

## CHAPTER 18: A SHORT-BUT MOST IMPORTANT- CHAPTER!

*Aldous Huxley and Bapak; Revolutionise The Role Of Helpers; The Waiting Period; Openings;*

“Several interesting people came to visit Pak Subuh in New York. Among them were Aldous Huxley and his Italian wife. I had first met Aldous in the thirties, when he and Gerald Heard used to come regularly to Ouspensky’s meeting in Colet, say nothing, and go away. He had entered himself as a Subud probationer in Los Angeles, and was on a short visit to the East.

He put three questions to Bapak:

“Who are you? Are you a prophet, or an incarnation?” Bapak had replied that he made no such claim. He was one who showed the way. He had opened a door which people could go through if they wished.

“But,” said Aldous, “you cannot divest yourself of your own position. You are the founder of Subud, and its spiritual leader. How can your followers help being dependent on you?” “No, Bapak is not a leader. He does not go in front. **At first people may misunderstand and think that Bapak will lead them. But later, if they practise the latihan sincerely, they learn that God alone is their leader and guide, and they do not depend upon Bapak.**”

“Even if you are not their leader, you are at least the teacher. They must learn from you and to that extent be dependent on you.” “No; there is no teaching in Subud and therefore no teacher.”

**Bapak may give explanations, but they are provisional only. As time goes on, each one gains his own understanding, and no longer needs explanations.”**

Aldous was clearly not satisfied but said: “It would be wonderful if it could only be true. This world needs more than anything else people who can make their own independent judgments.” (“Witness” pages 342-343 by John Bennett )

For many of us, this shows both Bapak and Subud at their best! First, these words show an unusual amount of respect for the individual and his or her own experience which are clearly stated as the *most* important things. Aldous Huxley says “It would be wonderful if it could only be true” probably because

organisations cannot seem to do this. More usually they end up inflicting a template of instructions, teachings, words onto individuals who are expected to fit in. Organisations all too readily encourage or demand conformity rather than the expression of individuality that Bapak is talking about here!

Second, it shows directly and unambiguously what Bapak's role is: he is not putting himself, his personality, his beliefs etc to the front at all. His role is simply to give *provisional* explanations to those who have not enough experience to "make their own independent judgments" based on "their own understanding." It is clear from this that these are the more important things! This then gives encouragement for individuals to understand their experience in many different ways- for some it may be as a Christian or a Buddhist or Hindu rather than as a Muslim, e.g.; for me it is as a Jungian...the varieties are potentially as different as individuals are! In all of this the one unity is...*the latihan*.

### *Bapak's Helpers*

For Subud to be anything more than a "personality cult" or "a Muslim sect," many of us believe that it is time for these words of Bapak's to be taken seriously by those who are designated as "Bapak's helpers." All too often this phrase has been misinterpreted to mean that Helpers see their role as instructing others to accept and fit in with everything that Bapak has said without referring it to anyone else's experience or viewpoint at all. So Subud then becomes like any other organisation which expects its members to fit in with its own single set of explanations, beliefs or words which are inflicted on them from outside their own experience.

For many the role of Helpers could be revolutionized by these words to Aldous Huxley! They would demand that Helpers be more respectful of each individual person's views and experience and less inclined to see themselves as instructors, teachers and enforcers of Bapak's words onto everyone, no matter what their experience. In fact, Bapak's words would be seen as a possible *starting point* and not as an *end point* in an individual's spiritual life. Seeing Bapak's explanations as "provisional" would encourage more humility! Believing that "as time goes on, each one gains his own understanding, and no longer needs explanations" would encourage more respect and a willingness to listen to each individual person's experience even when that did not conform to the Helper's or even Bapak's own.

The *locus of power* then shifts from the helper to each individual person he / she encounters whom the helper acknowledges as someone who has his or her own views, problems and life-experiences etc. which are to be fully respected. The amount of knowledge an applicant needs is small and easily passed on through books like “What Is Subud?” by van Hien and other publications. What the applicant then needs is *personal contact* and the Helper can best provide that by being someone who can both listen to individuals and stay close to his/her own latihan. Being “Bapak’s Helper” thus carries a much more specific meaning than has previously been commonly supposed. Not for nothing did Bapak say: “The one sin is teaching!” To many of us, this is a “sin” that all too often Helpers are guilty of.

### *The Three Month’s Waiting Period*

How important is this waiting period? Some of us have found our first experience of the latihan has come *before* we were officially opened, so clearly this waiting period is not necessarily a barrier to the experience! What seems to be more important is that the new person spends time with Subud folk (because the contact in Subud is transmitted through personal contact) and becomes familiar with some of the experiences of other people through the publications and through talking to a variety of people. Again, some people have first felt the latihan by being near to the latihans of other people i.e near to a room where the latihan was going on even before they were invited to join in! So this being near the group latihan would seem to be a good thing to encourage.

In its early days there was no waiting period for applicants at all, so it is obviously not essential. In practice, though, being around Subud people and their latihan in this time may be a gentle introduction to the experience which may be helpful to the opening. I am not sure that the practice of having a waiting period without any Subud contact is at all helpful because the few cases I have seen of this have not led to any awareness of receiving the latihan at the subsequent openings or for some time after. It seems that the waiting period can be a creative and fertile time if there is contact with a variety of Subud people, some talking and listening to them, reading, being near to the latihan of others and sitting in the pre-latihan quiet as far and as frequently as the new person can. Without these, the waiting period may have no apparent use and seem completely sterile. With them, the waiting period may be a fertile and interesting time, leading to a natural opening.

## *The Opening*

This is clearly another important time when *respect for the individual* most clearly shows itself! Unfortunately, having “A model of words and procedures for openings” has the danger of helpers thinking that this is the way that openings *have to be conducted*. There are just too many examples where people have been told they have to conform to it in order to be opened at all! Just recently a couple of people known to me had a troubled time with their helpers simply because they wanted the word “God” to be changed to something more meaningful to them and this resulted in one having a delayed opening and the other not being opened at all!

Because there is respect for the individual and because the latihan is not dependent on words, many of us believe a person’s opening should be primarily as he/ she would wish it. For most the suggested format is suitable; for others some changes need to be made; for some no formality is requested at all: the wish is just to join the ordinary latihan “with no extra fuss.” Bapak was clear from the beginning that his responsibility was to pass on the latihan to anyone who asked for it. Asking is the key thing; the rest is negotiable. I personally like the idea of beginning the first latihan with some words but would not expect everyone to feel the same way. I, myself, would simply change the suggested words to something like: “We are members of the Subud Association who are here to acknowledge (witness?) your wish to experience the latihan, the essential experience of Subud. We ask that you now be as open and relaxed as you can in order that you may experience that which is now available to you...We ask you to be relaxed and simply be receptive to whatever may happen in the next few minutes...Simply be prepared to receive and to follow whatever comes to you...Begin”

After the opening, a person’s experience of the latihan is acknowledged as an individual affair and so also should be any intellectual conclusions he or she may draw from it: *there should be absolutely no suggestion that any one person’s conclusions are more valid than anyone else’s*. In short, they are valuable really only to the individual concerned who may, of course, share them *without any suggestion that they have any validity, or importance to anyone else*. As Bapak so often pointed out the only unity in Subud is in the latihan. Outside of that is the rich diversity of the human race- that too can then be uniquely celebrated by this movement called “Subud!”

