

## “I Give You A Name...Yes, I Give You A Name!”

As well as giving me practical guidance for my daily life, the latihan was prompting me to shout, run around, dance, sing, chant and all the rest. After each latihan, I would invariably feel refreshed and strengthened. The advice continued to urge me to be strong and to stand on my own two feet. One latihan in Cambridge made me feel that my insides were being pounded away as if by a boxer in training. Certainly, I could understand that I needed “toughening up!” Curiously, also, after this latihan, one man came over to me and said that he thought I might “need a new name that would give me more aggression in the world!” I was really surprised by this for a couple of reasons. First, it is very unusual for anyone in Subud to give another person advice like this, especially if, as now, it was unasked for. Second, I had at this time been having many moments in my latihan when I was singing and, sometimes shouting, about names- especially about them being sacred and holy! Now it is quite common for Subud members to change their names, perhaps feeling that they had in some way outgrown the name that their parents had chosen for them or that they needed a new name to symbolise a new phase in their lives.

I think, in Subud, the practice stems from the story that Bapak was sickly as a child until his name was changed! Certainly he was more than happy to give new names to people when asked and it became a common thing for Subud members to do this. The practice was carried on after his death by a member of Bapak’s family: Ibu Rahayu. I did not really have a lot of sympathy with this, even though I knew that it was quite common for people to change their names when they entered a religious order, for example. I had also recently read that one of the foremost Christian mystics, Roysbroek, had said that “everyone had a spiritual name” which was a “secret between him or her and God.”

But to me it seemed somewhat ridiculous that so many Westerners in Subud were walking round with Muslim names (I lost count of the number of Latifs I met, for example!) whereas there were not so many Muslims changing their names to Western ones! I have to say, too, that the idea that someone has the authority or right to give you a new name was not appealing to me. So, all in all, I was extremely surprised to find my latihan going on and on about holy and sacred names so insistently. Finally, to my utter surprise, I found myself then shouting out over and over again in my latihan: “I give you a name! I give you a name! I give you a name: *Hussalu!*” I was unsure of the spelling, particularly

of the “u” and the “a” either side of the double “s.” Then I began to sing this outside of the latihans as well. I simply could not avoid, or forget, it: it was so insistent- and every time it carried feelings of great happiness with it. I would sing or shout it with great joy!

Once again, confirmation then came from an outer event or happening when a Subud friend visited me (guess what his name was? You got it: Latif!). As we were enjoying our tea and biscuits, Latif told me he had begun learning Arabic. My ears pricked up! I was sure this name that was dominating my latihans at this time was Arabic. It was a word I had never come across before but I thought it sounded Arabic to me, so when Latif said he had his books in the car I asked if I could see them- without, at this stage saying why. He brought in two or three huge dictionaries. I looked in the first- a bulky Arabic/ English dictionary – and there it was: Hussallu. It meant “to receive – something like an honorary degree!” Wow, my heart leapt! I explained my excitement to Latif and at the first opportunity I told my friend and next door neighbour. It seemed truly amazing. The book also explained that there was some problem with the spelling: it could either be an “a” or a “u”! Latif explained that in Arabic it was the beginnings of word that were most significant- in this case “Huss.” Anyway, the word I had received so dramatically in my latihans was easily identified in the dictionary. I especially liked the meaning: “to receive an honorary award” because receiving was what the latihan was all about.

I told a few people about this receiving but it became a problem for some people. I suppose they had not come across someone receiving their own name before (one usually asked Bapak or Ibu Rahayu to give a name) and they were, therefore, unsure how to treat it. Worse, Bapak did not seem to have mentioned it in any of his talks, so I guess he was not on hand to tell them what to think! Anyway, I was not prepared to get involved in discussions about it or to get het up about it. When I saw there was a difficulty for some people about it, I just spoke only briefly about it when I had to and decided to carry on answering to my old name. I was happy having a spiritual name that was between me and God. I have to say, too, that a few people had no difficulty with it at all and one or two (like my visiting friend studying Arabic) continued using it when they wrote to me for years afterwards.

This seemed to be one of my oddest and most incredible inner experiences yet and, also, one of the most convincingly confirmed in the outer!

