

CHAPTER NINE: WORK....AND THE INNER!

Is there a God? How can we know? Religious practices; Part-time commitment and vocation; My 2 big debts to teaching; The unmistakable influence of the latihan and the guidance of testing; Inner-and outer-preparation for interview; Headship; Inner guidance and outer growth; A triumphant Governors' A.G.M

For as long as I can remember I have wondered about whether there was any truth in any of the “religious” views of life. I asked questions like: Is there a God? And, if so, can an ordinary human being really have a relationship with “Him”? and so on. By the time I encountered Subud I had no convincing answers; just a mixture of rather contradictory thoughts and feelings. One thing I had come to believe was probably true, though, was that in order to find things out for oneself, one had to be prepared to sacrifice some of one’s time to pursuing these sorts of questions and, further, it was also probably necessary to use this sacrificed time in a special way, if one was at all serious about finding answers to such questions. I had learnt that prayer, meditation and a degree of self-denial, as well as the morality that seemed to be in all the major religions, were something of a minimum requirement. With this in place in one’s life, one could then undertake some experiments as suggested by the many religious and other “paths” which would possibly lead to “answers”.

I had been practising a gentle form of meditation for some years before I encountered Subud. That is to say I sat quietly, when I could, and reached out to what I simply called the “Higher Life”, really then just allowing my thoughts and feelings to go where they would. I had no success with the more formal types of meditation based on the exercise of self- will to control thoughts etc. I do not say these are wrong or ineffective; it is just that I never managed them. The fault- if there is one- is probably in me: in a lack of necessary discipline or effort. I suppose my “Quiet Times” then were rather like the pre-latihan Quiet but without the latihan to follow. If so, then I must have experienced the longest pre-latihan Quiet ever- some 15 years or so of it!!! Anyway, I came to Subud with the strong view that the religious life involved more and more time being given to things like prayer and meditation, a lot of which would also be best undertaken in Solitude and away from the “distractions” of the world. It seemed to me that the highest religious life would therefore be something of a monastic one! Again, I could not manage that sort of life, either, except only partly, and I was not sure how successful that sort of

part-time “commitment” could be. Certainly, though, it was the best I could manage!

One result of this belief of mine, was that I only ever gave a part commitment to work in the world. Paradoxically, teaching **was** also something of a vocation for me. For as long as I could remember, I “knew” I wanted to be a teacher. Even as a nine year old (or thereabouts) I was “playing schools”, demanding that my friends sit in rows in front of my blackboard while I gave them things to do and generally acted as their teacher. To this day, I am amazed they put up with this but they most certainly did! Shame that I have not a clue now what the lessons were about that I so dedicatedly thrust upon them (not the “National Curriculum” I bet!) So, I went to college and began teaching with the thought that I would not be teaching for long because my real life was elsewhere in something more obviously “spiritual.” How wrong can one be?! I was in education for over 30 odd years! And here is the biggest surprise of all: **TEACHING WAS TO GIVE ME MORE EVIDENCE OF THERE BEING A HIGHER “FORCE” OR REALITY THAN THE PERSONAL IN LIFE** than just about anything else I was to encounter! Even now I am somewhat amazed at this. I began my Subud life with the idea that escape from the “world” of work and worldly activities were the highest form of spiritual life. I thought I would be a teacher until something better, something more “spiritual”, would come along for me. Well, something more spiritual did come into my life (Subud) and that was to turn my previous views of religious living on their heads.

The latihan taught me that the body, the feelings, one’s thoughts, one’s will etc. were as God-given as devotion, worship, prayer, solitude etc. All were needed in the complete life. The outer was then to be as fully recognised as the Inner! And that is why I was to stay so long in my “temporary” job and, I see now, why I also had to stay in it even though I tried several times within those 30 odd years to leave! While I persisted in looking elsewhere for “evidence” of spirituality and a Higher Force, my job was to persist also in providing me with some of the best evidence I have to show both the reality of the inner life and also its dynamic, practical nature. And **AT THE SAME TIME TEACHING WAS ALSO TO TRANSFORM MY PERSONALITY SO THAT I BECAME A STRONGER, MORE “ROUNDED” PERSON!** These two things went along side by side for all those years and for most of that time also I was fighting against it all: moving forwards “kicking and screaming” and looking always, it seems, for an easier alternative which never came (until at the end of my career when I took early retirement, that is!) Yes, I was not a good learner and often, too, I was not a good listener to the

promptings of the Inner whether expressed as it so often was through the latihan or through my times of “Quiet”. Later I was to learn the dangers of this “not-listening” in an extreme and somewhat destructive way. Will I ever learn?! For now I was to learn through many experiences in my work so that I look back now with a feeling of respect for work and ordinary life in a way that for most of my earlier life I did not- even though I was to be almost constantly reminded of it.

An Idealistic But Timid Young Teacher

You see, I began my professional life as a rather hesitant, nervous teacher, lacking in self-confidence. I was not ambitious although I wanted to do the best job I could. I even had an idealistic view that I would be able to give those children coming into my classes something of a special relationship which I hoped they might remember all their lives- as well as teaching them necessary things like the subjects of the curriculum (whether they wanted to learn them or not, of course!) But I did not ever want to devote the whole of my life, all day and all night, to the job as some colleagues seemed to. At that time and for much of my teaching career I felt a greater empathy, a greater closeness, to the children than I did for the adults I encountered, particularly those with any sort of authority over me- Heads, advisers, Officials in any shape or form from Governors to Inspectors. This was, in fact, to be a real problem for me as I could rarely do my best when under any sort of scrutiny. I am pretty sure this was somewhat abnormal, pathological in my case. It was to be a constant difficulty and not just for my early years either. In fact, after I came into Subud I found there was to be no place to hide as my inadequacies, anxieties etc. were to be rather ruthlessly exposed and this at a time, also, when the profession was to become one of the most scrutinised in the country! More of this later...

When Subud came into my life I was respected at school by both the adults I worked with and, I think, by parents of children in my classes. I felt I had no problem getting on with most of the children although they often exhausted me, even when I was a young teacher. I was usually left to get on with things with little or no interference from my bosses. My end of year results were good and the children were obviously happy enough and, for the first years of my teaching life, that was really all that was expected. I was clearly not ambitious for promotion and, although I was often advised to “get my face recognised” by going to yet more meetings I never did so until after promotion came along. Many would say this was why I was not promoted earlier than I was. Just before I encountered Subud, my Head advised me to apply for promotion anyway,

“to test the waters” (to see if I was considered by the powers that be as “promotion material”) and I was not even short-listed for the job. Then along came Subud, and as I have already recounted, just the right promotion came up for me and I became Deputy Head. What a challenge this was to be! I was no longer in a large school where it was easier to stay in the background, if one so chose. I was Deputy Head of a small, village school where there was to be no hiding place. In such a small school everyone gets to know everyone else very well anyway and as Deputy Head I was to be involved in just about everything everyone in the school did, especially when the Head came up to retirement within two years of my being there.

When the new Head was appointed I was to suddenly find myself with more responsibility, partly because the new Head needed time to get to know the school and partly because his management style was to be much more “collegiate” than I was used to. Much more of the administrative and management tasks were delegated to me and I thoroughly enjoyed learning more about these aspects of school life which, until then I knew nothing about. It was then, of course, that my marriage broke up and we had the huge H.M.I. inspection to cope with. At this time all my vulnerabilities and anxieties came to the forefront of my mind. I was neither happy nor confident under observation (let alone “inspection”!) anyway; I was exhausted through lack of sleep; and bewildered by what was happening in my family life. Yet, in this extreme time, the latihan supported me and as I have recorded previously, got me through all this successfully. After the inspection, everyone at the school was on a “high” and extremely happy with the school’s success. Such was my poor emotional state, that I was convinced I had done something to let the school down during the inspection and eventually I would hear about it! Of course that proved to be totally untrue (thank goodness!). I was psychologically really up against it at this time and for a long time afterwards. I wrote in my diary at the time:

“It feels as if I am being dragged through barbed wire and my face is being scratched. I feel exposed. I can barely cope. The latihan is picking me up and urging me to stand up straight: to be more upright; to take more responsibility for my life. I need to take command now and steer this ship of my life out of these rocky waters into the open sea and into the New World. My job has made me confront persistent weaknesses that I have: lack of confidence, commitment, and lack of self-esteem. I must overcome this in order to survive: I must put myself “out there” and be prepared to cope with criticism and even dislike. I have not done this yet. I must be prepared to lose face.”

Outer Challenges and Professional growth: Inner Guidance

I did some testing:

If I stayed close to the latihan it would be like a car engine “firing on 4 plugs instead of 2”!

My attitude to my emotions should be to simply endure them like the rocks of the coast being hit over and over by the crashing waves of the sea.

I should not just be an Observer but also a Doer. I have to get up and join in more, put more into my work, get more involved. I should be prepared to progress through difficulty, humiliation, embarrassment and failure. I should recognise more fully that I have a responsibility to the children and staff of my school.

My attitude to my situation in life at present should be to see it more as, and to accept it as, if it were a very strong, dramatic latihan. Resist any pressure downwards. I have been nearly knocked over but now I must stand up by my own efforts with the strength of the latihan.

How can I get to be stronger? By being knocked all over the place like a seagull screeching and whirling in the wind! I cannot force strength but it can be born out of difficulty. Should I then NOT seek to escape from present difficulties? Just stand there being hit repeatedly with no defences up: just try to be prayerful. There is more difficulty to come...

You have to endure things. Think of your spiritual life being like having this huge diamond inside your chest and remember diamond is the hardest material there is! It is stronger than anything in the world. Think, too, of how pleased people are to own a tiny diamond in this world. The spiritual diamond is a million times bigger than these worldly ones and can never be taken away from you. It is priceless! You should be rejoicing that you actually possess it! (I later discovered that many Christian mystical writers like St. Teresa and Roysbrook speak of the soul as being like a crystal or diamond at one's heart! And Buddhists talk of the “diamond body” and have the “Diamond Sutra” as a sacred text...)

I did also get a little practical help to do this: it seemed important to work close to the latihan and one way for me to do this was simply to sing AS IN THE LATIHAN to myself. I was to do this a lot and especially when I

was most harassed. Even years later it made me laugh when colleagues would say: “You sound happy, John!” or when one of the children would say, as they invariably did: “Mr. Hager is always happy. He’s always singing!” These would be times when I was at my least content and my most stressed! I hope now, as I think of it, that this singing did something to protect them from my “real”, negative feelings at least!

Becoming a Head:

The effect of all this was to help me not only to survive my professional life while my family life was going through a complete upheaval but also to give me energy and inspiration to succeed at it, so much so that when my Head was promoted following the H.M.I. inspection, the question arose as to whether I would apply for the Headship he was leaving. I was told that it was unusual at that time for a Deputy to be promoted to Headship of the school he had been Deputy of: it was more usual for Deputies to go to a school where they were not previously known in an inferior role, so to speak. At first, I was unsure what to do. I knew I could do the job because I had run the school alongside my Head anyway as well as having the experience of being Acting Head for a term. As is so often the case with me, the Outer gave me an unexpected prompt: I found myself talking informally to my Chair of Governors. There was nothing unusual in this; we knew each other well and often spoke in this way. She knew I was not ambitious and I think, looking back, that she was a bit worried about this. Anyway, as we talked this time I became aware of “something in the air”; there was a tension, a something that was not usually there when we spoke. I then realised that the questions she was asking me were rather more formal than usual; in fact it was a bit like she was already interviewing me, or at least she was trying to find out, in a more serious way than ever before, what my ideas on education and for the school were. At the end, she remarked that I seemed much more confident, much more sure of myself and with such a lot of good and exciting ideas for the school, than she had realised! I felt good about that, of course, but I was also impressed by the spontaneous way it had happened and how assured I did, in fact, feel. As a result of this I decided to do some testing about the whole issue:

I began by asking what my attitude to applying for this Headship should be and was completely surprised by my receiving: “Say: “Yes!” to this with all your personality...Let there be no turning away but rather a loud and complete “Yes!”” I then felt that the interviewing panel would be “friendly” to me and not at all as I imagined: challenging to the point of hostility. This was encouraging, to say the least, and a feeling of

completeness, of total rightness about applying for the job remained with me afterwards.

I also received some encouragement and understanding from my Quiet Times. One in particular stands out even now so much so that I wrote it down immediately as it occurred:

“Your personality needs to be Head of this school... There have been forces pushing you towards this for some time. Ever since you have been there, you have come more and more to the FOREFRONT. True, there have been failures but you have had to rise through them as Deputy Head and you will also have to rise through them as Head. This rising will make you a stronger, more developed personality. You will express yourself outwardly much more positively than ever before and you will learn to be self-confident.”

When I thought about this, I realised I *had* been aware of “forces” in my school life, sometimes on a daily basis. For example, in my most difficult times I had gone into school feeling very low, depressed and even bewildered by my life, yet the moment I walked into school those feelings seemed to be taken away from me. I wrote at the time that “it does not matter what state I go into school in or even how unprepared I feel for the day, it is as if “my classroom organises me” because as soon as I step inside it, ideas come and I soon find myself inspired and even excited by my day. And on those few occasions when that does not work, I have only to see the children and all thoughts of myself vanish. Then I get some blessed relief from my own life as I get so involved with theirs!” This, of course was the explanation I gave to those many people who saw me so unhappy outside of school (understandably so) who wondered how on earth I managed to carry on working. They simply could not understand how my job actually released me from so much pain even if it was only while I was with the children. As soon as they left, of course, the black clouds would immediately gather round me again... Because of the help that school gave me at this time I learnt to treat it much more wholeheartedly and seriously because I felt so grateful to it!

Perhaps the most amazing (because of the surprised reactions of some of my colleagues who witnessed it also) example of some unusual force being at work in my ordinary school day was when I was stuck for a topic to do with the children in the first week or two of a new school year. I always aimed to do something a little different and hopefully of real and sure interest to the children in that time in order to get them off to the best

possible start to a new school year. It was interesting for me, also, to do something that I had not done before. But on this particular year I was struggling to come up with anything that I had not done before. I asked my colleagues for help but nothing really “clicked”. Then came the day before term and it struck me I would do a topic on “Elephants”. I did not know where that idea came from but I had not done that topic before and the children usually enjoyed anything to do with animals so I settled on that. The NEXT DAY a large letter came through the school post addressed to “The Elephant Expert”! Everybody’s eyes in the staff-room seemed to light up as I opened it. There was a complete pack of ideas and activities COVERING THE THEN REQUIREMENTS OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM for the children on “Elephants”. We were truly amazed! At first I thought a friend had sent it but no, this pack had been sent into all schools by a Conservation Group that I did not know. My colleagues were green with envy- all that tedious planning done for me. All I had to do was check it and change it to suit me and my children, if necessary. At that time, when the National Curriculum was so new, we were spending hours on such planning. It was really good not to have to do this for once! The ideas and activities proved to be excellent and we all had a happy and educational time with it. Even the parents joined in and we made a hall display of their paintings, photos, pictures, experiences, etc.etc. for everyone to see.

The Clarity of Testing: Specific, Practical and Detailed

Perhaps the most helpful testing I was to do was about the Headship interview itself. In those days interviews for Headships were whole day affairs, beginning with a brief welcome and tour round the school, followed by a question and answer time altogether, then lunch (with each candidate changing places after each course and so sitting with a different member of the interviewing panel each time), then came the interviews proper. I tested about each separate part of the day and was really glad I did!

My attitude to the whole thing should be to see it as “a splendid social occasion, enlivening and happy!” That is not how I would normally see such a situation! Normally, I would be a bag of nerves...Once again I received that I should say a complete “Yes!” to the whole occasion”! “How then should I be in the morning of the interview?” I should be “jokey and friendly”! “What about dinner time?” Then I should be serious and personally strong- there was no doubt this was where the interview *really* began. Then came the interview itself: **THEN** I had to give the **Performance** of my life! My friend received it was as if I was

having to field dozens of balls being thrown at me at once and I must not let one go past me!! That seemed a bit of a tall order, to say the least!

Finally the day of the interview came and amazingly I hardly felt nervous at all! I had a new thought which carried a lot of weight with me: this was THE day when my career had reached its peak; to get this far was an achievement, especially for someone as nervous and lacking in confidence as me. Why, this might be the only interview for Headship that I would get and so I determined to enjoy it and to try to get the most out of it I could! I drove slowly into school trying to savour everything about the day---the sunshine across the fields all around me, the feeling of well-being that I had and, of course, the thought that a day like this might never come to me again... There was a huge feeling of expectancy in the school as I stepped inside: the appointment of Head is perhaps the most important appointment a school can make and the staff are particularly affected by it so they tend to have all sorts of emotions about it from fear to worry and excitement. So, unsurprisingly, the school was full of life and expectancy, and, of course, with so many visitors present for the day, it was also trying hard to be on its best behaviour. Some of the candidates were already there when I arrived and sat, well dressed and somewhat sheepishly, in the staff-room waiting for the proceedings to properly begin. At last, we were called to order and, after our initial welcome to the County and the school, we were led around the school. One or two of the candidates tried very hard to impress at this point by almost non-stop talking and asking intense questions; I was not anxious to be part of this but I did remember my testing and I think I made a good job of socialising in a relaxed and “jokey” way. I also caught myself trying to sum up the other candidates on a completely self-interested basis of which of them I felt I would like to, or *could*, work with (and I bet the rest of the staff were doing the same thing at this time too). Then came the “trial by lunch”. Again the “over-talkers” tried ever so hard to impress, so there was still a sense of strain in the room but again, very surprisingly, I felt completely at ease and found myself curtailing any casual or flippant remarks (as the testing said) and I spoke easily and confidently to whoever I found myself next to. I actually enjoyed the meal and the conversations. Not all that long ago these people-Educationalists and “dignatories” from the local community-would have made me feel (through no fault of their own) extremely nervous and ill-at-ease. Not so today!

Then it was time for the personal interview itself...Now I did feel nervous as I remembered I had to “give the performance of my life”. This I was not at all sure I could do. I started badly and I know I did not give a

convincing answer to the first question. As I sat there bumbling on I swear I actually heard a swishing sound by my left ear: a sound that is of a ball whizzing past me. I had missed that one! Already I had let one ball go by and I knew I could not afford to do so with another, so... I sat upright in the chair, put all my wits around me and “caught” all the rest as they were thrown at me from all directions of the room. I left the interview room feeling tall and strong! If I had not got the job now it was, I thought, not for want of trying!

I did get the job and there was a real happiness in the school when it was announced to everyone. “I am really glad,” said my Chair Of Governors “I never thought you would pull it off. Well done! I have to tell you the Chair of the Education Committee was really taken with you!” And I had been told, before the interview, what a fierce, no nonsense interviewer she was...

At Last- No Doubts: I KNOW!

Well, I was on a real high after this. When I thought of how difficult my life had been around this time I felt especially pleased and proud. With the undoubted help of the latihan and the Inner it was as if I had triumphed against all the odds. I knew that left to myself I was not capable of this kind of strength. I knew, in fact, that left to myself I would simply not have been able to cope with the interview day, let alone with a hugely difficult personal life at the same time. For me to be so positive, comfortable, and even happy in the interview situation itself was something of a minor miracle to me! And, of course, the pre-interview testing proved to be spot on because it meant I “knew” exactly how to be for each part of the day. That is only one part of it because knowing is one thing, actually doing it is another. Once again I feel the Inner gave me that too because I felt so sure of myself during the day, helped enormously by the unarguable thoughts first thing in the morning which urged me to see the day as one of those very significant days in one’s life and to try to savour every moment of it. That I felt I could do, so that alone meant I was not going to be my usual over-nervous self.

I had no doubts by now that some kind of “Inner Force” was closely involved in my working life. I felt I had real evidence now for the Reality of a “Something” other than my pathetic little self being involved in those important areas of my life- school and family. And this had only become obvious to me after I had experienced the Subud Latihan.

I was to be a Head for something like 20 years and in all that time I was to continue to experience OFTEN this same reality that had been so clear to me at the Headship interview. Sometimes it would actually be on nothing short of a daily basis. Mostly, it would be when I was in difficulties and, my goodness me, my Headship was to encounter many of those. Often there were those little coincidences like my thinking of a story or exciting theme for assembly just “out of the blue” and then finding books or material to support this “just by chance”! Every so often I would encounter problems with staff, both teaching and non-teaching staff, and this would cause me a lot of worry. Invariably, I would find myself receiving “advice” during my early morning “Quiet”. Generally, this entailed seeing things more from the other person’s point of view so that I was able to be more sympathetic with them than I would have been otherwise. This generally meant that when I met with them later in the day I felt no hostility towards them whereas I might have done previously; usually, in fact, I felt warmly towards them and understood what a difficult time they were having. The result EVERY time was to resolve these difficulties harmoniously and with a closer feeling established between the two of us. These difficulties could also be quite challenging to me. Two, in particular, stand out for me. One was with a member of staff who found working in a small school just too demanding and was to suffer a lot of illness as a result and when this person was at school she needed a lot of support. In such a small school this is particularly difficult because it means more work for the few other staff who are already hard-pressed. This did, in fact, lead to some resentment towards the member of staff concerned. Nonetheless this was all resolved, under the direction of the latihan and my times of Quiet, both of which told me how to be with this member of staff and what to do to help the situation. In the end, she resigned amicably so much so that the Educational Official who had recommended her appointment in the first place said to me: “I think we have been looked after here, John!” I knew we truly had! The second incident got more messy than this as a member of my non-teaching staff began a “complaints procedure” against me because of “excessive workload”...To a large extent this was true. The government were hammering schools at that time and things were demanding and difficult for all of us. Nonetheless this complaint had to be formally investigated and for awhile it looked as if it could get rather serious. I again “knew” how to handle this and at the end of the first formal meeting the two of us ended up embracing each other and that was the end of the matter- and again things were much improved for all of us after.

A Triumphant Public Event

The most challenging time I had was when there was something of a parent's revolt against the many changes going on in the school at the time, largely because of the rush of Government initiatives in the wake of a National Curriculum. Virtually nothing was to be left unchanged as, just after I was appointed Head, the Government embarked on an educational revolution, so that administration, finances, the way schools were managed, and, of course, the whole Curriculum was changed. This involved a massive demand on teacher's time outside the classroom to try to make sense of it all, let alone to implement it! The changes came fast and furiously and it was to become a struggle just to keep up and even then few people were sure they were understanding things properly, let alone doing it "right". Generally teacher's morale dropped to an all time low and many old hands left and the Government had to try massive financial handouts to attract "good quality people" into training. When I first became Head I was responsible for about £3000; in a couple of years it was over £100,000 with only very basic training in how to handle it! When, for example, I told a friend who was a Director of a small company the amount of training I had for using computers for management, he stared at me in disbelief: I had one day's training whereas everyone involved in his business would have at least a week! Things were made more difficult in our case because of a general belief it seemed that the changes were leading to lower standards and, in particular, in one of our teacher's classes. Both beliefs were in my view completely unfounded. Nonetheless the whole thing came to a head at our Annual Meeting for Parents- a meeting set up by the Government for parents and Governors to meet together to "discuss" the "Governor's work over the past year and its plans for the coming year". This seemed a good idea except that usually few parents attended: many schools having one or two parents turn up, some none at all, some, like us, reaching double figures. This year our very large hall was full to the brim with VERY noisy parents! Just about every parent was there- over 100 of them: a world record I should think!

This was a huge test for me- me and not the Governors because usually they would not have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum or general educational matters to deal with such things in the amount of detail that would be needed. I was in effect on trial here, as any criticisms of the school or the staff in the school, would in the end be seen as my responsibility. There have been, and still are, moments in my life when I am "given" a confidence I do not normally have. You see, all my life I have realised the need in me to be more self-confident and less timid etc. Because of this, I tried, in my younger days especially, various

techniques, like repeating a number of “affirmations”, often, to “visualisations”, and even trying self-hypnosis. Each helped a little but by far the most helpful and convincing experiences of confidence have come from the Inner as a gift really and these came “out of the blue”, completely unexpectedly. Of course, this has often been when I have most needed them and this was to be one such occasion for, clearly, the school’s, and my, reputations were clearly on the line.

As I drove into the meeting, I knew what was ahead of me; the village had been buzzing with it all for days now! Yet inside myself I felt as if I could “hear laughter in the background”, then a real sense of happiness and the words: “Now we’ll show him!” formed clearly again “inside myself” and they left me feeling on top of the world! Next came a feeling of tremendous strength and the image of my Inner being like “an ocean inside me...the tides of this life could sometimes reach the shores of this Inner as now!” I actually felt impregnable!

I pulled up at the school only to find so many cars there already that it took me ages to find a space- and I was early! I walked into the hall alone and already it was full! I took my place at the front, central to everyone’s view. The Governors either side of me were unnaturally quiet and humourless. A lady-the leader of a “parent faction”, in fact-then walked down the central aisle, **in a bright red dress and hat** (no missing her then!) and sat right at the front in a seat that someone had RESERVED for her. Then my Chair of Governors noticed that following her were some obvious supporters who did not have children at the school but had chosen to send their children to private schools. Strictly speaking they should not be allowed at this meeting because the law specifically said the meetings were for Governors and parents only (consequently none of the teaching staff-except the Teaching Governor-were here either. Thus, I was also denied their support: this was to be a one man “show” in that respect!) Immediately, my Chair of Governors got up from her seat and went boldly over to the group and asked them to leave! (Normally, this probably would not have been done because these evenings were always, except this once, good humoured and full of interesting discussions). They at first refused but after a commotion and some raised voices with the promise that the evening would not go ahead unless they left, order was restored and these well dressed up “soldiers” went- presumably to the local pub to await news! Then the evening got underway...

Many questions and “comments” had been carefully prepared. The law also said that these had to be submitted “in the box provided” at least 24 hours before the meeting “to allow for necessary facts to be assembled”

so I knew what the first questions were. Usually, of course, as the meeting went ahead more comments and questions would arise there and then and that, I suppose, is when things could get tricky. Again, however, my Chair handled things protectively by saying at the beginning that only questions submitted in advance would be dealt with at this meeting. As it turned out that did not have to be enforced. I answered the first question forcefully and comprehensively I thought; then the next...and so on. Soon I was actually enjoying myself and especially enjoying this new-found feeling of personal impregnability! Question after question came and went...then a note was passed along the line to me from a Governor who used to be Head of the school: "This is going really well," it said, "Well done!" I could see the meeting visibly relax as the 100 or so parents quietened: they were soon really listening to me. I had often encountered times when the children in school listened so intently to me that I felt I "had them I the palm of my hand" (I loved those times and often hammed things up or played them along just for the hell of it!) This, however, was to be the first time that I was to experience this with an audience of parents. I have to say I loved it as much as with the children: it was such a feeling of control!! I knew full well though that this was not "my" control. Both with the children and with these adults I knew a Greater Power was involved- greater than my inept and timid personality, that is.

From all points of view, the Governors considered this to be a very successful evening. After the meeting the parents did not seem to want to go home. So many came up to me to say how much they had enjoyed it and how grateful they were. Many came up and simply shook my hands and said things like: "Congratulations!"... and: "You were magnificent!" My former Head, the one who appointed me as her deputy, said: "I was so proud of you, John!" One of my non-teaching staff who was also a parent said: "Wow! I have never seen you so...so...assertive!" The next day several of the Governors called into school, individually, to say how well the whole thing had gone and I even received some little gifts from them (very unusual!)...a big bouquet of flowers, a bottle of whisky, some chocolates...

I have to say I was deeply affected by all this. The parents and I were much closer after and, during my time as Head, I grew to consider many of them to be personal friends rather than just parents of children at my school. I also felt totally convinced now of the reality of my Inner life: of those deeper forces that had become more evident to me through the Subud Latihan. In spite of all the things that had happened to me previously I was the perennial doubter: I could always find an alternative

and less “supernatural” explanation. I simply could not do this with my work and my handling of situations like this involving large groups of adults. I had spent 30 odd years before Subud being nervous and ill at ease in so many situations like this. After Subud, I was to take this sort of thing more and more in my stride and especially in my job where I was regularly to speak to large and often intimidating audiences, not just of parents, but also of large audiences of teachers, educationalists and Governors in training. I KNOW that without Subud I would not have had the confidence to do this-and possibly not the opportunity either (I had not for the previous 30 plus years, after all).