

CHAPTER FIVE: THERE ARE SUBUD MEMBERS ALL OVER THE WORLD, YOU KNOW

Recollections of a “World Congress”; Subud “Enterprises”; Meditation and “Quiet Times”; “Talent Testing”; Latihan And Daily Life; International Organisation; Helpers; A Personal Dilemma and a “Deal,” or “Test”; Personal Highlights; So Many Conversations About Marital Breakdown...

So, there I was, in my wife’s red Citroen 2 C.V., pulling into this beautiful, long-established oak tree-lined road that was to lead me to the 7th. Subud World Congress. It just so happened that the first World Congress after I became a Subud member was held in Windsor, in a newly acquired Subud property called Anugraha, so I was lucky enough to experience such an event first-hand. What an impressive place this was: spacious green fields and ancient trees surrounding a superb English stately home. Well, it had been once. It was now a shell of its former self because the old building was now in the process of being converted into a modern “state- of- the- art, high- tech” hotel and conference Centre. Somehow, Subud, with its 10,000 or so members, had raised thousands of pounds, not only to buy this prestigious property, but also to begin the conversion work. It had been hoped that the conversion would have been completed in time for this Congress but it clearly was not. Even so, the building still looked highly impressive: the façade was completely intact and was going to remain so (I understand this was a condition of the sale). Just behind the front of the building and looking quite eye-catching was a huge transparent dome, reaching up to the sky. I also noticed another much smaller dome to one side of the building with armchairs, sofas and coffee tables inside: a light, airy place to sit with a relaxing drink, perhaps, and a pleasant snack, admiring the green English countryside outside. Yes, it was truly a beautiful place in the heart of the best of “England’s green and pleasant land”.

I could not help but notice as I drove into the car park, how rapidly it was filling up with cars in all their many varieties, and, judging by many of the cars there, some of these members were quite wealthy, to say the least. So there really were members wealthy enough to get this enterprise underway! I remember when I first heard of the plan to “raise” and spend millions of pounds (yes, MILLIONS!) on this enterprise I was with my little group of three quite ordinary (well, financially ordinary anyway!) members and I wondered how on earth such a project could possibly happen. Well, here it was, right in front of my very eyes-amazing! I knew that Bapak was keen on Subud members being involved in business

and other worldly “enterprises” as a way of putting the Inner life into “practice” for their own and the world’s benefit and, also, as a way of making money to support all sorts of Subud activities: charities, cultural, artistic, educational, welfare etc but this was the first time I was to see it actually in progress! In fact, Anugraha was talked of at the time as “the flagship of Subud enterprises”.

Anugraha

Many people hoped that the success of Anugraha would not only provide funds for the Subud activities already mentioned but also for other businesses and “enterprises” to start up and enable those groups that wanted to, to buy their own premises for latihan. I remember, too, how a ripple of disbelief went round the groups at Bapak’s choice of name for this so modern hotel and conference centre: “Anugraha”. It sounded so foreign, so strange- to Westerners at least. I had, myself, come across this word once in my reading of the words of a modern Indian Guru: Ramana Maharshi who used it to mean something like what Christians refer to as “Grace”. Bapak explained it as meaning “unexpected gift from God” which, I guess, might well be appealing to religious people but what really clinched it for people like me was the realisation that this unusual name would surely stand out in any list or directory of hotels etc because it did look and sound so different and, also, because it began with “A” it would also be near the TOP of any such list and, therefore, not likely to be overlooked by anyone looking for such a venue! This and the catchphrase “Anugraha- a new kind of place” was very appealing, I thought.

I stood briefly in the car park and looked around. My eyes soon picked out the signs giving instructions on where and how to “register”. The temptation, however, for most people, including myself, was not to “register” but to wander around admiring the grounds, the grazing horses, the leisurely “royal birds” drifting slowly along the river running through the huge well-trimmed lawns or to stand amongst the huge, ancient oak trees in full greenery and imagine former times of knights and royalty (these were not trees you would dare to climb: they were too majestic, too full of the authority of hundreds of years of English history for that! They had seen and survived too much and been too “protected” from so much in life---you might say like their owners in the past!) Another temptation which I think we all fell into was to stand about the car park talking to people we knew but had not seen for ages (in some cases, since the last World Congress four years ago!) Informal socialising was to be a big part

of the Congress for most of us and as I stood enjoying myself in this way in the car park I began to think my pre-Congress testing had got it wrong: I was to be like a monk praying alone in a private chapel at this Congress and before I had even registered, here I was excitedly chatting away to just about everyone I had ever met on my Subud travels! Well, things were soon to settle down, especially when I arrived at my room where I was to stay for the next fortnight...

My Room

Talk about a shock! If I had been pleasantly surprised, perhaps even overawed, by Anugraha itself, I was now to be brought down to earth with something of a horrendous bang. My room was not to be in the older part of the Royal Holloway College which looked very nice (but reserved for the many foreign visitors and other more fortunate- and more important?-Subud people). Alas, my room was in the modern block of student rooms a bus ride away from Anugraha. I could hardly believe the sparse, utilitarian ugliness of it! Undisguised, grey, going black in parts, concrete blocks everywhere. The room itself was just big enough for one (single bed, table, chair and lamp!) and the walls of the room were unpainted rough breezeblocks! And the corridors, which seemed to go on forever, were so dark. They, too, were concrete, with a dull electric light in the walls every so often, which gave just enough light for you to see your way. These lights had to be on the whole time because there were no windows at all- even the brightest sunny days (and most of the Congress days were bright and sunny) did not penetrate here. Every time I walked along these corridors it felt as if I was walking into an underground nuclear bunker or, on a good day, into a hermit's cave hidden in the rocks somewhere! Yes, here I could see my testing had relevance!!

Unfortunately, these rooms were to be too noisy to be at all contemplative- every door crashed at all hours of the day and night (silent doors had not yet been invented or, if they had, were, obviously, too expensive for mere students) and every morning I was to be woken at 5:30 a.m. up by the "blip-blip-blip" of next door's space invader game!

Subud And Meditation: "Quiet Times"

Still, this meant I was awake in time to get my early morning Quiet hour every day without fail. For as long as I can remember I have enjoyed these times when I sat quietly alone, admiring the early morning moments and being as receptive as I could to the new day. Generally, any kind of formal meditation is not recommended in Subud where the spiritual life is

“left entirely to God” and any attempt to wilfully-in meditation or by having more than the recommended 2 or 3 latihans a week- influence this is seen as spiritual greed and may lead to a “crisis” in which psychological balance may be disturbed. I have heard all sorts of stories of Subud members having various crises in which they have exhibited strange, even bizarre, behaviour but I have never experienced any first hand. The kind of crises I have encountered have been more to do with painful and unflattering insights about oneself and perhaps the people around one where it has been important for the truth to be out in the open. Yes, I can see that any form of self-will whether it be “spiritual greed”, or any other greed, is contrary to the spirit of Subud or, indeed any religious way, where one is trying to follow the will of the Highest Power rather than one’s own selfish will. Subud is more about “willingness”(to follow the will of God or the Highest Power) rather than personal “willfulness”. In the latihan, one simply waits and receives whatever comes: one does not make or try to force, in any way whatsoever, anything to happen.

So, any meditation based on force of will would not be encouraged in Subud. It is recommended in Subud, however, that one find time in one’s day for “pauses” when one sits quietly as before the latihan; that is, a time to sit in a relaxed and quiet way as possible, with the feelings and thoughts less the focus of attention rather than more; a time when one opens up to the possibility, at least, of something being experienced that is more than one’s usual thoughts and feelings. One does NOT, however, have the slightest idea beforehand what that something more might be!

My Quiet Times had always been like this for me: a time when I just sat and did and thought “nothing in particular”. Often, though not at this Congress (where there was no outside to look at from my room at all!), I would first become more aware of the view around me and it would be easy to respond to beauty in any way it presented itself to me: in a flower, the clouds, leaves or simply the nature of the light at any one time. Out of these feelings would then come feelings about life that were much more positive than I normally held for I would soon come to feel that life was not so bad! I have to say here that I am one of those people who sees a lot in life to get depressed about and my Quiet Times have been an enormous help with this. I have also received some good ideas etc. for my day in this period-some of my best ideas for school came this way. I also found that these more positive feelings would also, sometimes towards the end of my quiet sit, bring me more of a sense of compassion than I normally felt towards the people around me and this, too, I was grateful for. All in all I found this type of “Quiet” or, meditation, important to my life. If I

did not get these times for any reason then I would easily become irritable and “out of sorts”. With them I felt more myself and happier.

My first days at this World Congress were something of a challenge to these Quiet Times- to say the least! For a start they were never quiet simply because the “Halls Of Residence” and a lot of the people there were always so noisy- this was obviously no peaceful monastery! However, eventually, I was able to just let all that be, by somehow not “resisting” it in my thoughts and just letting it all happen as it wanted. This allowed me to focus more inside myself so that I did not feel pulled all over the place by other people’s noises and activities. It was never easy, however, and any peace I experienced was quite fleeting. I also found the noise, and the enforced late nights and early mornings because of it, extremely tiring. Although I was certainly no quiet, meditative monk in a lonely chapel I was soon convinced, though, that some quiet times, alone, were essential for me if I was to get the most out of my time here. I guess I was a typical introvert who needed time alone in order to cope with constant noise and lots and lots of contacts with people! I read in one of the Congress newsheets (produced every day and giving news of events, Congress developments etc.): about “members who get into a really disturbed state as a result of attending Congress” and thought how easy that might be when there was so much going on, so much noise, so little sleep, peace or quiet and so many people (Apparently, there were people at the Congress from “more than 50 countries and 5 continents”- thousands of people, in fact). The advice to these people was to inform the “house parents” in the Halls Of Residence who would then tell you who to go to for help. In my case, I came to see that my pre-latihan testing about my need for some prayerful Solitude was actually essential for my own coping and well-being. I made sure that I had my solitary morning Quiet no matter what!

The Congress

Apart from these difficulties with the Halls Of Residence and the lack of peace and quiet there, the rest of the Congress generally impressed me. A lot of hard work had obviously gone into its organisation- and most of it, I was told, was voluntarily undertaken. Some dedicated souls had put in hours and hours of their time to make sure everything was so well organised. Hundreds of people were placed in rooms and those, like me, who were a distance from Anugraha itself, were allocated coaches to carry them backwards and forwards from morning to night. It amused me to hear my own bus driver talk of Anugraha: he had his own way of pronouncing it, more like “Anugraaa!”. Every time he said it he made me

smile- as well as sounding somewhat “growlish” it somehow made Anugraha seem recognised and accepted, in some strange way, by people who, like this bus driver, were outside of the Subud world!

Of course the Conference centre itself had not been got ready in time so the organisers had hired some huge tents and marquees which were dotted around the lawns. They were given names like “Daisy,” “Poppy” and “Violet”! It was here that the meetings and events of the Congress took place. There were meetings about just about everything of interest or concern to Subud members, including enterprises or Subud and work, meetings for architects, writers and poets, youth and those in education, mental health, engineering and science. There were Concerts, various art and craft displays and exhibitions of projects going on around the world at that time like the setting up of a place of “refuge” in Albergaria in Portugal, or plans for a proposed Subud development of Darling Harbour in Australia. The details of the latter escape me but I remember them as being very futuristic! It was both fun and serious- and it was also inspiring!

The latihan was going on just about all the time. There were large and pre-planned latihan- and smaller more impromptu ones. All over the place people were testing all sorts of things, personal and of general interest. At the same time as all this, there were lots of “working parties” going on where people shared their stories and discussed issues like: the latihan and daily life, Subud and mental health, Young People etc. Often, these were arranged there and then by interested members. And while all this was going on, there were more formal meetings usually in the main tent when various reports from the many groups in Subud were read to the membership. These covered issues like Subud publications, Fund-raising, Welfare, the work of Subud charities, Subud’s humanitarian work and so on. When these reports began on the first day of the Congress, the Subud newssheet described them thus:

“This was the day that the huge vehicle that is Congress really began to roll, and its tremendous scope became evident. And that vehicle was on the road and moving early, as from 9:30 the great Congress tent was filled by members gathered to hear the Chairmen of every international Subud body give their reports on the wide stage in Bapak’s presence. Those reports summarised the last four year’s activities and showed the author’s views on the way forward. E.g the role of Subud Enterprise Services was reviewed and Bapak advised that S.E.S should service big international enterprises as well as those of individuals and small groups. A

communication system between people in enterprises around the world has now been established.”

The only problem with all this was that one simply could not attend everything! Mind you, this did provide a topic for conversation at meal times (if one were needed!) as people explained to each other what had happened at their meeting or working party, or whatever, that day. Yes, there was always a lot to talk about!

The Congress began with a huge meeting in what was described as “England’s largest tent”. I sat several rows back and as I looked at the huge Subud symbol at the back of the stage and the hundreds of people around me I realised Subud was much stronger in the world than I had imagined. A little while ago no-one I knew had heard of Subud; now I was sitting amongst maybe a thousand people or more to whom it was the most natural thing in the world! The World Congress Chairman officially welcomed everyone and reminded us all that the signing of the Magna Carta had taken place “in a nearby field surrounded by tents”. Then there were a couple of speeches by local dignitaries who were not Subud members: one welcomed us all as friends and expressed her keen interest in Anugraha because she “hoped to hold her own charity events here”; the second is reported to have said: “I have spoken often to audiences, and always from somewhere in the audience I have felt some point of animosity. But today when I spoke, and before, I did not feel it at all—only a feeling of togetherness and happiness.” This event was described as “the largest gathering this place has ever seen.” Both speakers wished us all “success and happiness at Runnymede” and then went into the library, with Bapak and his party, for coffee. The Congress had now officially started.

Working Parties

I attended as many of the working parties that I could and I always found them interesting and informative. At an Enterprise workshop, I heard Subud described as:

“the purification and reconstruction of one’s individuality”. And:

“An association of people of all religions and many nations who come together to worship God” and who:

“Seek the guidance of God in our business dealings. We seek to be open, honest and sincere in business.” Good ideals, huh?! I could not but think

of the early Quakers who had established so many of our famous banks and firms, many of which survive even to this day. They had clearly shown that this approach could work. Early Quakers like John Woolman achieved a reputation for honesty and fair dealing and soon found offers of work flooding in. I was so impressed with the fact that he, along with many other Quakers, would simply turn work away if it got in the way of his religious commitments or if he simply could not guarantee its quality. That is what the world of business needs I think: men and women of honest and fair principles!

Enterprises: Bringing The Inner And Outer Together; Subud “Spirituality”;

One of the key ideas in Subud, too, is that God exists in action and not just in the peace and quiet of prayer or contemplation and that the latihan can actually enliven and inspire actions of the body and mind. I received understanding of this after one latihan in the following words: “The body is made for actions; the mind is made for thinking and the heart for feelings”. I understood from this that it was, therefore right for the mind, heart and body to be active and, like the rest of the world, part of the changing scene. This was something of an about-turn for me: I had previously seen the highest form of spirituality as being withdrawal from “the world” as a monk, or nun! Subud members would tend NOT to withdraw from the ordinary world of work and activity but would tend rather to be VERY involved in worldly concerns.

The difference would now be that Subud folk would also have the latihan involved in their actions and this could manifest itself in all sorts of ways. The major point was that Subud folk would, hopefully, learn not to be at the complete mercy of the body, mind and feelings but (and this is a crucial “but”) the influence of the latihan would become stronger eventually so that all these “lower forces” could be expressed in their best and most harmonious ways. The lower forces on their own could so easily lead to unrestrained chaos; with the latihan the hope was that they would be guided, directed and used in the right way- for the benefit of everyone involved. Again, this seemed a good ideal to me. I hoped it might be an ideal that could really change the world of ordinary men and women for the better!

So the idea of enterprises, so often talked about in Subud, was nothing short of being something like a “religious observance”, it seemed to me; something then that we should all do as a way of benefiting ourselves and the world around us. Unlike some religious paths, Subud encouraged

passivity in the latihan, yes, but ACTIVITY in the world. One speaker defined it thus: “The human will is a tool given to us to use to change the world. We should not just be passive. You can and should pray to be shown the right way to act but remember God has already given you the tools to act in this world: the body, thinking, feeling, willing etc.”

It struck me, too, that this view of living from the latihan with the body, mind and feelings etc. being allowed to naturally move, change, develop etc. (because that is what they were made for) was in itself like the experience of the latihan anyway. Then one felt the latihan inspiring all sorts of body movements and sounds and all sorts of “experiences”. Perhaps the ideal was to live like this- in a state of latihan with the body and mind going about its business at the same time in something of an inspired way!

Receiving And Doing: Talent Testing

Clearly, enterprises were meant to be a way of “putting what we receive in the latihan into practice in our daily lives”. WHAT WE RECEIVE is, therefore, very important to what we DO in the world. “For this we might need to be prepared for CHANGE. The latihan may change you and your private enterprise may then be to use your will to bring about other changes”. I understood also from this workshop that enterprises were not simply about making money; they were also about people finding activities and work in the world which was in accord with their deepest selves or, in Subud terms, in accord with a person’s true “talents”. And it was clearly understood that a person’s true talents might be in work and activities that were artistic, cultural, humanitarian etc. etc. and not just in highly profitable businesses and ventures like Anugraha, e.g.

Because it was generally understood that this kind of Subud enterprise depended not just on the heart and mind but also on the latihan, particularly for its origins and inspirations, it was quite common for Subud members at this time to do what came to be called “talent testing”. Eventually a procedure emerged for this: after an ordinary latihan, the interested person would be asked to experience the latihan, first, in different parts of his or her body and then in the whole body and, finally, in “themselves” as completely as possible. Then various questions would be asked of the latihan in the hope that a type of work or activity in the world would be clearly revealed as a person’s real work. The results of this were varied to say the least- some people did find quite unexpected “vocations” and did change their work for the better. Others were not so successful and came to feel they made mistakes, sometimes disastrously

so in financial and/ or personal terms. Perhaps because of this, there is not so much talk in Subud circles today about “talent testing” in this way and, in fact, some members have become completely cynical about the whole process of testing. Perhaps it would have been useful to have tested beforehand an important question that was recommended in the latihan in daily life workshop: “Have I the capacity at this time to receive this testing, in the open- ended way, with clarity, sincerity and understanding?” It is just possible that this might have prevented some mistakes (at least) being made. I myself learnt a lot from this working party about enterprises and their value but I did not feel drawn to go in for such potentially life- changing testing- I had, after all, only recently undergone a huge change in my working life anyway.

Latihan And Daily Life

The workshop I most consistently attended was the one called “The Latihan and Daily Life”. I learnt a lot from this as various members told how they were helped to “remember the latihan in their ordinary lives” and the ways they had discovered of “staying close to the latihan” for more and more of their days.

Many said they had been most helped by remembering to have “Quiet moments” in their day- as often as possible. I tested about this and found that for me such moments would be “like eating a big, fat, juicy peach” i.e. a personally enjoyable experience! And if I remembered to take these moments (not easy, I was to find, in a busy working environment) then I would find myself dancing through the activities of the day- lightly, easily, energetically and with elegance and dignity! And I would deal with everyday problems in an alert and energetic way: I would be “like a firefighter coming down a pole ready to rush off to deal with another emergency!” Everyone felt it was important to get quiet before doing anything important. And one member said: “Remember, you have to be in a good state to do an enterprise” and periods of quiet, as well as the latihan, could help us to achieve that “good state”.

Another person said it was important to ask the latihan to tell you “what you are doing wrong. Say your problem, then just surrender it and then receive in the normal way. Then DO something- remember God helps those who help themselves.” He had found this to be extremely beneficial he said. Another suggested testing “How do I feel when I am about to make a mistake in my life? How do I feel when I am making a right decision?” A third simply suggested “saying your name in daily life”.

It was concluded that not to try to bring the latihan into one's daily life, in ways like these, was like "having a very sharp knife in a drawer and refusing to bring it out to use it".

Meetings In The "Big Tent"

As well as attending these workshops, I also went to some of the more formal, bigger meetings in the main tent where the Opening Ceremony had taken place.

The Organisation Of Subud

One was the report given by the International Helpers. Now Subud had early on evolved a dual structure. On the one side there were committees made up of chairmen, treasurers, secretaries and so on whose job it was to look after the material needs of Subud- things like hiring of halls, paying bills etc.

On the other side there were people called "helpers" whose job was to look after the spiritual side of Subud- things like giving explanations about the latihan, testing with members and making sure the latihan was available to people who wanted it.

The organisation had by this time grown so that there were Group helpers and committees (who looked after local group concerns) right the way up to National helpers and committees (who had meetings concerning their whole countries) up to International helpers and committees (who had visits to, and meetings about, groups of countries where there were Subud members). There is now a well-developed Subud organisation with various divisions of function and work.

Now the main point of this International Helpers' Report was: "The only authority in the spiritual is the Power of God. **THERE IS NO HIERARCHY IN SUBUD.** The division into group, National, and International Helpers is simply a division of work, not status or ability."

At one of the workshops I attended, somebody had said: "The one wrong thing you can do is to put yourself as an intermediary between a member and God"

I am sure that the setting up of the helper/ member division was done for the best of reasons as a practical means of organising huge numbers of

people; and I am equally sure that it was not meant to suggest any superiority. Helpers simply had a job to do (organising latihan, being Bapak's representatives when the occasion warranted it etc.) just as a secretary, or whatever, had a specific job to do in the organisation.

Problems With The Helpers; My Own "Test"

However, the distinction was obviously causing problems. Bapak had several times stressed that helpers were not in any way more advanced, even than the person experiencing the latihan for the first time. In fact, Bapak specifically said that often the person being opened was spiritually more developed than all the others in the room-but such things as this were only known by God! In the early days, soon after the appointment of helpers became the standard practice, Bapak had to point out to them that they were "emergency helpers" only because Bapak himself could not be everywhere at once. Bapak's definition of a "true" helper was someone who could "correct him or herself" and, apart from himself, he said there was only one other real helper ("because she could correct herself") and that was his daughter who was now dead. The message obviously had not sunk in because it was being said again at this Congress: there is no hierarchy, we are all equal in the sight of God, who could alone be the judge of a person's spirituality.

Too often, this did not seem to work in practice, however, My own experience of being made a helper was rather uneasy. When the idea arose for our new group to start up (because there were so many of us travelling the long distance to Ipswich from the same part of the world) it was said that the new group would need a group helper in accordance with Bapak's advice on the forming of new groups. I was asked if I would travel to Norwich to be tested with the helpers there to see if that would be the right thing to do. Well, it was not long before there were "twitterings" of disapproval from, and some bad feeling amongst, some of the older members who thought I had not been a member for "long enough" and so on. In the end I got so annoyed with it all that I set up one of my own "tests" about it. I decided that the conflict had become so bad that, although the arrangements had all been made and agreed to, I would only make the journey for this test IF I received another phone call on the day of the test itself. I felt that because everything had been finalised this was most unlikely to happen. Certainly, other arrangements for Subud meetings etc. had not been checked up on in this way after they had been so finally agreed. Anyway, the day itself finally came. Now I knew any

phone call would have to come before I left for work that day because I was going to have to leave straight from school, rather than come home first, because it was such a long journey and I would never make it in time otherwise. I also knew that no one who was likely to phone had my work number, and they probably did not know the address or name of my school, either.

Anyway, the time came for me to leave for work and there had been no phone call. So I walked to the garage sure I would not be going for the test that night. When I sat in the car, I checked my bag to make sure I had everything I needed for my day and, lo and behold, I had not got my assembly story which I needed for that morning's assembly. So, I had no alternative but to go back for it. Would you believe it, just as I opened my front door the phone went: it was my friend Latif again, checking all was well for the trip to Norwich! So I went- and that is how I became a helper.

Personal Highlights

The two weeks of the Congress went quickly and fascinatingly by as I attended workshops, listened to reports, and did lots of latihans and testing with people I knew and people I had only just met from all over the world. A number of highlights stand out for me even now, two decades later.

The latihans, sometimes with between 6 and 12 men, sometimes with hundreds of men, were strong, noisy, very active and, as always, I could not doubt their authenticity. One memory particularly stands out. It was of this huge, strong-looking man, with massive, hard-working hands who spent nearly all of his latihan on his knees, crying like a small child. Outside the latihan, this man looked so strong, so masculine, a man who you would feel could perform super-human feats of strength. Here in the latihan he seemed to be just as vulnerable and weak as the rest of us. The front he habitually wore had been stripped away completely in the latihan. How close I felt to that man, too: yes, I knew his pain as my own. Whenever I saw him after this, strolling around the grounds or at meal times, I felt warmly towards him. In the normal run of things I would not have thought he would be my "type"; as it was, he became something of a friend- an example of prejudice being over-ridden by something deeper: the latihan. Once again, I saw how deceptive appearances could be and how important- and real- the inside story was.

My most beautiful moment at this Congress was, surprisingly, not in my own latihan. It was one enchanting summer evening when the first stars were appearing in this huge, clear sky. It was comfortably warm and a friend and I were strolling through the archway of massive and very green oak trees with the imposing dome of Anugraha straight ahead of us. Directly above the dome, now riding high in the sky, and guarded by one or two crisp, sharp- twinkling stars, was this gloriously big, fully rounded moon. It was such a breathtakingly beautiful sight that we decided to stop and simply admire it for awhile...And then there arose such a crescendo of lovely singing that it was like listening to a choir of angels. It really was! It was, in fact, the ladies' latihan which had got underway just after we had stopped. We were told there were about a thousand ladies doing the latihan together in the main tent that night and we had never heard any thing like it. There must have been all sorts of sounds going on in that tent but from our distant position what we could most hear was this central core of sound which swelled up to the sky like one heavenly chord. It really did sound heavenly.

A major part of the Congress for me and for everyone there, I guess, was meeting so many Subud people from all over the world. There were people from 50 countries and it was the first time I had seen so many in one place. What was particularly interesting was to see the different nationalities up on the stage, giving their reports. I never realised how marked these characteristics could be. There were some real characters amongst them too. There was, for example, the Australian with his down-to-earth humour and no nonsense approach which woke everybody up and kept them on their toes; there was the Japanese man with his correctness and politeness which I found so appealing; then there was the Portuguese man with his liveliness and sudden bursts of loud, infectious laughter; and there was the man from Holland whose huge hands and arms seemed to hug you no matter how far away you were from him. One of the most moving moments came when a young man spoke about his experiences with young people in Subud. It was quite a shock to hear his account of the problems so many young people in and out of Subud were facing with drugs, alcohol and what he called "other personality problems". He captivated the audience with his own story: he had been a user of "hard drugs" and his discovery of the latihan and the subsequent experiences he had in the latihan had got him off drugs completely and given him his passion for working with young people who were having similar problems! He received a standing ovation! I guess there were also people from most walks of life there and most professions, too. People in Subud did literally seem to be a fair cross-section of people in the world. I liked that. If we could get along here maybe we could learn to get along

in the big bad world as well! Maybe Subud was showing a way forward...I thought, and hoped, so...

On a more personal note I had a little encounter which was both surprising and happy- making for me. When I went into one of the tents for my first meal I was welcomed, and shown to my place, by a face from my past. We both stopped in our tracks and stared at each other, disbelievably! "It's not YOU is it? You're not with this lot are you?!" It was my cousin whom I had not seen for over 10 years! It turned out that her company had won the contract for providing meals for this Congress! It was really good to renew this contact, to tell her all about Subud and to catch up on all that had happened in our lives. What a bonus!

My last Conversations

One of the striking things for me was the preparedness of people, many of them strangers before this Congress, to talk about their lives, even in some of its most personal aspects. I was never to encounter this so markedly again. I have since discovered that Subud people are like many other people- very guarded about talking about their real selves and the deeper issues of their lives, especially with strangers, of course. Not so here. I had many interesting conversations and I often felt privileged to be with these people. Unfortunately, however, I noticed there seemed to be a consistent theme in many of these talks: marriage breakdowns! There was this elderly lady who talked of her loneliness at being on her own for so many years and of how she now realised it was mainly her own fault: her attitude to sex had been "all wrong!" Because of this, her husband, who was a "good man", had "got involved with a younger woman" and he now had two young children and she, alas, had no family. The one big compensation was that they had all become good friends, even to the point where she actually went to stay with her husband and his new family every so often. All three of them were Subud members. Then there was the man I met who had been married three times and I listened almost disbelievably as he explained how each break up was as traumatic as the first ... Then there was the other chap who, sitting by the river with a cold pint of bitter in his hand, told me how he had been, what he thought was happily married, when one evening as he and his wife came back from their usual jog on the beach, she suddenly announced that she did not love him any more and that she was moving out there and then!

I heard stories like this so often that I got worried: Was I being told something?! I even asked others there if they were hearing a surprising

number of stories about marriage break-ups? The answer in every case was “no” Just me then...

I rang my own wife every evening and all seemed to be well...until my last night at the Congress when, even at 12:30 a.m., she did not answer the phone. I had no idea where she was or what had happened; she had not mentioned going anywhere when I had phoned her the night before. My imagination went haywire! When I eventually got to sleep, I dreamt I was adrift at sea on a little lilo-lost on the ocean on this flimsy, inappropriate little “toy”. Oh dear, what was all this about?