

## **CHAPTER ONE: SUBUD, A BEGINNING**

*A shopping expedition; a book and a neighbour; a cascade of little experiences and coincidences ; a trip to Ipswich-eventually and my experience in the car afterwards; a friend mysteriously helped; my wife surprises me; my first two latihans; 35 years old and I see things about myself and others that surprise me; first words about my family; an invaluable lesson at Bromley; latihan at National Headquarters*

Sometimes life's biggest changes come in the most ordinary of situations--and completely unexpectedly, too. So it was for me on that grey, gloomy, windy, routine-bound day some 30+ years ago.

There I was standing outside the supermarket, minding several bags of shopping, tired and somewhat bored. My wife, out of compassion (or was it irritation, wanting to get the last bits of the shopping done without my interference?) had parked me, and the heavy shopping, out of the way and disappeared into the crowded market. With nothing to do but wait I looked, without much interest, on a familiar scene but... what was that? A bookstall, a second-hand bookstall! On all the visits I had made here, I had never noticed that here before. Second-hand books are an irresistible magnet to me so, like a supermarket advert, I struggled across to them.

And there it was... John Bennett's "Concerning Subud" Now I had read this book over 10 years previously. I had enjoyed it then. I thought it would be a good book to have for one of those occasional times when I had nothing better to read. "How much is this one?" I asked. Wait for it... "20p" came back the answer!

What a successful day's shopping!

As it was the book remained on my bookshelf for weeks, if not months. Then one day my next-door neighbour came in for one of our much enjoyed "What have you been reading?" type chats. Great they were. Well, while I was making the coffee, he spotted the book on my shelf and, inquisitive as me, he asked to borrow it. On his next visit, he began talking about some of the ideas in the book and very quickly I realised I had forgotten more than I remembered about this thing called "Subud". So... I re-read the book. I was totally unprepared for what was to happen next and, especially over the next few months...

You see my first encounter with Subud had been the early outrageous newspaper reports around when I was about 17. "Shouting, Screaming,

Snarling...And they say it brings them closer to God!" was the gist of one front page article of one newspaper I read. It all sounded more like some sort of worked-up, contrived psycho-drama than a way to get "closer to God" to me. "Is there no end to the stupidity of adults?" I thought. Anyway this time on reading the book I felt Subud to be nothing short of being "a beautiful flower in God's Garden".

How refreshing it was to read that this Subud was all about experience, not belief. It was not another religion standing apart from other groups. In fact one could not only belong to Subud and another religion, it was directly stated that the experience of Subud could help one to understand one's religion better from FIRST-HAND experience. The whole emphasis was clearly on one's own direct experience, not on dogma, statements of belief or anything like that. Clearly there were enough of all these things in the world. Subud was offering a means to experience the FUNDAMENTALS of life for oneself. And more than this there was also the really exciting and hopeful news that Subud had come at this time, not just because modern people wanted proof from their own experience, but also because it could actually help the world at a particularly dangerous time---modern warfare could actually destroy the whole planet in ways too horrendous to imagine. In fact, it was possible that Subud was nothing short of a last chance for us. What an exciting possibility. Let's try anything, I thought. Anything that just might help...

At this time I had no intention of joining Subud or any organisation. I had visited a number of groups in all their million and one varieties and had concluded that whilst I might enjoy a few friends connected with these very different "ways", I could not commit myself to any one way. I had concluded that I was a "non-joiner." I could feel close to some things in just about all the groups I encountered but what I did not like was their exclusive nature or the suggestion (however slight or subtle) that each group was "superior" to all the others. Just because something worked for one person that does not mean it is necessarily the one and only way for everyone in the world. Wouldn't a variety of ways best serve a variety of peoples? Certainly it was never more true than now that there are a variety of religions and paths for a number of "tastes." I liked the idea that Subud was not a new religion but rather was "in all religions and none."

I saw from my second-hand book that it had been published over 20 years ago. I wondered if Subud was around still or whether, like so many other '60s groups, it had burned brightly for an exciting but short time,

promising so much and then disappearing just as quickly without trace. It was then that fate seemed to take another surprising hand in the game.

Everywhere I went Subud seemed to be mentioned. More second-hand books turned up (I especially liked van Hien's "What Is Subud?"). I particularly remember being early for a bus connection at Dartford and as I often did when I had minutes to spare I went to check out the local library. The first book I saw was Jacob Needleham's "The New Religions" which has an excellent chapter on "Subud." Then there was Lawrence Barter's "Towards Subud"... Anyway all this had the undoubted effect of keeping Subud in my mind so that, in the end, I found an address in one of the old books ("Cricklewood Lane") and wrote off for more information. Certainly I was not asking to join... I just wanted to see if it was still around!

Eventually, I got a reply. Cricklewood Lane had ceased to be a Subud address a long time ago but my letter had been forwarded so that I was told that my nearest group was about 1½ hrs. drive away in Norwich. Actually, that turned out to be untrue... The Norwich group informed me that there was in fact a member in Ipswich. It turned out that there was a little group meeting every Wednesday at Ipswich and that was to be my first point of contact... eventually. Norwich also sent me a most off-putting little book called "The Basis And Aim Of Subud" which was ½ Indonesian and ½ English. The latter was as incomprehensible to me as the Indonesian! Strangely enough when I later contacted Ipswich they, too, sent me another copy of this obscure little blue book. Obviously a quirky lot, I thought. I was in no rush to go down to Ipswich. I guess I had long ago lost any exciting expectations of what any group might do for me. But then something else happened that was going to force Subud onto my attention in a most peculiar way. Every time I thought of Subud (even just the word) I experienced the fresh, clean smell of bathroom soap! I felt refreshed and inwardly clean! This happened so often that, once again, it intrigued me. Eventually I wrote off to arrange a meeting with the Ipswich folk.

### *A Visit To The Ipswich Group- And Afterwards*

Little did I think on that first 50 minute journey through the dark and winding lanes of Suffolk that I would be doing this journey twice a week in all weathers--- and that the journey would fly by! As it was, my first trip to see the Ipswich group gave me nothing more than mild feelings of anticipation. When I arrived, I was surprised to see that the group

consisted that night of two men! There were no women. I was soon to learn that Subud was quite keen to keep the sexes separate---was that because its founder was a Muslim? Possibly. This surprised me at the time. I had expected Subud to be somewhat closer to modern thinking than that. Anyway, it was going to be some years before this was to become a hurdle for me. At the moment I was simply checking things out...More than anything, I was impressed at the time by the fact that these two men found this Subud so impressive that they came to its meeting week in and week out and had done so for YEARS. Often it was just the two of them--- sometimes three. Often, also, two- sometimes more- women met in a room next door. I wondered what the pulling power of this Subud was on this little group? It wasn't long before I was given a little idea--- I was at that time a shy, rather quiet person in company. Usually it took me a long time to feel comfortable with strangers. That was not so on this occasion! As soon as I stepped into the narrow, timber- framed, low- ceilinged room I felt both confident and at home. I don't remember what the conversation was about but I do remember it being surprisingly easy. However the real surprise was still to come...

It happened as soon as I drove away from the hall at the end of the meeting. Before I even got out of the car park this strange singing occurred to me! Suddenly my feelings soared and I sang this unrecognisable song. I knew the tune. It was "Amazing Grace" (not one I was ever given to singing but certainly a favourite of mine when other people sang it!) The really strange thing about it all was the words: they sounded foreign; they sounded like "Mane, Mane" sung over and over again and to this tune of "Amazing Grace"!!!! I remember wondering to myself if I was singing about "Money, Money"... And yet this singing made me feel so exuberant: happy and expansive. Soon I wanted the whole world to join in. Wow! What on earth was going on? After a while, the singing stopped and I was aware then of a change in my breathing. Inexplicably, it became deeper and deeper; it acquired a slower rhythm than usual. Again this felt very good, very liberating. Then the breathing changed and it seemed to become, in some way, sexual- as in sexual intercourse! This bothered me a little so I thought I'd better bring the whole experience to an end which I did immediately.

By this time my 50 minute journey was almost over. For the last part of my ride in the car (yes, I was driving) I tried to make sense of what had just happened. Later I was to find an amazing connection for my experience which was to excite me no end. For the moment, I simply concluded that I had had a Subud experience first- hand; it had made me

feel very happy, full of well-being. Nothing quite so strange had ever happened so dramatically to me before! Yet, it did not stop me functioning in the world---I carried on driving, probably better than usual because the experience made me more alert, more awake. And while all this was going on, not once was I not in control. When I wanted to stop I did so immediately. This I see as being a very important aspect of the Subud experience...Whatever dramatic thing may happen one is never entranced or controlled in any way. There is no violation of the person; more an extension, a changing and, as I was to discover, something of a real “flowering” of the personal.

The days that followed this experience were extremely interesting. I did not feel anxious about meeting the group again. My interest was mainly on the inner experiences that were just beginning for me. At this stage I had no idea where they were going to lead. Then one afternoon I came across what one of the Subud books called “probably one of the oldest prayers known to man: Om MANE Padme Hum.” I felt sure this was my mystery word! Certainly I had been singing it in a worshipful, prayerful way (well, I thought so!) and I learnt that this prayer was used in fact as a mantra and certainly I had been singing it over and over myself all the way through the tune of “Amazing Grace.”

Guess what? There was still more to come...

I think it was probably at about this time that I began to wonder if I should apply to become a Subud member. The procedure was simple: one just had to ask to join and then wait three months during which time one was encouraged to find out as much as possible about Subud before joining. One was encouraged to meet as many Subud folk as possible before taking the plunge. All very sensible I thought but even so I could not do this without a lot of thought: I could not do it lightly! There were still “indications” being given to me so that I could not leave the decision alone for long. I was, and I still am, very critical of these intuitions or inner feelings whether they are “dramatic” or not. It was here that I discovered that I could test these inner experiences. This was going to stand me in good stead over the coming years as I hope will later become clear. Anyway for now, in my desperation for guidance, I simply stumbled into it. “If Subud was truly a good thing,” I thought rather simplistically as I now realise “then it will benefit someone else, not just myself.” This seems a strange idea of mine now but I have to say it worked--- again in a dramatic and surprising way. Are you ready for this? I don’t think so! Here goes:

A day or two after having these thoughts, I had a phone call from a friend. Alas, she was having a horrendous time of it. All I could do was listen because I had no answers. I DID NOT mention Subud; I did not even think of it. Then came something of a minor miracle: a week later my friend rang again. "You know, John," she said EXCITEDLY, "since I rang you last week I have had going round and round in my head LIKE A MANTRA (her words, not mine!!) the song "Amazing Grace," do you know it? It has KEPT ME SANE this week." And then she went on to recount the true extent of her troubles. Suffice to say that she had feared for her sanity and believed she had been dramatically and beautifully saved from "disintegration" by the hymn "sung like a mantra!"

### *And Now My Wife Really Surprises Me!*

For me this was amazing stuff. Still I did not know how to handle it. Surprisingly, perhaps, I kept all this to myself, feeling sure that if I told anyone about it they would think me mad (I bet you're tempted aren't you?). Amazingly, I still did nothing about it all---except think. By now I was sure Subud was "a good thing" and obviously it was, in answer to my first question, still very much alive. In fact it had clearly shown me something of its inner reality. Yet I still could not just join. I don't really know why. Perhaps the idea of travelling to Ipswich (32 miles away) for two evenings a week was too off-putting. Or perhaps I simply did not want to be thought of as some sort of crank by my friends...In fact, I set up another "test." This was one that I felt sure would be highly unlikely to be positive.

This time I thought to myself: "If we had a new car, yes, I would join this strange group" Now I felt confident that for this to come about something highly unlikely (at least!) was going to have to happen because my wife and I had only just recently discussed--at length- what to do with the money she was now getting for her new job. We had most definitely agreed not to get a new car! With that, as I thought, finally dismissed, there in the kitchen, stood my wife about a week later, saying quite surprisingly: "I think we SHOULD get a new car!" With our "definite agreement" now a disagreement, I simply said: "Well, if we get a new car I think I'll give this Subud a try. It will mean my going to Ipswich two nights a week." A simple "O.K." followed. There was to be no going back now.

### *My First Two Group Latihans*

This time I looked forward to the occasion with some excitement and a lot more interest. While I waited for the day of my officially joining the Subud Association, I still got those little “indications” to encourage me. In times of doubt I would “smell” and feel a real inner cleanliness: yes there was that smell of bathroom soap again and sure enough I would then feel as relaxed and clean as if I was in a hot, beautiful bath!

Finally, the day arrived for my “opening”---this is the word given to describe your first latihan, presumably when you first become open to the latihan (the spiritual practice of Subud). You sit quietly with members of your own sex for about 10 minutes or so, then you stand still while a person more experienced than you reads out a statement about the latihan and your wish to take part. Then you are asked to say “I believe in Almighty God and wish only to worship Him” or “I wish to believe in Almighty God and to worship only Him.” In one of his talks at Cilandak in 1976, Bapak- the founder of Subud (more about him later)- made it clear that even an atheist can be welcomed into Subud: sincerity is more important than belief or the wish to believe. Many people at the talk witnessed Bapak introduce this self-proclaimed atheist to the latihan (i.e. “opened” him in Subud parlance.) whereupon the man fell upon his knees and in tears excitedly announced that now he “understood!” It was clearly a life-changing moment for the “atheist” and a delightful tribute to the power of the latihan to all present.

My own first group latihan was a surprisingly low-key affair as, I am told, it is for many people. There were more people there than usual because people had come down from Norwich to be part of this special occasion. Openings are usually seen as special and, later when I took part in other people’s first latihans, I experienced how different, indeed special, they could be for people already “used to” the latihan experience. My own opening was quiet, still and uneventful for me. I just stood still the whole time and experienced very little for myself---except for the latihans of the people around me! Someone was shouting something I could not understand (it sounded loud and unpleasant); someone else was running round the room making what I can only describe as little whoops of joy! Most captivating of all for me was the man I sensed as next to me on my right (one is advised to close one’s eyes in the latihan, possibly to avoid unnecessary distraction!): he was singing what sounded like a monkish chant. I had always enjoyed the tape I had of Gregorian chants and this was a bit like that. The joy of it for me was to feel that I was actually witnessing a chant being, I was sure, spontaneously sung and made up on the spot! It was not a “chant” I had heard before or was ever likely to hear again. The whole point of the Subud latihan is simply to

relax as much as one can manage, try to maintain an open mind without thinking of anything in particular and certainly without trying to “control” one’s mind or anything like that: in fact to try to decrease one’s self-will so that it simply becomes a willingness to follow whatever may happen. As I said before, one is never out of control (though it may appear that way to other’s!) or without one’s critical faculties. One remains as the witnessing self---with more to witness rather than less for a lot of the time. So, although nothing much happened to me in this latihan in the sense that I didn’t sing, dance, shout, run or leap around, chant, pray or make horrendous noises (all of which I was to do later!) I did feel the authenticity of the latihans of the people around me and especially of the “chanter.” So after my opening I felt pleased to have taken part and with no doubts about the spontaneous power and authenticity of this Subud latihan.

My second group latihan a few days later could not have been more different! Even the venue was a contrast. My first latihan had been in a low-ceilinged, timber-framed hall that belonged to the Unitarian church. Most Subud groups meet in hired halls (the Quaker halls are most often hired, I think). I guess this is because most groups have only a small number of members who cannot, although in general they would like to, afford their own Subud hall. For my second latihan I travelled to one of the most attractive of little Suffolk villages where a long-standing Subud member had kindly made her beautiful old cottage available to us. I walked to the cottage along a quiet, sleepy street; mostly deserted except for a row of ducklings following their mother along the middle of the street, presumably to the mill pond at the bottom. What a beautiful, rural setting! At my first latihan there had been a gathering of about 10 or more men; at this there was myself and....one other man! And what a latihan this turned out to be for me. Suddenly I started singing wordlessly, powerfully, noisily but not disharmoniously. And, miraculously, the “song” seemed to originate in my chest, not my mouth! It, again, carried a delightful range of feelings with it: real happiness (lovely!), exuberance and a sense of well-being which seemed to have to express itself through me in this way. Somehow, too, it made me feel confident in expressing myself in this way--- thoughts about what my companion was making of it or of how disturbing this singing might be to this sleepy village were soon dismissed as trivial compared to the enormity of this experience FOR ME!!! I was singing in a way that I had only done once before--- in the car coming back from my first visit to the Ipswich group. And this time it was “in company” and more clearly than ever from outside my will or even my mouth!! This came from my heart in some strange way... After the latihan quietened down, I felt incredibly excited. This was a



new and remarkable thing that had dramatically come into my life, this Subud latihan. As I finally calmed down and drove home, I just wondered whatever was going to happen next. Little did I know my life was going to change as dramatically outwardly as it had already seemed to be inwardly...

### *Seeing Myself And Others In A New Way*

At first my two latihans at Ipswich became the highlight of my week. I looked forward immensely to them. Generally, there were 4 of us there at most, sometimes just 2. Numbers just did not seem to matter: my latihan was as strong no matter how many people were there! Interestingly, too, I found myself latihan-singing for the whole 50 minute journey there and back so that by the end of the evening I had experienced nothing less than 2 hours latihan! Generally this would be considered “excessive.” To me it was completely spontaneous and the most natural thing in the world. I do remember some occasions when, at the end of the journey home, I felt that my mind had been taken to its limits and just one more bit of latihan and I would have gone “over the top,” mad: I would have lost my mind. I had no doubt I had been taken as far as I could go. Most times, though, I felt as most people do after the latihan: energised, content in myself, happy and pleasantly relaxed “like a cat curled up in front of a fire.”

It was only a matter of weeks before I began to notice changes in my ordinary life. These were small things at first and to do with my attitude to myself and my reactions to people around me, some of whom I had known for years. First I began to see things about me that were definitely not very flattering. I began to be aware of a sense of “superiority” I had towards most people I knew. At first that felt shameful but gradually that feeling gave way to a real relief to see myself as “ordinary”: I saw I was “special” but only as everyone else was special. I was no better than everyone else and, probably, no worse. It seemed that I had somehow been struggling previously to maintain an illusory, a wrong, sense of superiority. Now I did not have to. I could now accept the less flattering parts of myself. We all had them: it was all part of being human. At last I could feel some compassion for myself- something I had not been able to do before when I was struggling to be “perfect.” What a relief to be freed from this impossible burden! Immediately, this seemed to change my relationships with some people around me who suddenly, for no apparent reason, began opening up to me about themselves and their lives. A friend and work colleague who I had known for years began telling me about his being a mason and what that meant to him. All the years I had known him and I had not an inkling until this conversation about this, his “secret

life!” Another close family member began telling me about his “wayward” younger days when he had been a thief and he explained that his thieving was more for the “excitement” of it than really for the wish just to have the stolen things! Again, what an unexpected revelation!

In all, there now seemed to be a greater sense of authenticity in my relationships, a greater honesty. This was not always easy, however. Sometimes I was to become painfully aware of some thoughts and feelings which were being “hidden” and were at odds with how a person was acting. At first this was extremely confusing for me and I did not know how to handle it. I began to feel that I knew when people were lying to me, or were just trying to manipulate me into doing something for their own ends which were clearly not the reasons being given to me. I began to get to know people in a way which I now describe as from the inside. This was not always so but when it involved people I had known for years it could be shocking. A visit from old friends now had an added interest! This one I felt was irritated sometimes beyond measure by my tendency to butt in on a conversation before a person had finished saying their bit (quite right!), this one was angered by the way I brought up my children (not so fair!) and, most surprisingly, was this work-colleague’s dislike for me! When I was able to share these surprising feelings with friends who were interested in this kind of intimacy they were always authenticated; at other times I just did not know for sure. More experience over the years has given me a greater trust in these subjective experiences. In fact, some of my most painful relationships have since been with those very controlled people who, for various reasons (sometimes “religious” or “moral” or in the interests of “harmony”) believe in keeping their feelings hidden and put on an act with other people. Of course this may sometimes be the most expedient thing to do but, I guess, it is not the truth and, at least, somewhat dishonest. For me, that sort of company can be well-nigh intolerable! I want to talk to the inner person and not play what, to me, are games with various dubious motives. I guess for the same reasons I find the million and one varieties of small talk tiring and, after awhile, mind-numbing. I guess then I have become more introvert, preferring a few “real” friends, prepared to talk “big”( about themselves, the Inner, Life etc.) than ONLY “small.”

### *First Words On My Family*

I suppose the biggest “revelations” to do with relationships for me were to do with my wife. This is almost a story in itself and has been so important for me that I will come back to it as my Subud life continues. Suffice to say that, at this early stage of my Subud life, I had been

married 11 years, had 2 children ( a “pigeon pair”: a 5 year old boy and a coming up to 4 year old girl) and, whilst I was plainly aware of big differences between my wife and myself, I now hoped that Subud would add its magic and make things O.K. ---“one day.” As it was things were to go so badly wrong and, for a time (too long!) my life was to feel a hellish, malevolent thing, so that I now tend to believe that my early, dramatic and long latihans were nothing short of a preparation for what was to become a life- threatening separation from my wife and children - something I could not have borne without Subud. But a lot more was still to happen before then. At this time I can now see I was being prepared. E.g. I read back in my journal of this period at words received in, or shortly after the latihan, which were wiser than I realised at the time.

First, 2 months after I was “opened”: “The deeper the hurt, the more strength she has for change. What is debilitating is to just go on, and not DO anything. She cannot, and will not, verbalise or attempt to talk it out: she has to do. She is seriously considering building a new life for herself and the children: the lack of warmth, the isolation, is so painful that the practical (and other) restraints are not faced. At the moment, the decision to go is enough.”

Then over a year later: “I feel separate from my family. It feels as if new influences are coming into my life; that I am heading for some sort of cataclysmic change: that my daily life, the people around me, are all about to change. I cannot say this is definite: I just feel it. It is sad because I would have these people involved in my future life.”

Reading these now I realise they did not really sink in at the time. Maybe, though, they were to remain in my unconscious so that a year or two later they were to somehow help. Anyway that was all ahead of me...

### *Two More Significant Latihans*

Meanwhile my Subud life was continuing as excitingly and interestingly as ever.

Two weeks after being opened, my family and I went down to the South Coast for our annual holiday. The day before leaving I wondered where the nearest Subud groups were. I was anxious to keep up my two group latihans a week. Amazingly I discovered that our holiday was less than a half hour’s drive from the Subud National Centre which was then at a place in Kent called Kenfield Hall AND there was also a group meeting

fifteen minutes away from my mother-in-law's where we were to stay for a couple of nights! So it wasn't long before I was on my way to my first latihan with another group: 2 other groups, in fact. And I was to learn important things about the latihan from both.

I felt unusually nervous as I approached the first of the two groups. The building was so much bigger: imposingly so from the outside and inside was this huge uncluttered room, quite different from the small, narrow, chair-stacked room I was used to. Worse, I knew absolutely no-one. Gradually about a dozen men came into the room and, apart from a brief nod of the head or simple "Hello," nothing was said or done. We were here for the latihan, not for small talk or any "socialising." I liked that. And I liked the way I was unquestionably accepted even though nobody knew who I was! Then I had a sudden panic. Should I tell somebody I was a "new boy"? What if something unusual happened and nobody knew I was new? Might I need some looking after or out for? The moments ticked slowly away and I sat them out. At last we stood up and the latihan began... and there was that now becoming familiar singing and, best of all, that strong feeling inside me of the latihan. With that feeling I was confident, happy, relaxed. It did not seem to matter what was going on around me until shortly after starting... then there came this horrendous shouting right next to me! Some chap was really going for it and I did not like it one bit. I moved away from him, to the other side of the hall. Lo and behold he followed me! Wherever I went, he seemed to follow. I could not believe it. I hated it. Why, he was so loud, so strong, so unpleasant, he was stopping me having a good time with my own latihan. And that is how it stayed for the rest of the time, just about the whole latihan, in fact. Then, afterwards, as the group began separating into twos and threes for a bit of chat, I began to feel rather isolated; ignored, in fact. However, this lasted for only a short time because, out of the whole group there, only one man came over to talk to me. He was so kindly, so quietly spoken and such an attentive listener that I was much impressed with him. And, of course, guess who it was? It was the very same man who had followed me round in the latihan and made such a racket in my ear! I felt so ashamed of all the negative thoughts I had had about him in the latihan that I vowed to myself that from then on I would never again allow myself to be critical of another's latihan, no matter how noisy or whatever the latihan was. It was a valuable lesson. We all of us have to be completely free to go wherever the latihan leads us. By and large Subud folk accept this and it can be remarkable how much is tolerated in these latihans.

My Kenfield Hall latihan was altogether different. I turned up at this huge country house and there did not seem to be anyone there. I wandered around all these grand rooms feeling as if I was on a school visit to somewhere like Hampton Court (I seemed to go there every year as a school child and I hated it---boring!) The only trouble was I seemed to be the only one on this particular school trip- how on earth did that happen?! Eventually, I found my way to the grounds and there I saw a few children playing in the distance. So there obviously was some human life here!! I watched them for awhile, and found myself feeling sad that this beautiful house felt so underused: if only there were more happy sounds about the place, that would seem more Subud somehow...Eventually I heard a voice a few rooms away and before long I was once again sitting in the pre-latihan quiet with about half a dozen men in this beautifully sunlit room. On the floor was a large, impressively clean, circular rug while outside were these gorgeous views of the gardens. It all felt so lovely I had no nerves at all this time, just this feeling of happiness at being in such a lovely place. How different latihans can be. Nothing could have prepared me for what was to happen next. Suddenly these complete strangers and myself were caught up in this one unearthly, strange, worshipful sound! We sustained, for what seemed like minutes at a time, this one note and it was exhilarating! It literally felt heavenly! I had never experienced such a feeling of happy unity with a group of other people before- let alone complete strangers. And it went on and on... I felt so happy I could burst! And then, just as surprisingly, we all quietened down and, stopped, all of us, at more or less the same moment! It was remarkable. I was only to experience this harmony two or three times over the next 20 odd years. So rare is it. Usually latihans seem to be quite individual, largely subjective affairs but sometimes, as in my Kenfield latihan it seems we can transcend the personal. When that happens the experience is truly memorable and utterly joyful. I remember this experience vividly- some 23 years after it happened! Also remarkable to me, looking back after all these years, is the fact that, after this wonderful latihan, no-one commented on it! The talk was quite ordinary... but I drove joyfully back to my holiday house, along the coastal road, with the sky alight with a glowingly bright moon and full of what seemed to be a host of dancing, sharp- twinkling stars. I had this night discovered that life could be heavenly...