

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SUBUD

I wonder how far back in human history we have to go to find the first human beings who, on some unchronicled, perhaps prehistoric, night, raised their heads for the first time and gazed at the boundless immensity of the star-filled sky overhead and asked the same question as we modern 21<sup>st</sup>. Century people ask when we gaze reflectively upon the mysterious canopy under which we live and move, fret and philander:

**“What is the meaning of it all?”**

“Such is the profound difficulty of discovering a correct answer to this question that even today our greatest scientists must bow their heads in humble ignorance, because all their truly amazing victories of knowledge have still done little more than touch the fringe of the problem. Yet, through the long history of the sojourn of human beings on this planet, there have been no shortage of answers.” (Paul Brunton : “The Inner Reality” p7)

In fact, most of us now know that just about every culture and generation has had its own explanations which it lived by with varying amounts of success. And now with the world-wide opening up of knowledge in the 20<sup>th</sup>. and 21<sup>st</sup>. Centuries we can see this amazing variety and difference more clearly than ever!

And this has brought new questions:

**“Which explanation, religion, philosophy (if any) is correct? How can we know?”**

Across the ages and cultures, the variety of explanations, beliefs and interpretations may be both colourful and bewildering!

To many of us, this has brought both doubt and an inability to believe anything simply because we are told to by authority figures who seem, in many cases, to have been clearly the product of both their time and their culture. Consequently, the authority they once had has, in many cases, now gone.

We now seem to be required to think- and experience-for ourselves in a way that was previously much more difficult, even dangerous- and sometimes impossible – to do.

**So, do we, in fact, need a new way that is more suited to these unique times?**

A way that can unite so many differences and provide a form of evidence that does not rely on just outer authority? Can each individual now find experiential evidence for him/herself?

Many of us, when we began looking at **Subud** (see inside cover) started with such questions in mind and were particularly impressed to find that:

**1. Subud is something *NEW* and is *specifically suited* to these times.**

It all began in 1924, in Indonesia, with a man named affectionately as “Bapak” who was the first person to experience Subud as it is known today.

He called the most important experience in Subud: the **Latihan**. (See inside cover and Article 32). Van Hien says in “What Is Subud?”p 50:

“Submission” to the “workings” of this latihan, “is, for the world at large, the really strikingly **new** element in man’s spiritual struggle.”

Also, I was excited by Bapak’s view that modern life had become so precarious with the advent of nuclear power that, maybe, Subud had come, even as a last chance, at this particular time in order to be a real help. It seems all too easy to look around at the state of world as it has recently become and see something new as being necessary for this!

**2. The Latihan is based on experience and not on words.**

More and more people now seem to be looking for real evidence in *their own experience* rather than being content with a set of *beliefs* in which they are required to have *faith*. Subud would seem to be for those people.

Bapak likened the Latihan to tasting a fruit like a mango. Rather than try to describe or explain it, better just to give it to someone to taste for themselves!

“What attracted me to Subud,” says van Hien (p41) “perhaps more than anything else, was the the assurance that I need not believe anything that I was told about Subud because, ultimately, I could verify *by my own experience* what was true and what was not true.”

**There is no need to believe what one has not experienced for oneself.**

In his talk in Chicago in 1959, Bapak said:

“Bapak does not want you to believe anything you have not experienced yourselves; *so he hopes that you will not blindly believe his explanations*-it is necessary that you yourselves should experience what can be found in the latihan.”

He said at Garstang in Sept 1959:

“You must not, however try to imitate Bapak, but rather practice to follow the workings (of God) from within.” (Or as some would say: “the workings of the Latihan from within”) And:

“It is not necessary to listen to Bapak’s advice, but to be independent and receive directly.”

**3. Subud can be described as “the path of the ordinary person” who is living an “ordinary” life.**

No special qualities are required in order to experience the latihan other than a sincere wish to do so! You are not required to be religious, or non-religious, or to agree to any particular set of beliefs.

As John Bennett writes in “Concerning Subud”:

“Subud does not make its appeal to the intellectuals or to those who are in search of some esoteric teaching. It could well be called the “Way of the Ordinary Man.” It makes no demand beyond what is expressed in the phrase “ask and it shall be given you.” Such asking does not presuppose any special preparation nor even any special qualities. The scientist or philosopher has no advantage over the mechanic or the bus conductor, but it is also true that he is at no disadvantage.” (p 183) And:

“no previous preparation or training is required for admission to the latihan and its action is effectual in those who have had little or no experience of spiritual

exercises as in those who have devoted all their lives to such matters” (p 60)

So all that is required is a willingness to stand with others who have experienced the latihan and be as relaxed and as open as one is able at the time, to whatever may happen. One does not have to undertake arduous disciplines of self-denial or pray or meditate “ceaselessly” or withdraw from the world but simply ask- and relax- for about half an hour, initially with others, for a couple of times a week.

#### **4. No advice, theory or ritual is required.**

Again, in the Chicago talk mentioned above Bapak says:

“In Subud, therefore, there is no more need for advice, for theories, for rituals for the worship of God, for God Himself ( or as some of us would prefer to say: “the latihan Itself”) will guide you as to worship as well as to leading the right kind of life in this world.”

And again, in “Subud And The Active Life” (a collection of Bapak’s early talks), Bapak says:

“In Subud there is no theory – there are theories already in existing religions – but only receiving. And if people ask you what is taught in Subud, the answer is: “Nothing.” If they then ask why so many follow these spiritual exercises, the answer is: “The nature of Subud is receiving. No one is given any theories; as soon as he starts the Latihan, he will receive.”

#### **5. Propaganda is unnecessary for Subud.**

How refreshing this is! For once, there is something that is not about active recruitment, advertising, selling itself etc. How unusual and appealing in this day and age!

In “Subud And The Active Life” Bapak says:

“If we attempt to sow the seed of Subud as this is ordinarily done in the world – that is, by means of our thoughts and desires – not only will our efforts to penetrate into human society be obstructed, but they will be fraught with danger; opposition and hindrances will stand in our way, so that instead of making progress we shall

find ourselves stranded among conflicts and enmities. Attempts to act in this way will bring us into competition with our fellow men...”

He also says at a talk given at the Friends’ Meeting House:

“When you have the qualities arising from such (latihan) experiences, the qualities of Subud, present in each one of you, you do not need to follow the way of propaganda, for people will of their own accord become attracted; not because they are influenced by anything you may say or do, but because they will see and recognize the presence of truth within you.”

Words like these have meant that Subud members tend not to be concerned about consciously or actively seeking new members: the onus is on new people finding Subud themselves. So there are no recruitment drives, no advertising and no obvious attempts to attract members. Subud members tend therefore to focus more on their own latihans and lives, leaving others free to follow their own paths.

**However,**

Bapak has also made it clear that this should not mean a complete indifference to the spread of Subud. On p.139 of “Subud And The Active Life” he says:

“So our work in the spreading of this Subud should be fairly energetic but not too much of a drive. Do not go slowly and tell yourself: “Ah well, it is not necessary; and then go happily to sleep.”

So, complete passivity is to be avoided!

*So, what does it mean to be “fairly energetic” but not advertise and make propaganda?*

I see no contradiction here. I think it simply means having basic information (these core points, e.g) about Subud simply available to anyone interested without trying, in any way, to influence people to be interested. This could be done in the normal way: by setting up websites and making introductory pamphlets, books and information available in the usual “public information” places (libraries, noticeboards in our halls and other public information places, “What’s On” in our local publications etc.) without making any claims about it in order to promote it. Just putting them there is not the same as advertising or making propaganda- it is just making Subud accessible for people to find for themselves should they wish!

## 6. Subud is not a new religion.

In “Subud And The Active Life”, Bapak says

“Subud has not come to destroy religion; it has come, by the Will of God, to bring harmony into all religions, so that in their totality they may represent one human family, one aim and one God.”

And at the Friends’ meeting House, he said:

“In the Latihan there is no distinction of race or religion, for any distinction between men closes for them the way which leads to God.”

And this applies to *everyone*. In “The Path Of Subud” Rofe writes:

“Subud does not discriminate on religious, political, racial or other sectarian grounds. Serious applicants are never rejected...If they happen to be atheists or Communists, this will in no way affect their admission...Adherence to Subud demands no allegiance to any particular belief; it does not even require faith, for a spirit of enquiry may equally well yield results” (p181)

So, because it is about experience rather than beliefs like these, Subud can truly be for “all of humankind!”

## 7. Subud makes no claims not based on evidence

At the Friends’ Meeting House, Bapak says:

“...we should base everything upon the available evidence...We should not talk about anything for which there is no evidence. It is useless to speak in glowing terms of Subud, for what is needed is the experience. That is the basis upon which to reach the conclusion that, in truth, that which we have received clearly comes from a stream that – although we are incapable of understanding it – is beyond the power and influence of our thinking mind, our heart and our desires... For the same reason, **it is pointless to say that we receive this from God, for none can say this save God alone.**”

Bapak even says in “Subud And The Active Life”:

“...there may be those among you who will say: “I have been theorising for a long time, and yet I do not find reality in my theories. Is it true that in Subud one can find something real?” To that the answer is: “About that I cannot say yes or no. You must try it for yourself, for all that is there ...is received by your own being, neither more or less.”

### **8. Subud members are no better than anyone else**

At Vienna in 1959, Bapak made it clear that we cannot make any claim to be better than anyone else, either. He says:

“Concerning the high attainments and the perfections of the spiritual life, let us not say that we are better or more perfect than others – it may well be otherwise. We merely have the conviction that what we have received is true direction and guidance, so that we can become aware of, and understand, what the life of man really means, our life on earth as well as after death.”

### **9. Bapak claimed no special status for himself.**

In “Subud And The Active Life”, he says:

“Bapak never claims to be a saint, a prophet or anything like that – never. Pak Subuh is only Pak Subuh.”

In Calcutta, he said:

“Bapak is not like a clever person, no! Bapak is not like someone called a mahatma, no! Bapak is also not like a scholar, no! Bapak is also not a wise man, no! Bapak is the same as you all.”

Finally, and this is a favourite of mine, in August 1959, Bapak said these memorable words:

“In all this Bapak’s function is like that of 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 in this spiritual work of Subud; under the Power of God and in His hands.”

This also means that those helpers who see themselves as being “Bapak’s helpers” need to see themselves more as servants like this than teachers having some sort of spiritual authority to instruct and lead others!

In fact, Bapak has said:

**10. “The one great sin is teaching” (What Is Subud? p36)**

*Anything more than this becomes a matter of personal experience and choice.*

This, therefore, means that there is absolutely no obligation or pressure- however subtle and unspoken- to sign up to any one set of beliefs etc no matter who holds them! One is required to be true to one’s own experience and mind; one is free to find one’s own way: the only shared commitment is to the practice of the Latihan which is “the essence of Subud”. Many of us would say that these are the key ideas that are the core of Subud. They are the *strengths* of Subud and are the things we should be celebrating with the world at large. They make Subud different from, and compatible with, other groups in the world. In fact, it is possible to be a Subud member and a Christian, Buddhist etc or have no such faith at all!

So how does all this relate to modern day Subud practice *in my experience?*