

The Naked Subud

By Ragnar Lystad

Synopsis: In order to fulfill its purpose, Subud should be stripped of all unnecessary accessories.

The Subud organization was established in order to provide a suitable environment for the spiritual exercise that we call latihan, including the task of making the latihan generally available. However, this task is impeded by several later diversions that take attention and energy, while at the same time giving people a faulty picture of Subud.

We need an organization to provide the cooperation necessary to establish venues for the latihan. And we need some communication. It is a blessing, when you visit another country, to have an address where you can go and do the latihan. It is a blessing to be able to go to a Subud gathering in another country and do the latihan together with strangers, and then maybe feel the contact that sometimes is established immediately. It is also necessary to have some helpers who can introduce the latihan to newcomers and visit groups where there are problems. That is all the organization should be concerned with.

First among the diversions is the attempt to involve Subud in enterprises. As I have discussed this in other articles, I shall here only repeat that Subud, as an organization, cannot be involved in enterprises, neither in practice nor in theory, and moreover any effort in this direction will create disappointment from the failures that unavoidably come to pass.

Neither is a consulting service appropriate. First, practical experience obtained in one country is mostly useless when applied in another country. Local assistance and expertise is always needed. Second, it encourages the idea that advice from a Subud member is somehow better or more valuable than advice from anybody else. Actually, the opposite may be more true: such advice may be tainted by strange ideas and convictions that are far from the realities of this world. And third, it encourages the idea that enterprises are something that Subud should be concerned with.

Similar considerations apply to all the other "Wings" that have been set up. We can take health and artistic activities together, because the arguments are very much the same: to seek cooperation or inspiration from other Subud members is seldom especially rewarding. Other people, living in the same area, are easier to contact; furthermore, it may be that you have more in common with sincere practitioners in this field outside Subud than with Subud members who may be far away and sometimes burdened by unrealistic ideas. If we are able to contribute in our chosen profession with a spiritual inkling or insight, it is better to do it as single persons rather than as a team of Subud members, presenting it as a Subud undertaking.

Whether following one's own intuition and guidance leads to cooperation with other Subud members, with people outside Subud, or to working single-handed is irrelevant. Whether people are brought to Subud or not is also irrelevant.

A member who is also a well-known journalist and author had for almost 30 years a special column, covering one page every week in Norway's biggest newspaper, where he answered letters from children. He has made no secret that he is a Subud member (although he does not repeat it all the time). He has helped hundreds, maybe thousands of children by the answers and advice he gives, by establishing contact with health personnel, psychologists and others, and just by letting them know that he reads carefully all letters received.

Not one person has been brought to Subud by all his activities, however, and I have to admit that I once thought that this somehow made his work less important. This is an example of erroneous thinking that was once rather common in Subud. The important thing is of course that the children are helped, and other considerations are irrelevant.

The "Wing" that is most difficult to do away with is Susila Dharma. Should it not be the duty of everybody to help those in need, and should not we in Subud be an example to the world in this respect? Certainly it is a duty, but it has to be done from the heart and conscience of the single person, and not as a Subud activity.

It has been enlightening to follow the development of one of the most successful humanitarian projects initiated by a Subud member, the International Child Development Program (ICDP). The founder was my friend, the professor of psychology, Rukman Hundefide (recently deceased), assisted especially by two other members, one another professor in psychology and the other a businessman. This project, based on ideas partly developed and enthusiastically promoted by the two professors, has changed the methods more than two hundred thousand caretakers all over the world employ in caring for children and youth, and influenced the lives of nearly a million children. This project, although supported by Susila Dharma International (SDI) and many Subud members, is not really a Subud project in any sense of the term. From the beginning, Rukman insisted on employing non-Subud people in the various positions in the organization. The connection to Subud has never been brought up as a relevant issue. If you look up its website, Subud is not mentioned. ICDP is now organized as a foundation, and the Subud members are gradually giving up control. The project now goes on by itself, becoming more and more independent of Subud members. The contribution from SDI has been valuable, but not decisive. A main source of income has been the governments in the respective countries where ICDP has been established.

Rukman was obviously not concerned that his project in some ways deviated from Bapak's vision of projects that could make Subud prominent and respected in the world. He died before I got to tell him how he contributed to changing my own views about Subud projects. They should not be Subud projects and not presented as being led by Subud members. The value is greater if it is not in the name of Subud. Then we will not be suspected of proselytizing or having a hidden agenda. So, even if I very much appreciate charitable or humanitarian efforts by Subud members, it is best if any connection to Subud is left out.

In Subud there is complete freedom. We are not a special religion and accept people from all religions, including atheists. We have no specific political views. Social work is not obligatory, actually it cannot be, as we should do social work only if it is through inner guidance. There are recommendations, e.g. that men and women should not do latihan together, but such recommendations are not worldly aims. In short, there is nothing to form a basis for an organization – except the needs for latihan facilities and communication. If we do something of value it should be because it is valuable in itself, not because there is an agenda to promote Subud or the latihan. It is really a pity that such an idea – although extremely common in all organizations – has also infused Subud. But Subud has not and should not have any agenda, neither hidden nor presented openly.

It seems to be very difficult to let go of an agenda behind all our actions. This agenda is always to prove something to the world, maybe the cleverness or goodness of oneself or the organization one belongs to. The world is full of religions, movements and organizations that want to achieve something, and need to grow in order to realize their aims. The agenda is sometimes hidden to oneself but obvious to everybody else, viewing the whole situation from outside. We do not have any aims, and that is the difference. Only by accepting that we have no aim, no goal, no agenda can we maybe fulfill the duty of just being present to let anybody receive the latihan. This has to be done without asking them to renounce anything else in life, but on the contrary encouraging them to bring the benefits of the latihan into whatever else they are engaged in.

I remember that such an agenda was clearly expressed in the case of Anugraha. We know how that ended. The good thing about that and other similar cases is that it has not worked. But in the cases where something really valuable has been offered, through the efforts of single members, the name of Subud is not noticeable and rightly so. Such actions may be fruits of the latihan, but they should not be seen as a means to prove the value of Subud, nor the latihan.

Fortunately, it seems that the development goes this way "by itself". There is now not much talk

about Subud enterprises. Maybe we have learned something. And as to Susila Dharma: It seems that more and more of the projects that are supported are presented in a way that do not associate them with Subud. This development may not be according to the visions of Bapak, but it is much better this way.

The latihan should not be presented as anything else than the latihan. The reality of the latihan must be verified by the practitioner himself or herself. By presenting Subud as an organization that can boast of worldly achievements, we make it something that it is not. Only a "naked" Subud, stripped of everything but the latihan, is what can be offered.