the same time it is possible to get personal support from other practitioners so that problems that may arise can be solved or smoothed out. Close friendships may develop.

When the latihan is done in a group, it is still individual. Each practitioner follows the latihan as it works in him or her personally. Group latihan are not supposed to entail any co-ordination, but to stimulate the individual latihan of each practitioner. In a group latihan, therefore, each practitioner feels that his or her own latihan is supported by the presence of the others.

Segregation of Sexes:

Group latihan are, and should be, held separately for men and women. The reason for this is that one should feel completely free to let what comes up be expressed openly, not holding anything back and not having to care about the impression this may have on others nearby. This is more difficult when persons of the opposite sex are present, especially if there is the element of sexual attraction.

The above does not, of course, apply to men and women working together to make arrangements for group latihan, nor to the normal social relations that may develop in the group.

No Teaching:

The latihan is surrender to a force that operates in each person in a manner uniquely suited to that person. Therefore it cannot be formulated as a teaching and of course not as a religion either.

During the opening when a more experienced practitioner has to be present, no teaching or guidance is offered. The experienced practitioner should not influence the aspirant in any way. The experienced practitioner will thus not function as a teacher, but as a temporary connector. The power working in the latihan is the teacher, and for the experienced practitioner to interfere and put forward a personal teaching will impede the training given in the latihan. This said, it could also be pointed out that the experienced practitioner may be able to give advice as to the best attitude when doing the latihan, and sometimes also to explain experiences that at the beginning are felt to be confusing.

The Process:

Surrendering to the power in the latihan implies that one will go through a spiritual process or development. The latihan experience changes or develops accordingly. Benefits from doing the latihan may be felt quite soon. But the inner, spiritual change is adjusted to personal capacity and will take place gradually and usually slowly, even if the latihan is practised diligently.

The process follows an individual path, adapted to each person, and no specific map or plan of the process can be drawn up or outlined in advance. Everything that happens is in accordance with the capacity, the character and condition of each person, unless he or she deliberately tries to speed things up – which could be risky. There are, however, some experiences that are rather general, especially as regards the initial period.

In the beginning, the latihan is very often manifested in movements of the body. For example, the arms or legs may move as if by themselves, from an inner impulse and not from the conscious intent of the practitioner. Then other parts of the body are touched by the force, and often the voice too, which may burst out in spontaneous singing or make other kinds of sounds. This can be interpreted as the different organs ‘coming to life’. The organs are touched one by one and the effect of this may after a while also be felt in ordinary daily life.

The sounds and movements made are, especially in the beginning, not necessarily pleasant or harmonious. A certain ‘purification’ seems to take place, continuing indefinitely but manifesting differently as time goes by. There may be periods when doing the latihan can be trying. Afterwards, however, one may feel that one has got rid of a burden.

Later phases of the process, even if they may follow a certain pattern, are still so individual that more detailed descriptions may create false and misleading expectations. Such descriptions may, moreover, be misleading also because they can never convey the reality of an actual experience. It can, however, be said that many feel that their latihan in the course of time can be likened to a spiritual worship, but expressed in an individual fashion, specific for each person.

Because the essence of the latihan is surrender, those who want to acquire, for example, magical powers may be disappointed. What can happen instead is that they lose interest in such abilities, realizing that they would not have been beneficial at all. This is but one instance of how the development may take a direction that is not imagined or expected at the outset. Many have learned that they could not have known beforehand which changes would be best for them.

But the results are dependent on the practitioner’s lifestyle as well as his initial state. A way of living that conforms to the basic advice of most religions, especially the admonition against committing actions that hurt other people, will be favourable. It is also advisable not to indulge in activities that harm one’s own body or mind.

Spiritual Experiences:

Some practitioners report spiritual experiences of an extraordinary character, such as travelling in space etc. Since all experiences are adapted to the capacity of that specific person, such experiences should never be regarded as a kind of norm or

something that one should expect to happen to oneself. It must also be recognized that we are often influenced by ambitions and other personal feelings, and there will never be any guarantee that such experiences are not in the end just illusions. Practising the latihan diligently for some time will commonly lead to experiences of a spiritual nature, but they will typically be quite different from expectations.

Influence on Daily Life:

For all practical purposes, daily life should go on as before. But practising the latihan in itself gradually influences and changes one's daily life in many, sometimes subtle, ways.

Most practitioners observe, after some time, that the latihan power is somehow also present outside the times set for the regular latihan. The result may be added sensitivity to what goes on in oneself and in other people, and sometimes also an awareness of the best approach to a particular problem or situation. In this way, practitioners may feel a kind of 'guidance' as to how to behave towards others in daily life and also with regard to specific choices that come up. As such guidance is always experienced unique to the individual, little can be said in general about how the guidance will manifest. But in this as in other circumstances it is always wise to be aware that one may be misled by strong personal wishes. Guidance may easily be imagined or distorted by a wish to have some personal ambition confirmed.

In any case, it seems that practitioners who have been doing the latihan for some time usually find that their daily life has become richer, more interesting and rewarding, and often also more challenging. But difficulties may not be possible to avoid, as some will have to endure pain from repressed or hidden personal tensions and disturbances that the latihan power touches, so that they come to the fore.

Testing:

This is an issue that only with some hesitation is taken up in an introductory booklet, but as it is much talked about among latihan practitioners it seems right to touch upon it briefly.

There are two types of guidance – that which comes spontaneously or unexpectedly, and that which is sought explicitly. Testing comes in the second category.

Testing, in this sense, is trying to get guidance or an answer to a problem by posing a question in the context of the latihan. Matters connected with the spiritual process, including personal behaviour or development, can be suitable for testing, but not economic or outright material issues. The reliability of the answer is, however, dependent on how far one's own innate preferences can be set aside and the force operating in the latihan expressed with sufficient clarity. It is commonly recognized that it will take many years of doing the latihan regularly before the answers can be really trusted. Even then it is best to test together with someone who is not personally involved. In this way, there is a possibility that useful guidance can be received, e.g. about important decisions to be taken in life.

Availability:

The latihan is open to everybody, regardless of view of life, religion etc. The latihan can thus be practised by adherents of all religions and also by those who do

not belong to any religion or may even be atheists. It is an advantage, however, if the aspirant is not so committed to any particular world view or religion that he or she is not prepared to receive an experience that may be at odds with preconceived views.

Mentally unstable persons should not do the latihan, as more instability may result. It is recommended that one should be at least seventeen years old before opening.

The latihan is universal and therefore cannot be the monopoly of a particular organization. The safest way to get the latihan contact today is, however, to approach the Subud organization, that acts as a kind of steward of the latihan. Among its members over the last fifty years Subud has accumulated a lot of experience with the latihan. Subud groups have more or less fixed procedures for transmitting the latihan experience. Subud is established in most countries in the world and can be found in official registers and on the Internet. A short history of Subud and the spread of the latihan is found in the Appendix below.

APPENDIX

Subud traces its origin to the Indonesian Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901-1987), who received the latihan in a spiritual experience as a young man. After some years he discovered that he could transmit the ability to do the latihan to others who wanted to receive it, and that they could pass it on to others again. He then gathered a following and established Subud as an organization in Indonesia. The name Subud is an acronym for three Sanskrit words (Susila - Budhi - Dharma) that taken together means surrender to a power experienced within, in accordance with the will of God.

The latihan was brought to the West in the 1950s by an Englishman who had been opened in Indonesia, and then brought to the attention of an English spiritual leader, who subsequently introduced the latihan to his own following.

Muhammad Subuh – in Subud usually called Bapak, which means father – travelled all around the world in the years 1957-1985, giving a great number of talks and advice to the groups that had been set up.

There are Subud groups in most countries in the world, and local and national organizations have been established. The total number of members is approximately 10-15,000. There are, however, people doing the latihan without being attached to the Subud organization. Subud also has an international administration and holds an international congress every fourth year.