

No Reason to Be Disappointed

By Ragnar Lystad

The primary task of the Subud organization is to organize cooperation between the members so that facilities for latihan can be provided. But it must also be our duty to make the latihan available to all who might be interested in the spiritual process that the latihan offers. Most likely there are more of those than the modest number of persons doing latihan now.

When Subud began, we expected to bring the latihan to all humankind, and that the membership would soon be counted in millions. Now that most such expectations have been dampened, we often find a kind of uneasy resignation instead. This is obviously not good for us and it may also be unfounded. These expectations were not only unrealistic, but based on a misunderstanding. We believed that we could somehow promote Subud. But trying to become a big and well-known movement actually works against Subud's best interests.

If we really were a great movement with a membership counted in millions, we would be regarded as a serious competitor to the established religions, and they would automatically put up a defence. Antagonism would ensue, and there would be warnings against the latihan. This scenario is not desirable and the opposite of what we want. For this reason alone, we should not grow beyond being a minor nuisance.

Reactions such as the above are unavoidable if we try to monopolize the latihan and keep it within the Subud organization. By launching our own way to God, we in effect belittle the way of the religions, and put up a wall between ourselves and other spiritual movements. If the latihan is or should be the inner content of all religions — as Bapak repeatedly indicated and I believe is true — Subud should not be in competition with anybody.

There is another reason why keeping the latihan the property of Subud makes it difficult to reach people. The latihan is then primarily offered to those who are not involved in anything else, but are looking for a new direction in life. It will be less attractive to those who for a variety of reasons may not feel like joining the Subud organization.

Maybe we should also admit that the latihan is not for everybody. A constant state of inward surrender is necessary in a process that can sometimes be rather difficult and demanding. Nor does Subud satisfy one usual condition for a mass movement: i.e. a charismatic leader to give advice, instructions and favours. In Subud you do not even get a certificate to show your spiritual degree or accomplishments.

There are ways that the latihan can spread without formal openings in a Subud group. It is possible to be influenced by the latihan without really being aware of what is going on. No doubt this happens frequently. For some time I have been thinking that this is how it will be and how it should be. People all over the world are sometimes just opened, more or less inadvertently. I have myself seen several examples of this. Why should this not happen on a greater scale? Why shouldn't lots of people do the latihan, without calling it the latihan, without knowing that the original impulse came — maybe — through a small and obscure movement called Subud? I still think this is a likely development, but Subud can even then have a role to play.

Many trends in the world today indicate that an organization that focuses on a religious exercise or service open to all religions, and even atheism, but not committed to any of them, could satisfy a need and be positively welcomed. The trick is that we must not make a deliberate effort to spread the latihan. If we try, we just provoke resistance. Somewhat paradoxically, we can only transmit the latihan if we do not make that our aim. A kind of surrender is needed, but not in the sense that we do not feel any responsibility at all. We may have a responsibility, but not in the way that has been assumed for many years.

It is a grave error to deliberately promote Subud. Such activities detract attention from the spiritual aspect, and our lack of success has even had an adverse effect on the organization. Furthermore, It is clear that we have not been given help in our efforts in this respect. If we suppose that God has an interest in Subud, we can with certainty say that He has made it virtually impossible to spread through self-promotion. It simply does not work. And if we imagine that God in some way touches Subud enterprises with His fingertip, it has clearly been to halt or even crush them. Even if we take into consideration the amateurish way these enterprises often were conducted, the consistent lack of success is indeed remarkable. (Note that I speak of the joint Subud enterprises, not the individual efforts of many members to make a living for themselves.) I think we should take these signals seriously. It is especially unfortunate to blame ourselves for the failures, when failure was the only possible outcome. Our real responsibilities lie in an other direction. If there is any reason for disappointment, it is that this was not understood a long time ago. Many things could have been different then.

By being aware that the latihan and the Subud organization are two different things, we may introduce the latihan without arousing feelings of resistance and antagonism. People must be given the chance to receive the latihan without having to be Subud members. We have to acknowledge for ourselves and all others that it is not the Subud latihan, it is a universal exercise, and it is for everybody, without regard to religion or view of life. Then we should not be felt as a threat by anybody. We have to make ourselves harmless to the established religions and all other spiritual movements.

This does not mean that Subud always has to be diminutive and obscure, although the likelihood is that it will never be a great movement. But whatever its size, the Subud organization could still serve as a source or centre where the latihan could be maintained and followed with awareness and dedication. Subud could provide a setting where newcomers to the latihan get the necessary attention and follow-up to be able to receive properly. Membership in Subud, then, could imply the acceptance of a responsibility to ease the way for newcomers to the latihan. It would be a great and important responsibility to keep the organization alive and provide the support and assistance that spiritual seekers might need. More difficult than it sounds, but at least conceivable.

Furthermore, we can try to create an atmosphere where all the active members feel at ease or even happy, and also where everybody else feels welcome, so that they get a chance to experience what this is about. This is actually also a vital responsibility.

If we focus on our real responsibilities and let go of the ones that we have mistakenly assumed, feelings of disappointment will automatically subside. Maybe this could also facilitate our partaking in the mission of the higher power we surrender to, whatever our role may be.