

# Testing or Testosis?

by Bronte Grivell

Many years ago when I was talking with one of our members, he used the word “testosis”, saying that we had a bad case of it, because we wanted to “test” everything, worldly or spiritual. I have remained disturbed by that remark ever since. I see Subud’s practice of “testing” as an integral part of the life and training that is Subud. It is also a fascinating practice, much misunderstood, and underused.

In 1963, I watched Bapak as he tested two women to show how much progress they had made in the latihan. This demonstration plus all the other testing sessions with Bapak (how very few) has been the basis of my attitude to the latihan and Subud. Bapak often said that in Subud we can come to know things which we are not normally able to know. And he demonstrated this through testing. How many of us recall Bapak asking the women to “sing like the angels”, or the men to “walk like a German baron”? He also tested people to show “Where is Above”, and “Where are your hands?” Of course there is the famous question that seems to sum up the whole purpose and method of Subud: “Are you sitting on the chair, or is the chair sitting on you?” This was meant to illustrate the fact that we either dominate or are dominated by the material forces. We were expected to actually “feel” this difference, not imagine it, or intellectualise about it. We either did feel it or we didn’t! □

In Istimah Week’s book about the part of her life she spent working with Bapak and his team, she tells of an experience in Ireland; their hostess was absent from the room for Bapak’s testing session, and Bapak asked her why. She said she did not believe in testing. He advised her that it was most important.

Bapak wanted us all to become aware that there is a new life within us, and by testing we were, I believe, all meant to see, or rather feel, the difference between indications coming from that new life within us, and the normal thinking and feeling that we are accustomed to.

If it is about becoming aware of a new life within, then I see a religious analogy, Just as the latihan has been described by Bapak as “worship to God”, so could testing, in some circumstances, possibly be described as “praying”. It is, indeed, seeking guidance or help from a higher source than our normal selves, just as prayer is. At the least it is seeking to be made more capable of following the right way of behaving, according to whatever the Higher Source may want, rather than any mere worldly, habitual, learned way of behaving according to our own independent intelligence and emotions. I think testing helps introduce new choices, hopefully ones which bring us even closer to following a Higher Will. In the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel, God says to His people: “I will give you a *new heart* and put a new spirit within you.” I see a connection here with the inner content and the new way of looking at life that Subud expresses most conspicuously in the “testing” process.

What has become of testing? If the latihan itself could be likened to cooking a meal, a

lifelong meal, then the cook has to do some checking on its progress. We are the cooks and our progress is the meal. From time to time the cook has to taste the food. That, in Subud, is testing. Testing, tasting: similar words. Bapak seemed to be encouraging us to observe the changes which the Subud latihan creates within us. Without that we do not learn about the change in the tools we have within ourselves for use throughout our lives. I happen to think that not many Subud people yet have actually experienced this change in their lives, so testing is not yet an effective method for changing how we relate to life and each other. Testing is meant to be used moment-by-moment, whenever it's necessary, not just at some big event at a Subud gathering.

In various meetings, and with individuals over the years, I have taken part in testing for guidance about our needs in life, and about personal matters of concern. Indeed, a National Helper once had me test, with another member, what our attitudes to each other should be. That seems to be a common question, with the answer not always easy to follow. My life in the many years since then has shown that my receiving to be "always at a distance from that brother" was correct, in a very natural way.

However, people have used testing as some sort of oracle, for guidance in worldly things, and for controlling, not learning. Testing is expected to produce results according to what is wanted, not what *is*. So, often, the minds of the participants produce some fascinating but irrelevant result, which is claimed to be "receiving". Common sense is usually totally abandoned in these sessions. And so is the reality of the Subud latihan in the whole process. An example comes to mind of a group which was unhappy about the function of certain helpers. So they "tested", accompanied by visiting helpers, and the helpers in question stood down as a result. After that testing, most group latihans were not accompanied by helpers at all. Nothing was accomplished by the indulgence of a few dissatisfied individuals. One has to be careful to use testing correctly and impartially, with full surrender of the feelings and thoughts of the people involved. When testing, unexpected results have to be expected!

What could or should become of testing?

We may not easily receive the tests: "Where are our legs?", "Where is above?", "Sing like the Angels", but we can compare our usual emotional response in life with that which arises in us if we ask: "How is my latihan now if I do it fully and freely?", "How do I affect that person?", "How can I handle this experience more effectively?" □ It seems to me that all Subud members should practice some testing from time to time, preferably in the company of others who have already done some. It is becoming less and less possible to test alongside those of us who, no matter how few times, were shown by Bapak himself how he wanted us to do it.

I believe that all of Subud can be more effective if we apply this tool Bapak gave us in order to modulate, and be more aware of, the life that is within us, which we call the latihan of Subud. At present Subud may be weakened because testing is not used correctly or adequately enough to keep Subud progressing effectively, quite apart from any inadequacy of the practice of latihan itself. We can, and must, do much

more testing. It is a means of becoming aware of the reality of the latihan as something that always accompanies our lives and our actions. It can enhance the choices we make about anything important, as well as help us know if we are following the latihan in a productive way.