

## Sharing Discontents- For The First Time!

Well, seeing all this and feeling that Subud had so much more to offer, I did try to share my concerns with the Association by sending an article to the national Subud publication explaining my position. The article was too long to be published as an article, so it was halved and published on the letters page at the back. The title: "Who Says Subud Does Not Depend On Belief?" was completely cut out which I think is a shame because it is such a challenge to Subud folk who will tell you quite categorically that there is no belief in Subud and yet look askance at you if you dare to question something Bapak has said. The results of this "letter" were extremely interesting.

Suddenly, I had letters and phone calls (this was pre-internet) from as far away as Australia, New Zealand and the USA (sometimes people seemed unaware of the time-differences and contacted me in the middle- or worse- in the early hours of the night!) I was truly amazed at the numbers of people who felt as I did. And what surprised me even more was that many of them, having left "Subud," were still continuing with the latihan, often alone and sometimes with a small group of other like-minded people! What they all shared was a feeling that there was no place for them in Subud because they would not agree to 2 basic beliefs that they felt they were being continually pressured into agreeing to:

*The infallibility of its leader: Bapak . It is assumed that because someone is sometimes inspired, he must therefore always be inspired. It is assumed that because someone has had some obviously special experiences, he is therefore some kind of "prophet" rather than remaining an ordinary man in any respects.*

*This over-idealisation leads to his ideas, and just about everything he says, being given the authority of "holy writ"*

To many people Bapak's words are to be unquestioningly followed as being from a "Higher Source" than anyone else's. The idea that Bapak can speak, like the rest of us, from his own culture and personality is scandalous and hurtful to these members.

What Others Said To Me

Here are some of the things that were said to me at this time and some of the reasons given to me for people leaving Subud. I include the most common told to me:

“Subud is too narrow in its outlook. Its members are so spiritually unaware and it just got so depressing being with them and not growing. I wasn’t growing and neither were they, I am sure. I don’t think the latihan and Bapak’s advice are enough on their own to prevent its members eventually getting stuck and, worse, being completely unaware of it” (A lecturer and author of a number of books on the spiritual life)

“I got sick of all this talk about money and enterprises. I did not join Subud to become a business man” (A retired professional man)

“I have never had a decent conversation with anyone in Subud about God or anything like that!” (Another retired professional man)

“I think there is an unhealthy attitude to Bapak’s words and I have never understood why two people united in love (ie man and wife) cannot be united in their latihan” (An ex-policeman)

“I have just got rid of one Pope, I don’t want another!” (A lapsed Roman Catholic artist and housewife)

“I have always felt like you but I have not had the words or the courage to speak out like you have.” (A gardener and handyman)

“You are not the only one to think as you do. Can I put you in touch with...” (A Subud lady of 80 plus years)

“From working on Subud enterprises I can tell you that anyone with any such integrity and honesty as yours will simply not be able to stay in the Subud Association. I have been bemused beyond belief by the way Subud members expect to do business. They are the weakest links on any project because they put a saccharine harmony above all else and it’s the devil’s own job to get them to do anything!” (An ex-M.D of a number of companies, inside and outside of Subud)

"I was interested in what you said about Subud but when I saw what was said about women, I preferred my Tai chi!" (A housewife)

"When I was in Subud, I was always made to feel that it was not the done thing to talk to men about Subud things, or even mix with them after latihan." (Another housewife)

"I left Subud over 10 years ago, when I detected a change. Bapak seemed to be talking of himself as being in the "line of the prophets". (retired American man).

I have not got permission to quote these so they have to be anonymous. Just in case you think I have made these up I will include some comments that can be more easily verified.

Reading the original Subud Journals, I came across an article by a lady written in the late 1960s or 70s who coined the word "Bapakolatry" for the attitude putting her, and people like her, "off Subud"! Subud she felt should be about widening and deepening our own experiences of the latihan and to put so much of a focus on Bapak and his talks was actually hindering that!

The two most influential Westerners in Subud history (Rofe and John Bennett) whose initial enthusiasm made Subud an international phenomenon have expressed similar views and left the organisation.

In his book "A Spiritual Psychology" Bennett writes:

"In 1962 I came to the conclusion that the latihan is too limited in its action to provide a complete way of life. This was confirmed by the observation that those who practised it ...tended to become narrow in outlook and loyalty. Subud was becoming a new cult or at best a Moslem sect. I was not interested in dogma ( the talks!) but in method (the latihan) As a method the latihan works...This action cannot take more than one to two years...to continue longer is non-productive and finally counter-productive." (pp 29-30)

Rofe has written a great deal more. (See his book "Reflections On Subud") In the 1988 reprint of his "Path Of Subud" he writes:

“For 20 years, I have stood aside from the organization of Subud” (p2)

“I realized the dangers of uncritical and emotional hero-worship which many Western followers insisted on directing towards Pak Subuh. I realized the dangers inherent in their approach, both to themselves and to others, that they needed a more balanced outlook, even in the interests of the movement itself” (p3)

“...fanaticism dies hard. Led by emotion rather than intellect, many Subud members became persuaded of the infallibility of Pak Subuh, and not only on spiritual issues. He could never be wrong about anything so if he said (as in fact happened) that Pharoah threw King David into a den of tigers, history and scriptures had to be wrong but he could not” (p3)

Rofe also mentions how such comments as these led to Subud members being “forbidden” to read his book “Reflections On Subud” (p3)!

Finally, Rofe says his belief in the latihan remains. He says also that “the Subud movement and the memory of its founder can stand on its own merits” and that “those who remember Pak Subuh from personal experience have a sacred task to perform in accurately compiling for the future an honest account of the life and work of the great and remarkable sage” (p4) It is clear that those who knew Bapak well, like Rofe, attest to the man as making mistakes and able to be wrong! (Rofe, eg, gives a number of examples!)

Enough! Anyway, the response to my “letter” encouraged me to write a shorter article for the Subud national publication (then called “The Bulletin”) I had been asked by some sympathetic readers to make my points as clearly and briefly as I possibly could. This was never published, although it was very brief and it could not this time be through lack of space. I can only think it was too contentious and not what Subud editors and others wanted published. It was later pointed out to me that I had not gone through the “proper Subud channels” and that was unfair, therefore on Subud. (Again, Subud is organised to deal with problems by, first, talking and testing with them with the local helpers, then the regional helpers, then the National Helpers right up to a lady called Ibu Rahayu who seems to have become Subud’s top spokesperson. She gives talks in various countries, gives people new names when they request them and has talks published in Subud publications. In other words she now, to all intents and purposes, seems to have

taken on much, if not all of Bapak's role). So, I did this next... I sent a copy of both of my articles to the National helpers (man and woman), to the International Subud publication (called the "Subud Voice"), to the Chair of the "World Subud Association" and to Ibu Rahayu. To date, both National Helpers have replied: the lady with sympathy and apparent understanding; the man with no apparent understanding. His response to my carefully written letter and the articles was: "What's the problem then?"! I wondered after a couple of minutes of talking to him if he had even read my stuff as he showed absolutely no idea of what I had written. We made polite conversation and I brought the "conversation" to a speedy end! I have had no response from the "Subud Voice", the Chair of the World Subud Association" or Ibu Rahayu at all. I am best dismissed it seems by the officials but the response from ordinary, and ex, members – well, that was something else!

I felt convinced that these criticisms etc should be taken seriously. But what did that mean? All I could do, it seemed, was what many had obviously done before me, leave the Association and just get on with the latihan. This I did for a number of years. I now considered myself "Not a Subud Member, Just Someone Who Does The Latihan." Years later, there was to come another surprising change but not before my outer life was to demand my attention rather exclusively and in a way I could never have imagined even in my wildest dreams...