

Some Teachings In Subud

The Theory Of The Forces In Life

For a movement that has no teachings, Bapak talks a lot about the “forces” that exist in life. He might not like thinking about spiritual things but he quite clearly has an intellectual system that he adhered to and talked to Subud members about almost continually. It is not a system that appeals to me, although I know a number of people to whom it is perfectly comprehensible and reasonable. S.C.R.

Weightman, a lecturer in Religious Studies at the “School of Oriental and African Studies”, traces Bapak’s scheme of forces back , first, to the Neoplatonists, and then to the Sufis, who he says took it to Indonesia. So, once again, this looks like old “religion” rather than new revelation or even Inner receiving.

Although Subud members are not expected to sign up to agreement with any of this, most of them will and there can be a lot of talk about it. As a Subud member it is unlikely that you will not be asked to test about the influence of the various forces (the material, vegetable, animal and human and yet more – any the wiser?!) I have done this test several times myself and had some interesting experiences but I cannot say any more than that.

If you were interested in these forces you could find out more from a book that it is said “most, if not all Subud members will want a copy of”: Bapak’s book called “Susila Budhi Dharma”. Subud now really seems to have the features of an old religion: a “prophet” or at least authority clearly vested in a highly “visible” leader, its own special book, its own rituals (2 latihans of a certain length a week, a 10 minute quiet sit beforehand, shoes off, “Begin” and “Finish”), a recognised “priest craft” or hierarchy (various kinds of Helpers and then “ordinary” members) and it has its own belief system (that Bapak is... that men and women have these qualities and roles..that life is explained by these “forces” etc etc...) It, also, clearly expects its Helpers, at least, to promote this “belief-system” because, as Bapak says: “they are Bapak’s helpers after all.”

Subud members will still maintain that all this is just “advice” but to more ordinary folk this is an illusion that becomes more and more difficult to maintain.

For example, one of the best introductions to Subud is, I think, a book written by a non-Subud member: “The New Religions” by Jacob Needleham. In the sympathetic chapter on Subud, Needleham quotes Bapak as saying “We do not have a teaching and there is nothing that we have to learn to do because all that is required of us is complete surrender.”(Great stuff!) However, even Needleham finds himself 15 pages later talking largely about Subud “teachings, most notably on sex and death!” Needleham himself seems to have missed the contradiction here!! An easy “mistake” to make, I would say.

Subud Appears Cultish

Sometimes Subud looked “cultish” to me. It has only a few members who represent a very small part of the world’s population, even though Bapak clearly thinks that Subud should be for “all of humankind”- he even has a collection of his talks called by that title, in fact. Often, this small group, when it is known about by people outside its membership, appears to be rather quaint and eccentric with beliefs and practices that seem out of touch with the modern world. Worse, the only thinking that seems to be encouraged is its founders. History only too recently has shown just how foolish (and sometimes downright dangerous!) following a leader less moral and scrupulous than Bapak can be. Thank God that, because of the kind of man Bapak was, all this leads to in Subud is an isolating narrowness and an inability for Subud to be taken seriously ENOUGH by the modern Western world or by ENOUGH educated people all over the world for it to make much difference to either!

So, Subud people too often appear as parrot-like followers, narrow in their thinking and unchallenging of the ideas that are put about in their names.

Subud Appears Too Muslim

From very early on, I had difficulty with the Muslim influence. I met so many Westerners (Bill, David etc) who now called themselves Latif, Rashid and other Muslim names that I felt both amused and uncomfortable- it was so odd! You see, it did not work the other way round: I never met any Muslim who now had a Western name! I had no problem with people changing their names just why were they always Muslim here in this strange group?

And then there is the emphasis given every year to Ramadan. It is a big event for so many Subud members. Many have even converted to Islam but even those who have not will join in with this Fast because Bapak has said how beneficial this is. He has also said the same about Lent but you don't hear much about that in Subud! For a few years the date of Lent was put into the Subud publication of the time, at my request. When I stopped requesting it there was no longer a mention.

Harmony And Surrender

Because Subud members have been repeatedly told that harmony between themselves is, in fact, the most important thing (and this is interpreted as meaning no discussion made lively through disagreement), Subud members do not tend to rock the boat by voicing anything that might be considered contentious. Many, perhaps most, see themselves as just turning up for the latihan, not thinking much about it, certainly not sharing talk about it, or its experiences, afterwards,- or, in fact, any time at all - and not questioning, disputing, or arguing about anything. And because there is this often expressed idea that spiritual things are best "left to God," they will try to focus single-handedly, usually, on their own latihan, which means that if it has no, or little relevance to their lives they may do very little about it. Often, it seems that their attendance at the Latihan then becomes spasmodic and irregular and, after varying lengths of time, many will actually leave. Some return later, many are never seen again.

It is an undisputed fact that if all those who have left Subud had stayed then it is possible that by now Subud could really have had a big effect on the world! It is an undisputed fact, also, that the number of Subud members who continue regularly with two or three latihans a week is very small. Many who now hold key positions in Subud as National Helpers etc. do themselves average only one or two group latihans a month! Having said this I hasten to add that there are some members who could not be more devoted to the latihan and would not miss attendance at these three a latihans a week for anything BUT it is well known in Subud that they are easily a very small minority. Amazingly, there is little or no concern expressed about all this. Again, it is often considered to be something best left to God!

As a friend of mine once said: "You should see my garden when I leave it to God!"

Many Subud people seem to be so wrapped up in their own individual lives and affairs, that they have little or no interest in Subud as a collective or a group. And when they do, it is simply in order to maintain the status-quo set up by someone who is believed to know better! Or they quietly leave...