

## TWO LATIHANS

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 latihan 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 a simple "Hello," nothing was said or done. We were here for the latihan, not for "small talk" or 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 the now becoming familiar singing and, best of all, that strong feeling inside of me of the latihan. With that feeling I was confident, happy and 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 a 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 allow myself to be critical another's latihan, no matter how noisy, or whatever, the latihan was. I would just be attentive to my own latihan! 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 too frequently when I was a school child and I did not like it!) 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 was obviously 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 there 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 really felt heavenly! I had never experienced such a feeling of happy unity with a group of other people before like this- let alone with such complete strangers. And it went on and on...I felt so happy I could burst! And then, just a 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 a harmony like this two or three times over the next twenty plus 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 plus 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 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...