

SUBUD SADBURY

I have never been someone who enjoyed driving- even with my new car. Yet, it was not long before I was driving 600 miles a month just to get to latihan twice a week. Still the journey just flew by as I was having a great time in the car, singing, shouting, chanting, grunting and goodness knows what! I often arrived home around midnight more awake than at any other time of the week, full of excitement, energy and happiness. This would usually carry on through most of the next day, at least, so that my work, rather than suffer because of tiredness, actually went by more quickly and happily. At this time, most people I knew had not even heard of Subud. This surprised me because so many of them were “New Agers” or people with a keen interest in meditation, Indian mysticism, paganism or any of the other “new” movements and gurus that had recently burst onto the Western scene. These may have found their way into my little Suffolk village but Subud clearly had not! Well, that was now about to change...

It all began with an apparent deterioration in my relationship with my next-door neighbour (the one with whom I had many interesting discussions over coffee whom I have previously mentioned at the beginning of my story). I suddenly realised one day that I had not had a decent conversation with him for weeks- much longer than we had ever left it before. He knew about my interest in Subud and I wondered if that had made a difference? I was unsure what to do about this, so I asked the latihan for help. I simply went upstairs into the bedroom on my own, did a few minutes latihan and then asked how things were with my neighbour and myself at this time and should I go into his house for a coffee and a chat as I used to? I received that things were “OK” between us and it was “not necessary to go in for a coffee.” I was a bit disappointed with this because I thought it would mean the non-contact between us was likely to continue indefinitely. I then decided to go for a walk. When I came back from my walk, a surprise was waiting for me. My wife had a message for me: my neighbour had been in “for a chat and would come back when I got back from my walk!”

Well, we then spent over an hour talking about Subud and then continued the conversation later that afternoon, when we were down at the swings pushing our daughters up into the sky! It was the longest talk we had had for a very long time. The upshot was that my friend and neighbour was to sit in the car next to me on my next journey to Ipswich. He met the little group and I was amazed

when he was asked outright: “So, are you thinking of joining the old Brotherhood (now “Association”) then?” To which the answer was “Yes!” I was amazed at this because the reaction of the Ipswich group to my neighbour’s coming to see them was the complete opposite of their reaction at seeing me for the first time. To me, they had been very low-key. “If it is right for you to join us you will know in yourself. It is completely your decision,” they had said to me. So I could not believe how direct they were with my neighbour. And I could not believe his equally decisive and direct reply: “Yes!” I saw him as a cautious, reflective, slow to act sort of character. I certainly did not expect this. So, soon we were driving down to Ipswich twice a week together!

There were other surprises involving other people at this time also. The most dramatic involved an ex-policeman who had recently separated from his wife, was living in a sparsely-furnished cottage with no heating or warm water (!) and was trying to make a living as a potter which had been something of a life-long dream of his. One day there was a knock at my door. I had only just got home from teaching and, as all teachers will recognise, I was in that “shell-shock” state that follows a day’s teaching. Certainly not in a state to socialise! My wife knew from experience that all I could cope with when I first got home from work was a cup of tea and a quiet sit. I was best left alone: then I would gradually become “human” again. So, on this occasion, I was horrified to hear her say: “Oh, Hello, ----- . You haven’t met John, have you? Come on in and say “Hello””. I simply could not believe it. I was sure she knew better.

Anyway, within moments I was confronted by this rather large, bearded man who seemed to fill up the entire room. He quickly made himself at home, pulled out a well-sucked, droopy pipe and put it into his mouth, happily without lighting it. He was easy to talk to, though, and I quickly liked him, especially as he laughed readily with a real, chesty laugh. Suddenly, he spotted a book on my bookshelf. It was John Bennett’s “Witness.” “Well, I never,” he said, “I’ve been looking at this guy’s books in Cambridge this morning. Are you a Bennett fan?” I explained that through reading Bennett I had recently joined a group called Subud. I asked if he had heard of it? Nothing could have prepared me for what happened next. Suddenly, he stood up, whereupon I automatically stood up, too, and, to my utter amazement, he got me in something akin to a bear hug and said: “I have been looking for a mentor and, at last, I have found him.” And there we were standing in my front room, hugging each other. I felt I had known

him all my life! In fact, I had known him less than an hour...Soon he was to be sitting in the car travelling 32 miles with my neighbour and myself.

His opening was like the man: memorable. There were about 6 of us there and it was a loud, free-flowing latihan. He and I sang a duet at one point, in what was to both of us, a completely new way. It was loud, sustained and truly full-bloodied! This latihan had everything: from profound laughter at the beginning to tears of gratitude at the end. I felt it was a real privilege to be part of it all; truly a gift from God. I ended the latihan thinking: "If only we could share this wonderful thing with the whole world..." How often I was to think this! S----- himself, stayed still- in one place- for the whole latihan and at the end we looked on the floor where he had been standing and there were two perfectly-shaped and rather large footprints made out of sweat! By this time he was outside the hall, puffing like mad on his pipe, saying over and over: "Amazing! That was amazing. I have never experienced *anything* like that before!"

Through S----- some more people were to hear of Subud and it was not long before I received a phone call, one evening, from a young woman who lived a couple of miles away, asking if she could come to talk to me about Subud. She turned out to be a beautiful, young lady with obvious intelligence and a real enquiring mind. I, again, found it very easy to talk to her and she obviously liked what she heard because I had another phone call from her a day or so later, saying that her parents wanted to meet me. I was not expecting that one! I laughingly told myself that perhaps they had misunderstood and thought I was asking to marry their daughter or something like that (chance would have been a fine thing!) When I thought about it, though, I was impressed. A----- was at least 18 but her parents were obviously still looking out for her. There had been, and I guess still is, lots in the media about strange groups brainwashing people, and worse, so I liked this response. Goodness knows what they would make of me or Subud, though. The latter (certainly not the former!) could certainly seem strange but I knew we could be totally confident that everybody's freedom was in no way compromised by it. So my neighbour and I went off to meet A-----'s family.

The house was very impressive: timber-framed and highly polished, fine quality wooden furniture everywhere with a huge log fire burning in the Tudor fireplace. It was truly enchanting. The lighting was subdued but pleasantly relaxing. The company was attentive and courteous: Suffolk hospitality at its best. We had a fine meal, goodness knows how many of us (12?) sitting round

this long oak table. Conversation was unstrained and I particularly remember how easy it was to sit and be quiet with these people as well- better than talk for the sake of it, I think. Anyway, as I drove away afterwards, I thought it had been a particularly enjoyable evening. I also realised that I had been surprisingly relaxed all through. This was not, by any means, usually the case with me: I was usually guarded and shy with strangers and in unfamiliar settings like this one. In fact, I could be quite ill at ease and strained with people I did not know or who were so obviously different from myself. Not so on this occasion! I actually felt a clear sense of “all-rightness” in myself: a sense, in fact, of inner completeness which seemed to be independent of where I was or whom I was with! It was good for such a “gawky” person as myself to experience this. I could see that this Subud was clearly not just changing things around me but it was also changing me as a person. Why I was acquiring social competence at last, it seemed! At 30+ I was a bit of a late starter here. Better late than never!

Well, A----- and then my neighbour’s wife, C-----, both joined Subud. I remember experiencing a special moment during A----’s opening even though I, as a man, was not allowed in the same room as her or the group of ladies with her. The men, in fact, were in a completely different building, about 25 yards away. Nonetheless, at one point, about half way through the latihan I was almost overwhelmed by an inexplicable feeling of joy, real joy. This time I wondered whether there was a particular moment when this latihan entered a person or became manifest to a person. If there was I was sure this was it! Through A----- another man joined our group. He was the second son of a farmer, who would meet us at Ipswich on his brand new, glistening, shiny and very powerful motor bike. He, like A-----, had been attending “The Essex School Of Philosophy” and was familiar with the ideas of Gurdjieff and John Bennett, both of whom had been so influential in Subud’s early days. It was interesting to see the same thing happening some 30 years later. Strangely, I spent most of his opening latihan sobbing- goodness knows why.

Well, from just me in the remote wilds of Suffolk, there were now more Subud members near to where I lived than in the Ipswich group! There were two car loads of us travelling to join the two or three in the Ipswich group! Amazing that a year previously, Subud was unknown in my part of the world and there were now enough for us to start a new group here. My Ipswich days were already over. 128 miles a week’s driving was now to give way to less than 50. Our new group was also to benefit from the arrival of two long-standing

members who joined us from nearby Essex. They were to provide a stable, solid core and remain part of the group for many years. All sorts of things were going to happen to almost everyone else though...