

# “I Told You So!” - Or Lessons From The Lewes Project

(Compiled From Comments By Members of the Public As Seen On the “Lewes Forum” Website)

Some truly startling outer events now occurred in Lewes that actually caused me to wonder if they were not the “outside intervention” that my receiving had said was necessary for Subud to be reborn, firstly in this country and then across the world!

It all began excitingly enough with the Subud Lewes group deciding to bid for some land in order to promote a Subud enterprise. To do this it had to put in a bid to the local council who would consider it along with any others it might receive. The result was that Subud was thrust into the public eye for the first time in several decades.

Who could have foreseen what would happen next?!

As members of the Lewes public began to find out about Subud (initially from 3 main places: The SB Trustees And Director’s Report For The Year 2012; The 2013 Handbook and the Pewarta magazine) there was increasing hostility towards Subud expressed with a vehemence that became truly worrying. Criticism of Subud came from some local councillors who had granted the bid to Subud Lewes in the first place, “outraged” individuals, pressure groups, and the MP Norman Baker, who demanded a public enquiry.

The whole thing, being documented on the “Lewes Forum,” was easily accessed by anyone with a computer. Now there was no hiding place and not only did 5 out of the 7 criticisms that had been rejected for consideration at the Congress previously now have to be talked about, they also had to be acted on.

Subud was described variously as a “horrible religious cult, sect or organization” and as such should not have been eligible, under the rules set by the “Equality Advisory Support Service” (brought in to advise the Council as it considered the various bids) to even apply for the land.

Subud had claimed not to be a religion. Many locals declared themselves

“outraged” by this, pointing out that Subud got its charitable status on the grounds that it sought “to promote and advance religion and advance the aims and principles of the worship of God known as Susila Budhhi Dharma!” You only had to look at the language the group used with its endless references to God and “worship” etc.

As one local, disbelievingly, said

“Subud has a lot of eggs stacked in a religious basket for something that isn’t a religion.”

Subud was accused of “at best, lacking transparency; at worst being deceitful.” It looked to many as if Subud had said it was not a religion in order to “flout the rule against religious groups bidding.”

To most non-Subud people for Subud to claim not to be a religion simply “beggars belief.”

Some people were shocked to discover that some of the activities in the locality ( like “Living Well, Dying Well” workshops ) which were well known to them, also had this Subud connection which had not been publicly made clear previously. There seemed to be an appalling lack of transparency with this group, too.

Feelings were running very high at this point:

“I didn’t care about Subud,” said one local, “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 recorded in the Handbook about Gays and women led to an outcry of horror!

Bapak is quoted as saying that homosexuality is “not allowed by God” and that the latihan can put it right! Well, this is a traditional religious view for some religions like Islam and it is a view that has added immeasurably to the suffering of untold numbers of human beings. But to the educated Western world it is now a thoroughly discredited view.

The World Health Organisation is clear about this, stating that “the professional consensus is that homosexuality is a natural variation of human sexuality and cannot be regarded as a pathological condition” and that “any therapy for curing it represents a serious threat to the health and well-being- even the lives- of affected people” And any kind of discrimination in this country (and beyond) is now clearly illegal.

The Handbook is as forthrightly discriminatory towards women, stating: “It may be that the law stipulates that men and women are equal in everything but...we must have restraint” and women must have their husband’s permission to join Subud but not so the husband- that would “truly exceed the role of woman.”

Poor Lewes group! They were called “nice and normal” people but Subud was described as “a horrible (nasty, insidious, manipulative...) homophobic, sexist religious cult.”

The local publicity for Subud could hardly have been worse and very soon there were calls repeatedly on the Forum for the National media to be informed. What could be done?

It is said on the Forum that the Lewes group first tried to dissociate themselves from the Handbook saying that they were unaware of these words of Bapak and that the ethos of the Handbook was not the ethos of Subud Lewes! People found it hard to believe that a group could be “unaware” of its Founders views and anyway, it was pointed out that it wasn’t Subud Lewes who were buying the land: it was Subud Britain, so nothing was changed by these comments.

Finally, in an attempt to, apparently, defuse the situation (there was now talk of a legal challenge) there was a complete retraction of, and “whole-hearted, unequivocal apology” for, Bapak’s words concerning homosexuality with the promise to withdraw them from the Handbook.

At this point, one of the calmer voices summed things up by saying:

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

much more succinct:

“Subud has been caught with its pants down.” Oh dear!

So how does all this relate to the criticisms so unanimously rejected for consideration at the national Congress?

The first 3 were: 1) an insufficient focus being currently given to the Latihan and an overemphasis on 2) the authority of Bapak and (3) his words.

Well, clearly the public of Lewes on investigating this unheard of “Subud” found very little other than Bapak’s *teachings*. There were only two mentions of the latihan on the Forum, saying it sounded “a bit bizarre” and the highly objectionable one about “purifying” what is “wrong within” us in reference to homosexuality.

Bapak’s words about everything else fuelled a storm of protest. I wish that when the public expressed disbelief that the Lewes group was “unaware” of the offending words the point was made very clearly that Subud is primarily about each person’s *experience of the Latihan* and not about “words” whoever says them!! In other words what you believe in Subud- whoever you are- is primarily your own affair and there is no one set of beliefs that anyone in Subud is expected to sign up to (except, perhaps, belief in the possibilities of the Latihan). In fact, Subud seeks to unite human beings whatever they believe. So it is then quite reasonable for Subud Lewes to “dissociate” itself from Bapak’s words and say, truthfully, they do not reflect their own beliefs.

As it was Subud was not judged (how could it be?) on the latihan but on all those words of Bapak about other things! And these were quickly seen to be not only divisive but offensive! The Latihan is fundamental to Subud but was lost amongst Bapak’s words about religion, Gays and women, eg.

I wish that as well as “Bapak’s Advice and Guidance” there was an equally accessible “Testimony To The Latihan” book which reflects individuals’ experiences etc of the Latihan. It could include simple statements like:

“I often begin my latihan feeling stressed and negative but then end it feeling as

relaxed and content as a cat curled up in front of a glowing fire” as well as longer testimonies, of course. Perhaps the public would then see what we are really about and why we are the way we are! And perhaps then the Latihan would be seen more for what it is, rather than a strange “bizarre” practice with no meaning or understanding at all.

2 comments on the Forum with regard to these criticisms stand out for me. The first came after a rather heated exchange and a member of the Lewes public simply said to the Subud helper:

“I would just encourage you to become a more questioning person.” So many of us intellectuals in Subud (yes, we do exist!) shouted for joy at this.

The second had rather more of a sting. In response to the endless repetitions of Bapak’s words he asks:

“Do you Subud people have some sort of “collective unconscious” and share the same brain”!

Criticisms 4 (Helpers having “Spiritual Authority” as “instructors” etc) and 5 (Testing) were not directly mentioned on the Forum

With regard to criticism 6 (the religiosity of Subud) the suggestion on the Forum was that if Subud was truly not a religion then it should “end all the religious bits and pieces.” With regard to the bid surviving the new “Scrutiny Board” (recently appointed to review the whole bidding process), the only other alternative would be for the council to change its previous rule and allow bids from “religious organizations.” And if they did that might not other religious organizations, previously deterred, wish to make bids?

With regard to criticism 7 (Subud is discriminatory), there have been some interesting comments on the Forum. If Subud was truly not homophobic, could some Subud Gays speak out and support this? And one could also say if Subud is for people of all religions- and none- could some of their voices also be heard? Where are the Buddhist, Hindu, let alone agnostics, atheist etc “explanations” also?

The issue of gender equality remains, although some Subud helpers are calling for Bapak's words about this to be removed also because "they have been ignored in the West for decades." There are others who support the words however.

This issue came up in my experience a few years ago and caused some difficulties for the women concerned. In the end the advice of the "Equality Commission" was sought and they said that the issue would only finally be resolved through a test case but, in their opinion, this was clearly not in the "spirit of the Act." So I guess Subud had been warned. And I am told that at that time, also, a lady in the North of England did, in fact, threaten legal action about this and that resulted in the demand "for the husband's permission" being withdrawn.

Finally, back to Criticisms 1, 2 and 3. As soon as Bapak's words on homosexuality were removed the question of Bapak's authority on anything was then challenged. Eg:

"If Bapak was so wrong about homosexuality and the subservient role of women, then how can anything he says have relevance at all?" and

"If Subud is based on what are clearly untruths, flights of fancy or delusions...what use are they to anyone?"

Can we rise to this challenge now and in the future?

I would again suggest that the answer should come from our combined experience of the Latihan. Maybe it is time for us to rely and focus on the Latihan and its experiences more than we have done before?

And I would suggest, too, that we be clearer as a group on how Subud is different from religion and stress those aspects that so many of us find so dear. These are so clearly recorded in the early books about Subud and, especially, in van Hien's "What Is Subud?" These are to me - and to so many others- the hugely attractive strengths of Subud.

The non-Subud world in Lewes have seen the negative side of Subud and it has horrified and alarmed them. And it has repelled many of them. Can we now show them we are more than this? Or at least can we take these criticisms on board and

have a long hard look at ourselves?

What can now be done to counteract this negative publicity?

I would like to see Subud emphasise its strengths now and I know that, in many cases, it is these that led many of us to join Subud in the first place! It has also led to many more new people showing initial interest nowadays which teachings about Bapak and his beliefs have subsequently alienated.

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, mainly without words, which some people have found to be very beneficial in their lives, in a variety of ways.

Some testimonies, or examples, now (as the cat one above) 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"!

"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."

As mentioned above, I would like to see more like this along with longer stories, collected into a “Latihan Book” to go alongside the revised, or edited, “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 groups and “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 behavior...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.