

CHAPTER 20: SHALL WE NOW SAY GOODBYE?

And so now this long journey has come near its end. I am honoured that you have accompanied me! But it has not all been straightforward, has it?

What, then, am I – let alone *you* - to make of all this? And, perhaps, more importantly, what happens to us now?

Well, first and foremost, I surely must repeat that this writing has been entirely about my experiences of both the latihan and of the organisation around that called Subud. I wonder what yours would be like? I must reiterate that this is very much an individual matter and your experience may be uniquely your own. This latihan is very much a “taste it and see” exercise. Yet, from such a simple act can come all manner of changes, both inwardly (ie psychologically and in “personal growth”) and outwardly (affecting the outer world of people, places and events). I am confident that most chapters (at least!) of this book show that!

I wonder how you feel about that? For yourself, I mean?

The problem for me has been the Subud structure now built solidly around the Latihan: a structure of beliefs and attitudes that I- and many others- find irrelevant to our experience and repulsive to our critical minds. We yearn for the freedom we give to each other in the latihan to be also given outside the latihan, so that we are not tied to any one set of words- no matter who utters them. This book argues that originally Subud was free in this way and needs to get back to that freedom in order to be relevant to modern life in the way its founder originally believed was right.

But for now we are stuck with that organisation, aren't we? In order to experience this potentially life-changing latihan do we have to accept this Subud structure – at least, like so many of us- *to begin with*? I am beginning to think so!

It is possible that were you to make contact with your local Subud group, you just might encounter the sort of open-minded Helpers this book argues for. It is possible! They do exist. So, it may be worth a go...If, however, that does not happen for you, then you may have to decide whether you are going to let the words and beliefs etc of others prevent you from experiencing the latihan for yourself. Just how important then is Subud- as opposed to the latihan- for you?

Is it possible for you to think that words (of others- and one's own) are simply not the fundamental or important thing here- experience of the latihan is!

What if Subud's words, like any others, are just not that significant?

What other people, including Subud members, believe is their own affair; the latihan is *the unity* behind all beliefs, therefore no words or beliefs should stop anyone experiencing the independent reality of the latihan, should they?

Alas, I know many people have been unable to take this attitude: they just cannot be personally associated with the beliefs and attitudes that Subud people they encounter express. I wish they could initially give these words less attention in order to experience the latihan and then speak from their own experience and minds after. Unfortunately, also, too many people do not feel they can stay as Subud members and hold the views expressed in this book. I left Subud myself for a number of years for this reason. As this book records, I now believe in remaining as a member (not as a helper) and expressing my views at every opportunity! I believe that the acceptance of diverse views and beliefs to be *true Subud*.

Interestingly, the internet has brought many of us disaffected members together in a way that did not happen before. In a few places this has led to ex-members organising themselves into alternative latihan groups. Currently I know of 5 such groups: 1 in Hawaii; 1 in the U.K; 1 in France and 2 in the U.S.A. They have all stepped outside of Subud and have renamed themselves into a kind of "Latihan Association." I have personal experience of the 1 in the U.K. called A.I.R (Active Inner Response). I asked its founder to explain: here are his words:

"In 1970 when I was opened I had hopes of finding a group where each person's individual unfolding process was supported and, to a large extent that is how it seemed in practice. I was never challenged or quizzed about my personal beliefs and met a variety of people of all ages and opinions. In 1988 my wife decided to leave Subud...I was by then also noticing that Bapak's ideas were often trotted out as if they were a new creed or simply "the Facts." I was becoming uncomfortable and also disappointed because I had great hopes once that the latihan could be a widespread unifying force in a fragmented world...

For this reason I put much time and effort into contributing to a broader, more inclusive stewardship style for Subud. Despite many "reformers" the main

direction taken by those representing Subud seemed to get more and more dogmatic over the next two decades...Despite all this I have a very staunch and steadfast side to my nature and only considered starting an independent group because several applicants, newer members and a few long-standing ones all fell foul of the same group of helpers in a short time spell and all took leave of Subud...And most of those who left Subud were still interested in practising the latihan. We met, had email and phone exchanges and eventually 10 of us co-founded the new group in Ipswich, U.K. We formed in 2013. Since then others have joined in, several travelling 60-90 minutes for latihan and a number of people new to the latihan are finding value in it and attending regularly.

We gave this latihan group a new name so we could explore a simpler stewardship approach without Subud feeling responsible. In AIR ...we are not wedded to the following 10 Subud conventions:

1. Helper system

In AIR, all are equal and peer support is given and received by all willing.

2. 3 months wait to be opened

In AIR a person makes inquiries, talks with practitioners and joins in when (s)he feels ready

3. Standard recommended opening statement

In AIR a person, having decided, may simply join the group exercise without any ceremony. Or he/she may make an intention silently or aloud, in his/her own words.

4. Membership requirement

In AIR we recognise that there is no way for an inquirer to know in advance how important it will be, and so there is no requirement to sign any form or to be a member.

5. Advice against “mixing” or “meditation”

In AIR we respect any individual’s interest in meditation, yoga, healing, psychology etc. The only advice is to refrain from consciously using any other methods during the half-hour exercise.

6. No gurus or spiritual leaders

In AIR we consider that everyone, whether experienced or new, has his/her own preferred sources of wisdom, and no wisdom is officially ranked above any other.

7. Attitudes that close down conversations

There is no advice that discourages logical thinking, planning, asking questions, challenging orthodoxy; no taboo about discussing spiritual matters, reading diverse spiritual sources, psychological literature, political or ecological engagement, passion etc. For those who want, there is a sharing session (talking together/peer support) before the exercise.

8. Assumptions about gender

AIR supports men and women in following their own choices. There are no “guidelines” concerning women’s periods, dress code, subservience to husbands, gay relationships, a duty to have many children etc. There is no taboo against mixed gender latihan, though the aim is to provide people with a choice.

9. Prohibition on advertising

The AIR group have no desire to persuade anyone to do the exercise and no concerns that inhibit networking or letting others know that it exists.

10. Opposition to changes

In many spiritual communities who have an inspirational teacher, after his/her death, members often stick closely to past advice rather than innovate. This can lead to staleness and may stunt initiative. AIR is based on the idea of emergent learning. We learn from one another, from practical experience, improve and adapt as we go along.

We are on an ongoing learning curve and welcome all feedback including constructive criticism. This is a “work in progress” ”

It is, of course, possible that as more people communicate via the internet, more such independent groups will form and thereby offer the latihan experience without the Subud structure and framework. But, as yet, they are “tender young shoots” and it is too early to say if these groups will become more (or less) widespread. It is clear, though, that, at the moment, you will be very lucky to find such a group near you.

Before groups like AIR came into being an attempt was made to provide a forum for Subud debate on what was called a “Subud Vision” website. Alas, Subud did not welcome this and refused to include mention of it on its own “official website.” Nonetheless it attracts a variety of concerned members and ex-members who have contributed many challenging, interesting and stimulating articles. In the preface to the 2007 book of articles, the Editors write:

“Subud has always prided itself on being open to a wide variety of beliefs, religions, approaches and people. Many people, however, experience the Subud reality as insular and conformist. There are certain beliefs, rituals and practices that have taken hold and have become- despite our best intentions- a kind of unofficial Subud dogma. The existence of this dogma constricts our future, and belies our statements about the kind of community we are.

On the whole, Subud members are an independent bunch. Many don’t subscribe to the dogma, and even more don’t subscribe to large parts of it. Some just tolerate it. Others have found the prevailing belief system so alienating that they have left Subud. The dogma is supported by the tacit cultural injunctions: don’t think, don’t contradict, be patient, accept. Many members go along with these injunctions out of politeness, or because they’re just there for the latihan, not to change the culture.

The editors of Subud Vision felt that it was important at this stage in Subud’s history for some views “outside the box” to be collected and shared. To us it seems likely that if Subud continues down its well-worn path, it will simply die. The dogma needs to be questioned. This questioning calls upon an important human capacity that conjoins two Subud taboo words: critical thinking.

We were gratified by the flow of articles, ideas and support. In this collection you’ll find questioning, analysis and proposed alternatives for almost every aspect of Subud life...”

I can verify the last sentence from my own experience and 9 years since it was written the internet discussion remains as lively as ever.

So there have been a number of calls for change for a number of years now.

However the fact remains that you, as a newcomer, are likely to encounter a Subud that simply ignores all this and perpetuates attitudes and beliefs that you

may find unappealing, old-fashioned, uneducated and even downright offensive! What then are you to do?

My Own Example

A week before my first latihan, I almost withdrew from Subud because of the formality and narrowness of the “Procedures For Openings” which I felt was contrary to what I understood- and liked- Subud to be (see Chapters 15 and 16). So many people had put such a lot into the preparation for this evening, however, and some were travelling such long distances to attend, that I “went along with it,” even though I did not like it, or even agree with it. Now, of course, I am *so* glad that I did!

There may be an important lesson for you to consider here because *had I withdrawn my application to join, I would not have:*

- Encountered an experience of *Something New* in my life at 35 years old which presaged many other new and unexpected life-changes which continue to this day
- experienced so many positive, uplifting, life-enriching- and sometimes amazing- latihans. The variety of the latihan’s manifestations continue to surprise me even now, after nearly 40 years practice. The latihan has prompted me to: sing, chant, shout, laugh, cry, dance, run and move my body in various ways; I have felt a whole and wide range of feelings, including real joy and compassion; I have been surprised by sudden ideas, changes of perspective and mind. (See Ch 2, eg) This has often led to outer, practical changes in my life (See especially the chapters to do with my work)
- experienced the latihan as a kind of therapy, prompting both self – expression and personality growth. I, as an introverted thinker (see Appendix 3) have clearly expressed more of the other aspects of my personality than I would have done without the latihan – especially physical movements (like dance) and singing , both of which I am at my most inhibited in my ordinary life. The latihan has shown needs in me for growth, confidence, activity and other personal qualities and given me the

wherewithal to achieve them. This has led to many outer changes for me - of places, people, situations etc (See especially the Chapters to do with my work, my homes and my relationships with the people around me and the people I have lived with!)

- experienced moments of greater than normal happiness **with no outer cause and coming purely from some deeper and previously unknown part of myself**. I am not naturally an optimist, or even a positive thinker but I have known moments in the latihan of real joy and a happiness so great I have wanted to share these feelings with the whole world! (See my first experience, in the car on the way home after my first meeting with a Subud group (Ch 1) ... in many, many latihan like the Kenfield Hall latihan (Ch 1)... latihan with Bapak (Ch 2)... testing with Bapak (Ch11)...eg)
- experienced many mood-changing moments in my life both in the set latihan sessions and in spontaneous latihan moments at other times in my ordinary life. I have lost count, eg, of the number of times that negative feelings at the beginning of my day (anxiety, depression, frustration, loneliness, eg) have been transformed by a quiet reaching out to the latihan into positive feelings that include energy, enthusiasm and excitement...opposite feelings, in fact. As you may imagine, this has so often made a **huge** difference to my daily life!
- sometimes this has also included a surprising uprush of ***uncharacteristically confident feelings***, especially in my work- see the Headship interview and Governor's AGM (Ch 9)... Inspections (CH 6, 11, 14) eg.
- avoided a complete breakdown because of the presence of the latihan in my life and received ***clear, specific and practical guidance*** which enabled me to rebuild a new and better life for myself and my family. (See: Ch 6)

- survived some really bleak and challenging times - the loss of my first wife and a changed relationship with my children (Ch 6, 7)... living at the Schoolhouse as a single parent (Ch 7, 8)... failure of my second marriage (Ch 13) eg
- received extremely welcome *practical help and outer changes clearly and closely linked to the latihan*- especially my work (Ch 3, 6, 9,11)...and related to the Schoolhouse (Ch 7) eg
- experienced surprising insights into my own personality as well as the inner character of people around me – see Ch 1: “Seeing Myself and Others In A New Way”..Ch2 “another unflattering revelation”...Ch3: “The urge to personal growth” eg
- had convincing evidence of *more* in life than I had previously known – see Ch 4 and Ch 6 for some spiritualist-type of experiences and the many, many examples of synchronicity given in this book...
- experienced some rare moments of blissful unity with my surroundings and, especially the people around me- see the Kenfield Hall latihan (Ch 1) and Latihan (Ch 2) and testing (Ch 11) with Bapak.
- received unmistakable guidance, and the undoubted support, of the latihan consistently for my almost 40 years of practice which has had undoubted beneficial effects to just about all areas of my life.

Imagine : all this could have been lost to me if I had turned away from the latihan because of the discomfort I felt with the procedure for openings laid down in the “Advice And Guidance For Helpers” Handbook. What a massive loss! Who knows how my life would have then gone? What I do know is it could not possibly have gone better without the Latihan experience. Of that I am as sure as a person can be...

AND PLEASE REMEMBER:

I think it was Fritz Perls who said that there were 3 kinds of words, or conversations, in life: “chickenshit, cowshit and bullshit.” Never was this truer than with regards to Subud because one of the unique features of Subud is that the latihan is fundamentally based on *experience and not on dogma, belief, theory or even any words.* (See Ch15) So apart from a few words about the latihan (especially about preparing for it) words have a minimal role in Subud. If Subud Helpers forget that, it is a problem but, as I argue here, it need not be an insurmountable one- just shelve what you hear until after you have received the experience and then make up your own mind.

In conclusion, so unusual is this that I wish to repeat it because it could make a huge difference to your life as it did to mine:

- The Latihan remains free of all, words, beliefs, statements.
- Therefore, we do not need to be so concerned about **any** of these words, beliefs or statements in order to receive this potentially life-changing latihan. In short, my experience leads me to say that we should allow nothing and nobody to prevent us from experiencing the latihan: the benefits are potentially too great!

Perhaps the best attitude is to approach the latihan with **a willing suspension of both belief and disbelief!**

If some Subud people put so much importance on words, do **you** need to?

Unfortunately, with so much of Subud being the way it is at this time, some “biting of the lip” may be required- at least, initially.

Simply do not get involved in much discussion or dispute about anything in Subud that can be construed as “teachings.” After the Lewes affair (see Ch 19) this is said to be the way forward anyway and is supposed to be the brief for a new, revised Handbook (currently being compiled).

Let your mantra be: **Experience first; Explanations after.**

And, then, after you have received the latihan?

Your problems may come when, in spite of much latihan experience, you still cannot go along with the Subud teachings and theories.

Perhaps then you will add your voice to mine, and the many others like mine, and together we may cause change...Or, maybe, we will together help to support a new and different **Latihan Association?** Who knows?!

To withdraw at the beginning (as I nearly did) or to leave (as I once did) admits defeat, maintains a stifling status quo and, most important of all, ***is to deny oneself the many and undoubted possible benefits of the latihan.***

But if we go ahead and all stay... who knows?

So perhaps it is time, now, for your own “pioneering adventure” to begin? ***Is it?***