

CHAPTER 19: SUBUD MEETS THE MODERN (WESTERN) WORLD!

Is Subud In Decline? Personal Failure And Rejection; What Now? Subud Meets The Lewes Public; Hopeful Change? A New "Introduction To Subud" leaflet;

Is Subud In Need Of A Renewal?

When the idea of writing this book first occurred to me so long ago, I remember being left saddened and a little chastened by the intuition that there would be one set of people who would not support it and would intensely dislike it: Subud members! At first, I could not believe this: surely an individual's latihan experiences and subsequent life story would naturally interest others experiencing the latihan? How naive I was! It did not take me long to feel that this intuition was totally accurate. At first my merely asking questions about the contradictions I saw was enough to cause bad feeling and avoidance of me by some members. Later when I began to voice what had now become obvious criticisms things were made worse. Then when I discovered so many others feeling the same as me, my confidence grew and I began to write as well as talk about these things whenever I could. I could not believe Subud had become such an exclusive sect – anyone questioning Bapak's words or status, however gently, was all too often in line for various levels of rejection, even abuse it seemed. The result was that for many years I saw myself as separate from Subud and I joined those I knew who simply latihan alone or with like-minded people who were unbothered by the Subud organisation. I still cannot believe there are so many!

Years later I was shocked to receive repeatedly over a series of latihan that Subud **was in desperate need of renewal**. Well, I could agree with this but I just could not see why I should be receiving it so insistently. What on earth could I do about it? The result was that eventually I decided to check this receiving by involving myself in some Subud meetings again. It had been many years since I had done this. I went to National Congress, to Regional Kejiwaan Days, to Regional Council Meetings and to groups other than my own. It did not take me long to conclude that the receiving was right. Subud itself had repeatedly noted at its National Council Meetings that it now "had an ageing and declining membership." And yet it seemed either completely clueless about, or totally indifferent to, doing any more than recording this fact!

Personal Rejection

I have totally failed –as previous chapters show- to stimulate any sort of worthwhile consideration within Subud itself about all this. In fact, the fact that I have admitted to latihan with members of the opposite sex and being involved with others who do not agree with everything Bapak has said, has led to my having my Helper's Card withdrawn. I am still officially a member but without the responsibilities or status of helper. It is an attempt to maintain Bapak's authority, I suppose, by imposing one group of his ideas onto everyone. I value independence of receiving and independence of mind too much to be suitable as a helper of such a group. The upshot of this is that I have almost come to the end of my attempts to broaden Subud's appeal by emphasising what many of us believe are –and were its original- strengths which seem to have been obscured, if not lost, by an unnecessary belief system. I will continue to voice my view when I can but I guess I will now have fewer opportunities as I have been, in the view of some Helpers and members, rather sidelined. I certainly no longer have the inclination, either, to make the long journeys necessary to get to the organisations official meetings.

And Now?

Nonetheless, I still wish to honour my receivings about “bearing witness” and telling my Subud story without worrying much about how that is received. This book is probably my best attempt at doing this. I have called it: “Wild West Subud” because I am sure that is how it will be received by many Subud folk- “wild” because not disciplined by Bapak's advice sufficiently; and, of course, Western in its rejection of traditional “certainties” which are to so many Westerners no longer anything like “certain”! The Latihan is here the authority and I have found that can carry as much discipline with it as is ever likely to be necessary. I see this as the only way Subud will have a future other than as a diminishing cult-like group of narrow minded enthusiasts.

Yes, this writing has truly been like a pioneering journey across an unknown landscape! It has not gone smoothly but we are now nearing its end. What am I- let alone *you*- to make of all this?

Recently, I received, in a rather dramatic latihan, that Subud Britain was like a pregnant woman who should by now have delivered her baby. In fact, so late was it that both the baby's and the mother's life was in danger. I understood that if the birth did not happen naturally then *outside intervention would be*

necessary. At the time of this receiving I could not think what this outside intervention might be. And recently it may have happened...

The Lewes Project

The Subud group in Lewes recently came up with a plan to develop some land and had had their bid accepted by their local council in preference to one or two other bids from other different interested groups. This resulted in a blaze of bad publicity and local bad feeling directed at Subud! Much of this was expressed on a “Lewes Forum website” which anyone with a computer could access and add to. Criticism of Subud came from some local councillors in Lewes who had at first approved the bid, from “outraged” members of the public, local pressure groups and the local MP Norman Baker who “demanded a public enquiry.” In addition, the local media slated Subud and there were calls for the national media to be informed.

Subud was described as “a horrible, manipulative, religious cult, sect and organisation” and as such should not have been eligible, under the rules set by the “Equality Advisory Support Service” (brought in to advise by the local council as it considered the various bids) to even apply for the bid. Subud had claimed not to be a religion. Many locals felt that Subud had not only “lacked transparency” but been plainly “deceitful” here- it was obviously a religion! Why, you had only to look at its language: it was full of references to “God” and “worship” e.g. There was further outrage when it was discovered that Subud got its charitable status because it sought to “promote and advance religion and advance the aims of Susila Buddhi Dharma.” How on earth could it claim not to be a religion except in order to dishonestly get its bid approved?!

Gradually more and more details about Subud were made public. It seems 3 main sources were used for this: the SB Trustees and Directors Report 2012; the 2013 Handbook and the *Pewart* magazine. Things soon got extremely heated! As one member of the Lewes public put it:

“I didn’t care about Subud until I started researching the St. Anne’s bid. Now I’ll join those boycotting everything to do with them because I don’t like what I’ve read with my own eyes, in Subud’s own words.”

In particular, Bapak’s words about Gays and women led to an outcry. Bapak was quoted as saying that homosexuality is “not allowed by God” and that “the latihan can correct it” (2013 Handbook). These comments were not only highly

inflammatory to the local, and soon National, Gay community but were also commonly seen as “discredited and untrue.” The World Health Organisation had already made this clear, stating that “the professional consensus is that homosexuality is a natural variation of human sexuality and cannot be regarded as a pathological condition.” Moreover, “any therapy for curing Gays represents a serious threat to the health and well-being- even the lives- of affected people.” It was also pointed out that the anti-bullying policy of the Subud Lewes school made no mention of the different types of bullying, including that of homosexuals. Very soon support for the Gay Community grew and the national body began to organise for a legal challenge against Subud.

Similarly, Bapak’s words about women were also declared discriminatory. Again, the Handbook was quoted. E.g: “It may be that the law stipulates men and women are equal in everything but...we must have restraint. The wife must have the husband’s permission to join Subud” but for the husband to ask for his wife’s permission “would truly exceed the role of woman.” Such blatant discrimination left members of the public aghast- and very angry.

The Lewes Group were described as “nice and normal” but Subud was declared “a nasty (insidious, manipulative) homophobic, sexist, religious cult.” Things now could hardly have got worse for Subud. What could be done? It faced a legal challenge and extremely bad publicity that now threatened to spread to the national media.

First, Lewes Group tried to dissociate themselves from the Handbook by saying that they “were unaware of these words of Bapak and the ethos of the Handbook was not the ethos of Subud Lewes.” Once again, people expressed disbelief. How could a group claim to be “unaware of its Founders views”? And, anyway, it was soon pointed out that it was not Subud Lewes who were buying the land: it was Subud Britain so nothing was changed by these words.

Finally, in order to defuse the situation there came a complete retraction of, and a “whole-hearted, unequivocal apology” for Bapak’s words about homosexuality with the promise to withdraw them from the Handbook. At this point a member of the public summed the situation by saying:

“Subud’s wider activities, charitable status, beliefs and culture have quite rightly become objects of public concern and scrutiny and have been found wanting.” Another was less gentle:

“Subud has been caught with its pants down!”

In all of this there was little about the latihan, the real strength of Subud. I saw only 2 comments: one saying it seemed “a bit bizarre” and the other was about it “purifying what is wrong within” with regard to homosexuality. I wish that when the public expressed disbelief that the Lewes Group were unaware of Bapak’s offending words the point was made that Subud is about each person’s experience of the latihan and not about words, whoever says them! In other words, what we believe in Subud- whoever we are- is primarily our own affair and there is not 1 set of beliefs that anyone is expected to sign up (except perhaps in the possibilities of the latihan). In fact, Subud seeks to unite human beings whatever they believe. So then it is quite reasonable for Subud Lewes to dissociate itself from Bapak’s words and say truthfully they do not reflect their own beliefs.

I also think that a “Latihan Handbook” would have been so helpful to those members of the Lewes community who genuinely sought information about this unfamiliar and unknown group who were wanting to buy so much of their land. It might have gone some way, at least, to balancing the information that they could find. Perhaps then they would have been able to understand more about what we really are and why we are the way we are! As it was they were left to make their judgements from a belief system that was abhorrent to them. The real essence of Subud was still unknown to most of them and those that had seen it mentioned could only see it as seeming “a bit bizarre”! And to Subud members it is “fundamental” and the “essence of Subud” !

I think, too, that it would also have been helpful for Subud to have been able to offer the Lewes public and anyone interested a summary of Subud that states simply what the essentials of Subud are and shows, what many of us believe to be, the strengths of Subud.

So, here is my suggestion for a first step: a 4 page “Introduction To Subud”

Page 1: **SUBUD**

Subud is...an international charity which, based on an experience called the latihan, aims to bring together people of all religious faiths- and none- in order to improve both our individual lives and this troubled old world in which we live.

The ***latihan***...an experience, often without words, which some people have found to be very beneficial in their lives, in a variety of ways.

Some testimonies, or examples, now. Eg:

“I was at my wit’s end. I had lost my wife and family, my home, and now my job was in danger. I felt like running away (and sometimes worse) but it was the latihan and testing one evening that got me back up on my feet and showed me the next steps that led me first to be able to cope... and then to make a new life for myself”

“I had the strange experience of feeling the latihan was like a huge golden globe in my lap... and then I later discovered that this is an important symbol for “wholeness” in many fairy tales and myths, as in “Iron John.” I also learnt that this would have been seen as a very important image in many forms of therapy (like the Jungian)!

“The latihan first came to me with this weird singing which came from I know not where (was it from my heart?) and it completely surprised me! And almost as soon as it started I had an upsurge of real happiness. I wanted the whole world to share this. I just could not believe it! I had never felt so happy in my life and I so wanted to give this happiness to the rest of the world, too!”

As mentioned above, I would like to see more like this, along with longer testimonials, collected into a “Latihan Handbook” to go alongside the revised, or edited, ““Members’ Handbook”

Page 2: **Essential Subud** - headings taken from “What Is Subud?” by van Hien (available as an e-book) These give a quick overview of the basics of Subud. I give the page numbers for those who wish for more detail...

Subud is different from other “isms” (p123, 126): It is not a new religion and it has no teaching, no creed and no dogma. (p19) No Advice, Theory or Ritual is required (p139)

The one fundamental is the latihan. The very essence of the latihan is that, of ourselves, we do nothing; it is different for each one of us; it cannot be learned or taught. Our only contribution is a sincere willingness to submit to the action (p27)

The latihan is about facts, not words (p101) Personal experience is what is needed, not theory (p111); there is no need to believe what has not yet been experienced (140)

Subud is for all of humankind, irrespective of race or language, colour or nation,

belief or words (p130)

Subud is compatible with all religions. There is nothing that goes against anything in religion... or against the beliefs of those who do not follow any faith (p111)

No claims can be made about Bapak's status(114) "Pak Subuh is only Pak Subuh" (p114)

Bapak's words are "really intended to help quiet the working of your thoughts, your heart and your desires...thus making it easier for you to receive the latihan" Thinking, arguing about them etc is not the idea: that "will only be the source of fresh impurities" (p101) You should not "blindly believe...it is necessary that you yourselves should experience what can be found in the latihan" (p141)

Subud members are not better than anyone else(115) and should fulfil their worldly obligations (p120)

Propaganda is unnecessary for Subud. We are not in competition with anyone else (p156)

Each nation is to conform to its own laws and standards (p159) So Subud members are adaptable and law-abiding- isn't this the answer to the bad publicity and criticism about Subud and minorities?

Page 3: **In the Words Of the Founder Of Subud** - fuller excerpts for each of the previous headings from Bapak talks. Again, I give page numbers from "What Is Subud?" and where and when the talks were given for those who wish to see longer excerpts. Eg:

"Subud is bringing about in man the facts which he demands in preference to words...The Latihan should have priority and be regarded as fundamental for all of us" Friends' House, London August 1959 p 101

"In Subud there is no theory- there are theories enough in existing religions-but only receiving. And If people ask you what is taught in Subud, the answer is "Nothing" (p111) Subud and the Active Life pp 75-76

"The experiences or latihan of 2 people can never be the same because everyone is different from everyone else. Therefore, it is clear that there cannot be any theory or spiritual teaching in Subud because each person is different from another...this is something personal for everyone" Singapore April 1960 p104

“Bapak never claims to be a saint, a prophet or anything like that- never.”
Subud and the Active Life p72-73 p 114

“Bapak does not want you to believe anything you have not experienced yourselves; so he hopes that you will not blindly believe his explanations”
Chicago June 1959 p141

“The evidence you should bring before human society is that of your own standards of behaviour... This should be (in line) with the recognized morality and traditions of the country in which you live... By living with these realities according to the customs and traditions of each particular country, we respect the worldly and spiritual freedom of all peoples and all nations, so that nobody is bound... Each country should observe the laws of that country.” Subud and the Active Life p187- 189 p159

I believe that quotes like these show there is more to Bapak than the Forum suggests and will give a fairer and more balanced view of the man. And it shows clearly that Subud is not meant to be narrowed down into an “old religious” viewpoint. When asked why Subud had come at this time, Bapak said it was because Subud was uniquely suited to the conditions of modern life. The quotes above go some way to show this and I think this is why they should be stressed more from now on.

Page 4: Basic information about the organization and how to find out more.

So What Happened?

Well, at the time of writing nothing seems to be finally resolved. Subud Lewes is still trying to agree terms for a much scaled-down version of its original plans. The scrutiny board has found nothing wrong with the way the local Council dealt with the bids so it should eventually bear fruition. (It did not! So many conditions were imposed by the local council that Subud Britain felt it had no option but to withdraw the bid- a disappointing and sad outcome for Subud generally but especially for Subud Lewes who had worked so hard on the project.)

The Subud Handbook *has* been withdrawn and plans are afoot to issue another one that simply focuses on the practicalities of the latihan and excludes anything that might be construed as “teachings.” I see this as a huge advance. It has not gone down well with all Subud members, however. At one of the last meetings I

attended attempts were made to allow distribution of the old Handbook again but nothing came of it other than some bad feeling. I fear that there are too many pro-Bapak voices involved, though, for the Handbook to become truly teachings-free but I hope time reveals that I am wrong! Can Subud truly be more latihan-focussed and less focused on the belief system of its founder? This seems to me a critical question: if the answer is no there can surely be no widespread appeal as Bapak originally seemed to think there would be; if yes, then it is possible that the excitement of Subud's first coming to the West might be re-lived again...