

## Let's Celebrate... Bapak

“Spiritual Guides” worry me. Anyone who has lived through the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century, has more than enough evidence of the potential folly of uncritically following any charismatic authority, political, spiritual or otherwise. Did you know there are over 500 “new religious groups or cults” in this country ( 3000 in the U.S.A), many of them declaring that their leader is different from the rest and has a special role in the lives of human-kind, even though he (it is usually a *he*) is virtually unknown to anyone outside their own, often little, group? So, what about Subud then and in particular Bapak, who is described in the Constitution drawn up in 1959, as the “Spiritual Guide of Subud members”?

Well, this was very much on my mind when I discovered Subud all those years ago and it is still sometimes a major concern for modern enquirers when faced with the obvious respect this man has from more experienced Subud members. It did not take me long to feel reassured and “Bapak” has become, for me, a person to be truly “celebrated.”

My reassurance comes, first, from Bapak’s own words about himself, was then confirmed from the words of people who knew him well in Subud’s early days, and from a couple of personal experiences of my own. I wish to share this as part of my own inner prompting and as a result of a number of conversations recently with both long-standing Subud members and a few new enquirers.

I was absolutely delighted to read almost immediately in van Hien’s book (“What Is Subud?”p.34 ):

“In all this, Bapak’s function is like a school-servant, who sets out the books, opens the door, clears the rooms and arranges the tables and

chairs. When you are all in the classroom the teacher will come and give the lessons; and the teacher is not Bapak, but God Himself. Bapak is not a teacher, but only the servant of God. This is in truth Bapak's position" (Aug 1959)

(For many years I was a Headteacher- I can just imagine what I- and the rest of my staff- would have thought if judgements about our school were made *solely* on the words of the caretaker!)

At that time also Bapak cautioned against making any claims about his spiritual status, "for God alone...knows how Bapak stands before God, and it is not possible for men to know it"

"That is why Bapak never claims to be a saint, a prophet or anything like that-never. Pak Subuh is only Pak Subuh" ("Subud And The Active life pp. 72-73)

I found (and still find) these words liberating and worth celebrating. They free me from having to believe anything about this man in order to be a Subud member. They shift my focus clearly back to giving priority to the Latihan which is clearly independent of whatever beliefs one has, or does not have, about its founder. It is significant to me that the experience of the Latihan is completely independent of the man who *first* passed this on.

Having said this, it is clear to me that Bapak remains a person I respect hugely and whose life I want to celebrate. I hope you will read further because I maintain that there is no contradiction here.

I believe that there is more than enough evidence in Bapak's life, and in the experience of Subud members worldwide, to show that he was clearly a hugely gifted man. I think it would be good (for new and old members alike) to be reminded of some of these periodically. But Bapak

clearly remained a man! I think Rofe says what I mean very clearly here. Now Rofe was hugely important in Subud's history and often stayed with Bapak , sometimes talking privately well into the night. He writes :

“In Bapak it is easy to distinguish between the human element and the Divine authority. There was not a revelation every time he opened his mouth; he could and did make mistakes like any other human being...” (Rofe gives examples of a few of these mistakes) “At such times the fallible human being was speaking; but there were other times when revelation descended on him, when he was overshadowed by something greater than himself...” (The Path of Subud p99)

Finally, I wish to say that I have once had a latihan in London with Bapak present (with crowds of others!) and once had a testing session in front of Bapak (with 3 other men). In both I experienced moments of a happiness that really amounted to a *bliss* which absolutely streamed from my Inner and continued long after the latihan and the testing finished...