

## Let's Celebrate...*No Teaching, Creed or Dogma!*

Driving through the quiet, country Suffolk roads to my opening, suddenly my beautiful peace was shattered by an ear-splitting and horrendously loud noise which scared the life out of me! Looking up, I saw, hurtling across the sky, a low-flying jet. I just got a glimpse of it before it was gone. And it was as if I was looking at it for the first time. I saw, with some awe, what a tribute this was to the cleverness and ingenuity of human beings who were capable of making such an incredible piece of machinery. Then the realisation hit me...the whole purpose of this amazing invention was to destroy – *to destroy and to kill and to do it as quickly as possible!* My heart sank at the potential for hurt and destruction I had just witnessed. Suddenly, life on this old planet of ours felt very precarious and I felt unusually vulnerable.

I then thought of Bapak's words about Subud coming at this time because of "the situation in which contemporary man finds himself." (San Francisco 1958) I had read a lot about Subud previously but I had not thought much about this aspect of it. Bapak clearly saw the latihan as a very real and potent help to counteract the "troubled atmosphere of the world which is now so disturbed" (Cilandak 1971)

What did he mean? What was unique then about Subud that made it especially suited to "modern times"? Where, then, to start with this?

Well, clearly, Subud made much of the fact that it was not a new religion. Just as well I thought. Researchers have listed over 100,000 religions in man's history. Billions of people had professed a belief in a Higher Power –and still do- yet the world is more precarious than ever (because of recent inventions like this jet and because it can be completely destroyed at "the press of a button" now). Belief had not done the trick *globally*, however much it may have helped *individuals* and *groups*.

I soon saw that Bapak had a clear understanding of the situation of so many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century people when he said:

“At the present time men no longer believe in words but look for facts. Bapak himself feels ...that the appearance of Subud is bringing about in man the facts which he demands in preference to words.” (London 22 August 1959)

“In Subud there is no theory-there are theories already in existing religions- but only receiving. And if people ask you what is taught in Subud, the answer is “Nothing” (Subud and the Active Life pp75-76)

Here is the secret: because belief is not of primary importance in Subud, people of all faiths- and none!- can come together in what Bapak called the "unity of one human family." What a wonderful idea! How on earth can this be realized? Well, clearly, Bapak believed that whilst “words divide” it is the latihan which “unites”. And how simple this was...It was like offering a mango to people, he said. You did not need to endlessly describe it, or worry about how it is made or give explanations about who or what made it or what forces led to its growth: you just gave them a piece to taste and then they would know what it was like. And so with the latihan. Personal experience of the latihan and the individual growth that came from it was the key: the individual and his or her own experience was to be paramount.

With such an emphasis on the Latihan, the “heat”, or pressure is off beliefs. The latter are not the thing: they are, simply, not that important. Perhaps the only belief you need in Subud is in the *possibilities* of the latihan. Indeed, if one looks with an unbiased eye at the history of belief it looks as if belief itself has been the cause of bloody and scary conflict! How wonderful that Subud offers something so different! Clearly, the experience of Subud members can lead them to many different beliefs, none of which bars anyone from the latihan. Rofe sums this up well on page 181 of “The Path of Subud” where he writes:

“Subud does not discriminate on religious, political, racial or other sectarian grounds. Serious applicants are never rejected...If they happen to be atheists or Communists, this will in no way affect their admission...Adherence to Subud demands no allegiance to any particular belief; it does not even require faith, for a spirit of scientific enquiry may equally well yield results.”

Bapak was a Muslim; Subud members do not have to be. Bapak was clear about this, saying that “You must not suppose that you have to follow or become like Muhammad Subuh...You must not follow or imitate anyone else because you must find your own way” And how do you find your own way? Through diligent practice of the Latihan! Bapak “hopes you will not blindly believe his explanations- it is necessary that you yourselves experience what can be found in the latihan.” (Chicago 1959)

Bapak explained clearly how the process works:

“In Subud there is no discrimination between the different religions because what comes to a person is really what is already within him...So a person who has a religion (as Bapak clearly had!) will experience in the latihan only according to what is in his religion and what is within him” (Singapore 1960) This explains why so much of Bapak’s talks is expressed through the words and ideas of his own culture: that of a Javanese Muslim. This is in no way to denigrate them- as Bapak makes clear it is natural for the latihan to use “what is already within” a person and we each have to “find” our “own way.” He goes further saying: “what may be the right way for one may be completely wrong for another” (Singapore 1960)

Still, after 34 years in Subud, I am excited by the idea that our latihan doors can be open to such a diversity of people: to those with no particular beliefs (an ever-growing number it seems!); those with strong beliefs in “God” (Christian, Muslim, Jewish etc); those Buddhists who do not believe it to be helpful to talk of “God” at all); agnostics... and even (open-minded!) atheists ( I recently had a latihan with a man who described himself as a “near-atheist”..!) Oh yes, I really want to celebrate this! And once again it is Bapak’s words which make my heart leap;

“what Bapak has received is not for him alone but for all of mankind, irrespective of race or language, colour or nation because... the knowledge which comes from God is bestowed upon mankind as a whole and not for any particular race *or this or that particular group*” (San Francisco 1958)

In Subud, no asking group or person is excluded and the hope is that through the experience of the Latihan can come both important personal growth and a better

world for all of us, however different we each are.