

CHANGE, CHANGE, CHANGE!

When Subud “exploded” into my life, I was 32 years old: old enough to have a settled home-life and to be established in my career. I was living in a beautiful Suffolk village with my little family and working as a teacher in a modern open-plan school about 20 minutes drive away and on the bus route which was handy when my wife started back at work or needed the car on an occasional day before then. Life was busy but to all outward purposes good and going well. Beneath the surface, there were discontents, of course, but I accepted these as normal. It was not until many years later that I realised “normal” life could actually mean so much more. The changes to make this possible began soon after I began practising the Subud latihan.

The Latihan And My Job

First to be affected was my job. In the year before I joined Subud I had applied for promotion to a small, local school. I did not even get an interview. I had been told I should attend more meetings and such like in order to “get my face recognised” if I was serious about “getting on in my career.” This did not feel right to me; I guess I was idealistic and thought that promotion in teaching should not depend on such a superficial thing as “getting your face recognised.” When no interview came, I accepted that perhaps I had gone as far as I was going to go in my career. I took some comfort and satisfaction from the feeling I had that the people who worked with me- other teachers- respected me and I clearly got on well with most of the children and their parents. I remember once I saw a little girl at the edge of my classroom just about to have a paint tub hit her on the head and in my anxiety to warn her I shouted across the room. Just after I heard a girl from my own class say to her neighbour: “Who was that man who just shouted?” This made me laugh but also made me realise that I was able to teach without loud- mouthedness: my discipline was more than just unsubtle bullying, at least!

I did not bother to apply for any of the jobs that came up immediately after my first failed application. Then the latihan intervened. In one latihan I had an image in my mind of this old-fashioned sailing ship; it was on the rocks and unable to sail out into the wide open sea. I felt that if it stayed there, it would eventually fall to bits and sink into the sea without a trace. Then I suddenly realised that the sailing ship represented my job! If I stayed where I was, my career would sink without a trace. I also realised that the ship had all it needed to get off the rocks: its sails

and everything were intact. So it seemed to me that my career was ready to move forward: I did actually have all that was needed to ensure this. All I had to do was make a bit of effort and the ship of my career would sail off the rocks.

I found this interesting, to say the least, but I have to say I was not convinced by it. I have never been a person with “faith” in anything other than reason or “common-sense.” Inner feelings alone have never been enough for me. This has, I now think, been a good and a bad thing. Good because I have always looked for some outer “confirmations” of my intuitions, feelings or receivings (sometimes, right from just before my first group latihan, deliberately setting them up and-surprise surprise!- nearly always getting them!) Downright bad in only one instance now I come to think of it. That was the Christmas just over a year after I had been opened when I felt this strong urge to go to Indonesia where Bapak lived. I kept “seeing” Bapak’s face, smiling and encouraging, in my mind. At first I just dismissed it but it became so insistent that I set up a test: if it was right to go to see Bapak in this way then I would get the money somehow. Well the money did not come through the letter box, so I dismissed the idea and I did not contact Bapak about it or anything. It seemed a madcap idea anyway. Surely I could not abandon my family in this way- especially at Christmas time. In the light of later events that turned out to be a misplaced notion (they were to abandon me anyway!). Worse, I later realised that now my wife was at work and paying half the bills, I had the money already, waiting in my bank account. Alas, I just could not take the idea seriously; it seemed completely “wild” and somewhat irrational. Now I realise all too clearly that it was none of those things and I could so easily have gone!

In fact, I now see it as probably a bitterly wasted opportunity for me to actually meet this person I had heard so much about: to meet him and give him my unasked-for criticisms of Subud etc. I would surely have learnt so much! I say “probably” because I have no idea if the trip would have come off anyway. It could all have been a fancy on my part. I think the only way to have really tested it would have been to have contacted Bapak and seen what would have happened. Oh dear, but it still feels like a wasted opportunity! It shows so clearly my complete lack of faith. I recall that wonderful story that Varindra Vittachi tells in his “Reporter in Subud”. It was the time of great civil unrest in his native Ceylon (as it then was); a truly dangerous time. Varindra was in the heat of it all, busy reporting the fast-changing events. Then he suddenly gets a call from Bapak telling him to leave immediately and go to Bapak in Indonesia. I am amazed: Varindra does this unquestionably, with NO REASONS

being given. Thank God he did. Straight afterwards a gunman was caught in Varindras's garden intent on killing Varindra! I guess if that had been me I would not be here to tell the tale today!

Still one mistake in 23 years is not too bad is it? And I comfort myself with the thought that if I was REALLY meant to have gone, I would have done anyway! It helps a bit...

I suppose the real "problem" with my lack of trust in the Inner like this is that it has often delayed things for me and made it an extremely tortuous process to get me to change things or to do quickly what I should do. I am simply a critical person. I think I have read too much of the dangers of following intuition or inner "guidance". I may not have trust but neither have I been led into the foolishness of blindly following a leader (into suicide e.g. or gassing people or giving up all my money to a "Rolls-Royce" fund or being brainwashed into thinking all my family and friends outside of my group are "evil" ETC. All this and more are fairly recent real-life examples!) Anyway, in this instance of my sailing ship image, I had no such problems. All I could do was simply wait and see what happened.

Sure enough, it happened no more than two weeks after the inner experience. My wife and a friend both told me, within a week of each other, of a job that had just come up that "was just right for me". Now I took their word for it and immediately applied for it. For me to do anything "immediately" was something of a novelty! Anyway, shortly after this, the Head of the school I was working at came up to me at break time one day and, believe it or not, said to me: "John, I have just been talking to the head of that school you have applied for and it sounds ideal for you. She says she wants a "family man", who is a good teacher, and who will not want to use the school for his own quick promotion." Well, I got the job.

I knew I would before I went to the interview. Every time I had doubts about it and sometimes at other times also I would get the song "Greensleeves" running through my head! Oh dear, songs again! For some reason, which I do not understand, this song has come to mean separation and leaving to me. This was the first time I experienced it. I can remember it suddenly starting up one night as I walked across the school field to catch my bus home and I just knew it meant I was leaving this school and that could only mean I was going to get my promotion. I was to "receive" this song at other times in my life when I was to move house or people were to go out of my life for some reason or other.

Usually, it would occur before there was any evidence for it. I guess it simply got me to look out for such a change and, more, it helped prepare me for it. Once or twice it helped me to make a decision: the song would occur over and over and then I would find myself needing to make a decision (Is so-and-so (a member of my staff) going to leave? Should I be planning for someone new coming in? This was particularly useful when I had a member of staff absent with long-term sickness!) So convinced was I that I was going to get this job that I told my wife and suggested she make the “necessary arrangements (for the children and herself) because I would need the car when I started because this school was not on a bus route!

So within a few months of becoming a Subud member I was promoted in spite of not even being interviewed for a similar job in the previous year! And it was to come about through both inner and outer indications- that I find is the most convincing way Subud works for me. This is not so for all Subud members, of course. Subud clearly works in an individual way. I think everyone has his or her own story. This is simply mine. I hope that it can be seen as evidence of Subud’s authenticity, power and even relevance to a modern person i.e. me!!

Anyway, I was to discover that my new job was to give me some of the best evidence I have for the reality of Subud and of its potential for change in a person’s life: change that is in one’s working life and at the same time in one’s capabilities and personality. Again and again, my job was to put me into challenging situations that I simply had no doubt that **BY MYSELF** I could not cope with. Sometimes the Higher Power brought into my experience by the latihan felt almost tangible to me. But here I am getting ahead of myself! At first, I had a brief honeymoon period when I could not believe I was in such a quiet, well-run, orderly school. It was so much easier than my last school where there were a high proportion of “social problems”. My challenges were to come later...