

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: AND NOW (SEVERAL YEARS LATER!) ?

A View From My Window; The Joys Of Solitude; A Surprising Inner Prompt; A Change In Attitude To Subud In The World (After All These Years!); Regional Kejiwaan Days; An Intuition Easily Fulfilled; Expressing An Unwanted Point Of View and Some Consequences; Articles For The Subud Journal; National Congress Proposal “Too Negative” And Fails; Receivings About World Congress; Subud Britain And The Future Of Subud.

The honeysuckle this year is really fiery! I am almost spellbound as I look at its little pink, red and yellow fingers filling the bush that is directly outside my window. It overhangs an arch that leads into the little wilderness that is my garden; a garden of overgrown and well-established bushes and trees. Now that the house has been painted, decorated, for the first time since I have been here, I suppose the garden will have to be tidied up and sorted next. I have grown especially fond of this honeysuckle bush. It has obviously been here a good few years – bushes like this take a fair while to get so large and striking. And it has been positioned so as to dominate the view outside of this little room which doubles as a dining room and my study. So I have watched the honeysuckle slowly emerge from the total greenery of early Spring into this eye-catching shower of beautiful colour that it is now. I notice many birds visiting it and pecking its little flowers, sometimes emerging along the stems with specks of red or pink all over their tiny bodies. The birds, I am sure, discover this bush to be both friendly and happy-making as they dart all over it; sometimes they notice me watching them but, so wonderful is their world that they pay me no heed whatsoever! For two weeks this bush looks enchanting: full and even vibrant. How sad I find it when the glory passes and my bush becomes ordinary again and I have to wait another full year for all this colour to reappear.

I have lived here for more than fifteen years now. For the past four years I have lived on my own. All my adult life previously, I have lived with a family around me. For so many years separation from my third wife like this would have been unthinkable, even impossible, to both of us, I think. But after 11+ years it happened. By then we had both become different people and our lives had diverged so much that they then seemed to be going in completely opposite directions. E.g., my wife trained as a teacher, thus fulfilling a life-time’s ambition, and began teaching at the very same time that I retired and ended my teaching career!

As we each then settled into our very different outer lives, so the differences between us gradually increased and finally became unbridgeable. My wife was worldly-busy; I was becoming more and more monastic! There was nothing I liked better than sitting in my own company, watching the changing seasons and getting excited by *ideas, feelings and even inspirational prompts for my day*. My wife was enjoying the outer scene of people and worldly activity. We continued to share the Latihan but it was obvious that there was little else that we now had in common. I needed the space that worldly withdrawal gave; she needed more worldly and social engagement. So, in the end, we agreed to separate - and we did so *with no hard feelings at all!* I continued to want her to be happy and I still to this day get a fast heartbeat when I see her! But our lives are about very different things now. Looking back on this separation, its rightness is shown to me by the ease with which it happened! I am truly amazed that separation from the “love of my life” was so easy and had none of the awfulness of my first separation (see Chapter 6). This one seemed more like ripe fruit falling naturally from a tree!

Amazingly, I have taken to this solitude like a duck to water! When I was younger this would have been unthinkable for me but now in the latter part of my life I am mostly positive about it. I wake up about 5 a.m and spend the first hours of the new day sitting in a Quiet that is peaceful and undistracted. Completely alone I feel content and, within moments, happy! I watch the beauty of the light which is always changing and which brings both beauty and uplift into my life. Yes, the emphasis of my day has completely changed. Previously, it would be dominated by people and activities with some, usually brief, pauses for Quiet and latihan. Now it is the other way round: hours of Quiet and moments of latihan are interspersed with a few people and necessary domestic and practical jobs. Yes, the focus of my life has changed so that the outer (of people and worldly activities) becomes permeated by the centred contentment of the Inner. And there is inspiration in it, too. Perhaps the most surprising and persistent of these was to do with Subud, which was then to become of major concern to me once more.

Intuition (“Receivings”) About Subud

After years of seeing myself as detached from Subud (“not a Subud member just someone who does the latihan”) I am completely surprised to experience a persistent and strong feeling that ***Subud is in need of renewal***. I ignore this feeling for a long time but so irritating is it in my Quiet Times and in my latihan that in the end I begin to take it more

seriously. I cannot see why I should be feeling this. I have had nothing to do with Subud beyond my own little group for years. And what could I do about it anyway? Clearly, no-one is going to listen to me: hadn't my earlier experiences proved this? In the end I decide I will check out Subud- and this feeling about it- by going again to some of its meetings, talking to members outside of my local group i.e getting involved a little again in the Subud community. First meeting coming up is the Regional Kejiwaan Day: a time for all members and helpers in the region to get together and to focus on the latihan and testing problems, concerns, current issues etc. Yes, this seemed a good place to start. I am pleased that there are no formalities required in order to attend: I can just turn up unannounced and join in. Great!

The meeting is due to start at 11 am. I arrive at 10:40 and the place is deserted! 3 other men eventually turn up- one looking as if he has just got out of bed! I later learn that there were several more ladies but I do not see any during the whole time I am there. I am told, on another occasion, that there are usually less men at these *Regional* Latihans than at an ordinary group latihan here during the week! Thankfully, my latihan is really strong and beautiful- it is the saving grace of my visit. Then after latihan, the men relax for what seems like hours (one lying on the floor- is he really snoring?!) We all look tired and in need of this sleepy time. Gradually, someone gets up and leaves; I say a few words to one person...and the day is over. I have driven 50 miles for this!

Well, I certainly feel that things have deteriorated since I last attended a Regional Kedjiwaan Day several years ago! Then the day began with about 20+ men and women sitting together in a large circle with some talk about the day ahead or some sharing of news of the wider Subud world. Then there would follow the latihan and general testing about things that concerned everyone (a test that Bapak had done, eg, or a test about understanding something that concerned us all etc) After lunch there would follow time and space for personal testing which left some others free to chat or explore the locality. After this, everyone got together in the circle again to share their experiences of the day or anything else of interest. The day would end late afternoon with a few minutes of latihan again before everyone left for home. What a contrast! Now a handful of men turned up for a latihan and some testing (if anyone could think of any!) and then left. The men and women did not seem to want to get together at all and so barely even saw each other.

When the next Kejiwaan Day arrived, I took my thoughts and concerns into my morning Quiet and wondered whether I should go again or not.

Within minutes I again experienced the annoying, strong feeling that *renewal was needed in our region*. Slightly annoyed I wondered what I could do with this feeling? Share a strong latihan came to me, firstly. Yes, hopefully I could do that. And then came a surprise: the Region “needed a “get-together” somewhere central to the Region.” Now that made me sit up: yes, that seemed a good practical step, I thought. The only problem was I was loathe to take any sort of lead and suggest it- probably because nothing I had suggested in the past had been positively received. So, I made up my mind that I would go to this meeting again but I was not going to initiate anything without a prompt from somebody else! I was clear that the lead would have to come from somewhere, or someone, else.

I now began my hour+ journey feeling interested! Well, the day started just as the previous one. There were 4 men there this time. Again, we had a long “doze” to start and then a strong, beautiful, uplifting latihan. Afterwards, a quiet sleepy period followed again. I waited for something to be said now that would spark off some testing. After my feelings this morning I was sure something was going to happen this time. But what was this?! One man got up and left the room; then another behind him. They were having a chat in the room outside the latihan room when the remaining man and I began to talk. We talked about days like this “years ago” and we were reminded of some of the tests that were done then. He mentioned testing about the “state of our region and what the region most needs at this time” Suddenly, he had a burst of energy. “We should do that test now,” he said and ran out of the room to call back the men who had left and were now walking out of the garden to their cars. He succeeded and soon we were standing in a little circle, ready to test. True to my word I said nothing ...until one man said quite clearly that he felt that what the region needed was –and I use his exact words- “a get-together, somewhere central to our region” You could have knocked me over with a feather! Was he really saying this? Yes! And the talk now was where that “somewhere central to the region might be”? And here comes the next part of this rather amazing story...

It seemed that my group was, in fact, the most central of the groups in the region, so I was asked if I would look for a Hall that would suit us. I had no hesitation in agreeing- well, that lasted until I was hurtling home on the A11! Then it hit me just how difficult that might be! I remembered how much trouble we had had finding premises for our little group to use and now I was to look for a bigger place that would –and here was an added difficulty- be available on a Sunday. (Regional meetings were always held on Sundays when church halls like ours were obviously not

available) Oh dear what had I taken on? Oh well, I decided, I would first of all ask around and see if anyone I knew had any ideas. I was on my way to my daughters now so I wondered about asking her. I did not think she would be able to help. She was not a particularly sociable type of person and anyway she had enough to do looking after her three young boys! Nonetheless I did ask her and once gain a feather would have been all it would have taken to knock me down.

“Well, that’s funny,” she said, “I have just become Bookings Officer for our local hall! Yes, I thought I would like to do something for the community and this is what they asked me to do.” I could hardly believe what I was hearing! Anyway, I went with my daughter to see the hall. It was ideal for us: it had a huge room, two other smaller latihan rooms and all the usual facilities. It was also set in a beautiful part of the Suffolk countryside with fields all around. And close by was a brand new children’s playground! So, on the same day as the test about finding such a hall, I had a hall booked! So it all could not have been easier for me!

We have now had several happy meetings here, including times when we have been able to have our picnics sitting on the grass by the play area, looking across the fields up to the horizon. Best of all, no-one has had to journey much more than an hour to get here and this has allowed two more groups than usual to send members because they had found previous meetings just too far for them to travel.

“Just Be Amongst Subud Members And Express Your View”

I felt much encouraged by this and wondered what else I might be doing now. I was clearly looking at my relationship with Subud in a new light-after so many years! I felt that instead of withdrawing from Subud because I did not share what seemed to be the consensus view, I should now stay and simply say what I believed was true for me and not be concerned about how others reacted. I just felt that my view was a valid one and should be expressed and not so easily suppressed by louder or more strident voices. This was not always easy, however. I remember one particularly unpleasant episode when I took my life in my hands (exaggeration!) and asked one of the local lady helpers why they had refused to open someone I knew on the basis of helper testing. They had “tested whether she should be opened and God had said “no”.” I could hardly believe this: were they believing that testing was the “word of God”? I simply could not go along with such an outrageous (to me) claim! Nonetheless, I really wanted to know why these ladies did not just follow Bapak’s advice and open the woman after the usual three months

sincerity test? The helper just exploded in front of me: she completely lost her temper and shouted at me so that everyone all over the house heard: “Get out,” she screamed at me, “Go away...Get away from me...How can you call yourself a Subud member...” I was speechless. People came running over to control the situation. At one point I really felt she was going to physically attack me- so incensed was she! And all I had done was to ask: “Can I ask why the ladies are testing if people should be opened?” I must quickly say at this point that this was the only time I experienced such an extreme reaction! Usually, I met with silent hostility at worst or sometimes merely an obvious avoidance. Surprisingly, there were those, particularly the men in my region, who seemed –on the surface at least- to be friendly and accepting of me and I found that heart-warming and has left me feeling warmly towards them still.

Articles For The Subud Journal

After this outburst, my confidence was knocked and I was feeling that any attempt towards helping, in however small a way, towards any kind of change in Subud –let alone a renewal- was going to be an uphill task. Had it not been because of these inner prompts, I would have not carried on. In fact, it was not long before a couple of major set-backs left me feeling it to almost certainly to be impossible. The first occurred when an idea popped into my head that felt to be obviously right: one thing I could do was to write an article for the Subud Journal. I hoped this would be an easy means of prompting discussion and even testing which might result from this. So, I wrote about some of my findings from my discussions with people who had looked into Subud and then rejected it.

This involved the comments and opinions of a large number of people and I thought members who believed that Subud was for “all of humankind” would be interested. How wrong I was! To the editors credit this time the article was printed with a few alterations (the title was abbreviated to: Just Someone Who Does The Latihan, eg) and it was received with a deafening silence. I think there were a couple of emotional comments only (one outrageously fundamentalist one that I particularly remember was: “I pray every day that J__ H__ one day will know who Bapak really was.” This was in response to my suggesting that Bapak did not *have to* be seen as infallible eg) The idea of the article inspiring debate and testing was pure pie- in-the-sky. Neither took place anywhere. It just seemed to cause bad feeling or no comment and avoidance.

A Proposal For National Congress

A further disappointment came when I responded to a request for a suggestion for something that would inspire a lively workshop at the coming National Congress. I suggested that the topic of “Subud in the world” be discussed by all the delegates at National Congress. I was asked if I would be prepared to facilitate the meeting and suggest some ideas for the delegates to consider. These ideas had then to be worded as a proposal and put forward as a resolution after being approved by the whole region.

So I took my proposal to the next Regional Meeting where there was immediate and unanimous disapproval on the basis that the proposal was “too negative.” This was because I had included a section about the major criticisms of Subud I had encountered from the 3 groups mentioned in the previous chapter. The region *unanimously* did not want anything “critical” to be part of the Congress discussions! As a result I withdrew my offer to facilitate the workshop and a new facilitator was found and the proposal was completely reworded to remove anything that could be seen as negative or contentious. The result was completely predictable. In the words of one delegate who bothered to evaluate the workshop “it was the same stuff we have been talking about for years. Some of us are really interested in this subject- when are we going to have an intelligent and practical discussion about it?” Very disappointing and for me it was a complete failure.

I tried more articles for the Journal. I had determined that I would carry on with this until I had an article rejected- then I would give up. Well, I came close to this as one or two articles were changed and had chunks of (slightly) contentious stuff removed. It was made clear to me that the Journal had a “be positive and encouraging policy” so anything other than this would be “outside its remit”. But, on the plus side, I was also asked if I would write more about my personal experiences in Subud. This I did and these articles were more positively received by the editors with very little comment from anyone else. Finally, the Journal carried an appeal by a newly appointed National Chair who was inviting ideas for “the future of Subud” from members. So I sent mine off and received an email thanking me very much for them- “they were just the sort of things she had in mind” and she would “get back to me in about a week’s time.” It is now almost a year later and ... the *silence is deafening!* Why did I get these receivings? It is failure, failure, failure. And more was to come...

Testing About World Congress!

About this time I attended two meetings when there was some excitement about whether Subud Britain should apply to host the next Subud World Congress. The first took place when a visiting International Helper came for a rare local visit here. I stood in a circle of about 15 or more men and felt that it would not be a good idea for this application to go ahead. I – and one other man there- also received that this testing was a waste of time because “the decision to apply had already been made.” There were some positive receivings but on the whole the group seemed less than enthusiastic about it. Nonetheless, we were eventually to hear that the application had gone ahead!

My second testing session was far more dramatic and took place at the National Congress later in the year.

As soon as the testing started I received a surprising image of Subud Britain being like a pregnant woman whose time for delivery had come but the birth was not happening! And this was getting more and more painful for the mother. It looked as if the baby would have to be born as a result of outside intervention and soon *because the mother's and the baby's lives were in danger!* I understood from this graphic and startling receiving that there were things seriously wrong here and they would need to be put right *before Subud Britain could fulfil this role of hosting a World Congress.* I also understood that Subud would not put this right *by itself-* something external to it would have to happen to cause that! Then we tested how it would be if Subud Britain was “as God wished it to be.” What a receiving! This time the birth was natural and happy and –this really surprised me- the birth became like the Christian Nativity: many people from all over the world would come to see this baby (not just the wise men and the shepherds!) I felt that it would be like the time when Subud first came to the West: exciting and involving an explosion of the “many who would come...”

Could I really believe this? I did not know. I would have liked to have tested further (especially about what specifically Subud Britain could “put right”) but my receiving was clearly not in line with the majority who received happily that the bid should go ahead and for whom there were no complications. This puzzled me and a few others who had also received negatively, so I decided to await the outcome before I decided whether to take my response seriously or not. Well, the bid was unsuccessful and the Congress was going to be held in Germany. Perhaps I had something to take seriously from this testing then?! Perhaps we could really experience again the excitements of those early days when

Subud was a world-wide attraction? I found myself thinking what that would be like:

Subud 1957 And Now- What A Contrast!

Subud came to the West from Indonesia in 1957 when it quickly spread all over the world. It is hard for people like me who see how difficult it is to hear of Subud nowadays, and to see how few world-wide members there are, to appreciate the excitements and incessant activity of Subud members at that time. John Bennett was a key figure in Subud's arrival in the West. He writes about this time in his book "Witness":

"Subud acted with explosive violence...Visitors from America, South Africa, Canada, France, Germany, Holland and Norway came... and were opened. Subud was beginning to be known.

Then came an unexpected invitation to California for two months....We were swept along by the stream of surprising events...Two months of incessant travelling between San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles and Carmel, lectures, talks, meetings, openings, latihan with great crowds...

We flew to Australia, via Honolulu and Fiji...

Before we reached the customs, the reporters were on us. I had no means of knowing what had been told them, or why I was being bombarded with questions...we discovered that a hand-out to the Press had aroused such interest that I was to have a Press conference with about twenty reporters, an interview on television, two radio talks.

At last, ready to drop, we left the airport at five p.m. to learn that I was expected to open about forty men and Elizabeth (Bennett's wife) fifty women that very evening. To cap it all I had to give an introductory lecture...

I walked in and found about three hundred men and women filling the hall and waiting for me to speak. I have no idea what impression I made. I spoke for twenty minutes, and probably told them that it was not the explanation, but the experience that mattered. With great trouble and much confusion, the hall was cleared. Reporters were firmly told that they could not be present at the opening. All the men left the room, and Elizabeth was left alone to face sixty or seventy women...

I could not get a moment to sit quietly and bring my disturbed and revolted feelings into some semblance of calm. After forty minutes, I went into the hall with the men. There were not far short of fifty... I pronounced the formula usual at the opening, asked them to keep their eyes closed whatever might happen, and commended myself to God...

After ten or fifteen minutes, I opened my eyes and an extraordinary sight met them. Nearly all the men in the room were already responding to the latihan. More had happened in an hour than I had seen in England in a month. In that moment, I became convinced beyond all doubt that the Power that works in Subud has nothing to do with me or any other person. I could no longer question its real-that is, its objective- presence.

We left for Singapore and Ceylon (Sri Lanka)...

By this time, interest in Subud had spread all over the world. People in at least fifty countries had expressed the wish to receive the contact... Pak Subuh went first to Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan, and then...Australia and New Zealand to Mexico, where we would meet him..." (pp 329- 340)

And To-Day?

All this is such a far cry from to-day! Subud is so low profile, so out of the public eye that it may seem virtually non-existent! There is no media interest; you are unlikely to find any books about it or many references to it anywhere; there are no public talks or lectures...There is a website but you will need to know the word "Subud" before you can access that and how are you going to come across that word in the first place, except by chance? To me, it is amazing that Subud continues to exist at all without any publicity or any obvious attempts to promote it! A small number of people still continue to find it, however, sometimes by personal contact and sometimes, as in my case, through a string of unlikely events.

As you might expect Subud does not have a large membership nowadays but small (usually) groups still exist in many countries of the world. There are still enough members to keep the world-wide organisation functioning. But many groups have ceased to exist or have an ageing membership or are made up of the minimum number that can keep a group going. For example, my own group is just surviving with 2, sometimes 3 elderly men and two elderly women; the next group along has 3 elderly men and 2 women. 2 other local groups have ceased to exist in recent years. Some groups have expanded but most have not and for

some years now openings have become rare. The National Council Minutes for Britain have noted for a number of years now that Britain has an “ageing and declining membership.” In fact, the future of Subud looks very uncertain to a number of Subud members world-wide because so many are now coming to the end of their lives and are not being replaced.

Bapak’s vision for Subud being for “all of humankind” with enough members to create various “enterprises,” which would fund a variety of cultural and charitable activities, is far from being realised. With so few members and an “ageing and declining membership” how then can this vision become a possibility? Is it likely that Subud is, in fact, in a *terminal* decline? How can we prevent that? Can we really experience again- as my testing suggested- the excitements and expansion of those early days when Subud first came to the West? I believe the Subud presented in this book is the way this might happen!