

EARLY IPSWICH EXPERIENCES

A week after my London experiences, I was back at Ipswich again. This time there were 4 of us altogether- for the group this was a full house! Compared to the London latihan it could hardly be more of a contrast. Nevertheless this latihan was as strong and energising as ever and, not for the last time, I was to feel convinced of the reality of the Subud latihan simply by being with these few folk for about half an hour twice a week like this. After this latihan, the group decided it was time to see if it would be alright for me to latihan on my own at home now. The usual advice is that once the latihan is established in a person then, as well as having two latihan a week with a group, one should also have a third latihan at home on one's own. I was to find this an invaluable practice and often my home latihan were very different from my experience of the group ones.

This latihan was about "testing" whether it was "OK" for me to latihan alone now. "Testing" is an important word in Subud. It refers to the practice of asking a question of the latihan whilst in a "receiving state." So what normally happens is that at the end of the usual latihan everyone stands up as if they are ready to start the latihan again. This time, though, one person asks a question out loud and then everyone simply receives the latihan in response. So, on this occasion one of the group asked the question: "Would it be appropriate for John to latihan on his own now?" It was clear from the responses of the group that this would *not* be a good thing. People receive answers in a variety of ways: some in bodily movements; others in noises and so on, all of which carry meaning to the person concerned.

After the question was asked, I immediately received an image of myself as being extremely tall (which I am not!), looking down on the town where we were. It did not feel good! Then I understood from it that I was seeing myself as "too big for my boots," again, too "superior" (that old problem!), too arrogant towards the people around me! It felt important that I learn again that I was no better than anyone else. Strangely, this felt so obviously the truth that I did not feel disappointed or anything negative at all- it was just the way it was! If anything, I felt humbler and freer after the testing.

I had much more to learn about testing but this was still to come. I guess this occasion was a first taste for me. I came away from the testing feeling surprisingly happy to have experienced a not-so-flattering aspect of my

character. Recognising my vanity in this way did not lead to feelings of shame and inadequacy. I felt, in fact, as if a burden had been lifted from my shoulders! Interestingly, it was my practice at this time to read from a collection of Bapak's talks on the bus as I travelled to work each morning. The morning after this testing I read:

“Actually, any feeling of superiority, any action that signifies we consider that we are more than other people is actually a very great danger”

Important to know this, then! Bapak clearly applied this to himself also for in the same talk he says: “Treat me as an ordinary man. Do not regard me as someone more than yourself because the only one who is more than we are is Almighty God”

I was now beginning to learn how secretive this feeling of superiority could be and how much it seemed the latihan wanted it out in the open for then it seemed to lose its power. For me it then made me feel closer to other people and much more compassionate to all of us same-flawed human beings.

Occasionally, these early Ipswich latihan would take me unexpectedly into new experiences. I remember one time when I had a “funny little experience” of my legs moving less because of me and my will and more from the latihan within me! Again, it made me feel extremely happy- almost as if my legs were somehow tickling me! Certainly, I could not help but laugh- and laugh! Sometimes in the latihan I would laugh almost uncontrollably and it would feel as if I had just heard the best joke in the world. The trouble was I did not have a clue what the joke was! This was not to be the last time I was to learn what REAL laughing was like (see “Testing With Bapak”) Then there was one particular latihan which was so different from the others that it took me completely by surprise: I felt ice-cold, in alternate pain and despair and generally very uncomfortable. After the latihan, we tested whether my wife should have the operation on her throat that the doctor was suggesting. My testing was not altogether clear to me but it turned out that there was one man there who received very clearly that she should go ahead and that my own latihan had largely been a response to her condition! Once again, this was a reminder to me that our individual latihan may not just be about ourselves but, as this one seemed to show, can also be about the people around us! In fact, I could begin to believe now that the idea that the latihan was so often chaotic and unpleasant-sounding because it reflects the chaotic forces in the world

around us at present, might well be true. Yes, I saw that as quite a plausible idea now!

By now my latihan were no longer limited to the group ones. They could come upon me at any time. I often went out for a walk across the fields where I lived and find myself bellowing to the sky or to some unexpected oak tree or crow! I loved these open air latihan. I can also remember walking round our country park and NOT feeling any resentment or “claustrophobia” because of all the tourists about (as I often did!) I actually found myself enjoying these people! Instead of ignoring them I found myself talking with them and feeling no different from them. Perhaps I really had lost some of that “superiority”?!

Then I remember suddenly experiencing a strong latihan in the “smallest room in the house” and feeling that I was having some sort of throat operation. I had, in fact, had a troublesome throat infection for over a week. Only now was it to begin to get better..! There have been many stories of Subud healings, especially, I think, in its early days. I have myself only witnessed what seems to have been one. It concerned a very kindly, elderly man whom I saw very irregularly. On this particular occasion I was alarmed to see him in a wheelchair with, he said he had been advised, the likelihood of more deterioration ahead of him. It seemed so sad. Months later, however, I saw him again and there he was walking unaided across a stage, apparently completely well! He told me that he had written to Bapak for advice which led to his changing his diet and having regular moments of latihan during every day. Unfortunately, I lost contact with him a year or so later at which point he was as active as ever.

Well all these experiences had clearly shown me the power, reality and authenticity of this remarkable latihan. My first year as a Subud member ended with an image I had of myself having landed a huge fish which was still struggling on the bank. Any angler would have been pleased to have landed such a big fish but I could see it was not yet safely brought in. It still seemed to be very powerfully flapping all over the place! This seemed to be a surprisingly expressive and clear symbol of my relationship with Subud at this time.

So much had happened, inwardly, to me I could scarcely believe it. Outwardly, my life seemed fairly settled and uneventful. All that was now to change and those inner dramas I had experienced were now to be matched by some surprising outer ones...