

## EARLY LATIHANS AND MY MARRIAGE

There was a theme in many of my early latihan that should, I suppose, have alerted me more to what was happening in my marriage, culminating in a series of latihan that impressed on me that I should see myself as “married to the latihan”! This was so insistent that I actually went to the jewellers and bought myself a cheap wedding ring to wear on my right hand. It gave me a surprising amount of satisfaction to have a wedding ring on each hand- one for my earthly marriage and one for my “spiritual marriage.” To wear two rings like this made me feel that my life was in balance and it felt good. It also reminded me of the “spiritual marriage” that Christian mystics like St. Teresa spoke of. Of course, mine was not the same as their experience but it did have a little similarity: the ring was an outer symbol now of my relationship with the latihan. Meanwhile, however, my earthly marriage was beginning to plummet to new depths...

My wife and I were poles apart: we had shared the adventures of setting up homes together, having children together and, of course, we were both teachers. As the marriage went on, I guess our values, wishes etc all became more and more different. She was putting a great deal of energy into her work, in improving the home, of *doing* more and more; I was reluctant with all of this, more interested and excited by ideas and inner experiences. She used to joke that when I died she was going to have me stuffed and put in a chair with a book in my hand and nobody would notice! Like all good jokes, there was some truth in this- but also a deal of exaggeration as well! By this time I suppose the joking was over and things were getting a lot more serious...

The latihan had been giving me advice about this almost as soon as I began experiencing it and largely at this stage through my feelings (which meant I simply did not know how true they were). I began to feel that ahead of me there was “pain, pain, pain; great destruction. I see that the secure routines of my life are destined to be turned upside down, sooner or later. I FEEL her strength.” I also understood something of her suffering: “She does not feel understood. She feels isolated and unable to share.” (of course, we BOTH felt like that: I wanted her to share my inner life...) I also saw that she had so many good qualities: she inspired a deep love from out two children; she was a very good, hardworking teacher; she had a very strong will especially when faced with physical pain and she was particularly good with people in any sort of need. But I saw, too, that she felt belittled as if everything she did was criticised! I see now that when two

people are so different each can so easily feel like that. A friend of mine was to say to me later that he noticed how stooped over I was throughout my marriage and I did not stand upright and straight until my marriage was over! I do not think this is anyone's fault- it seems to be a natural result of such big differences between two people.

At this time, also, I had the unwanted feeling that I was somehow being "withdrawn" from my children. It sometimes showed itself in my having a feeling of being "pushed back" and prevented from joining in with some of the children's games! It was extremely odd: normally if they were playing nearby I would at some point go and mess about with them for awhile. Now it felt as if I was not to do that. With hindsight, I wonder if we were being prepared for not being around each other so much in the future? I also noticed how much more independent the two of them were becoming, anyway: they were not toddlers any more.

These feelings were to be repeated regularly over the coming months so that I could not forget them even if at the time I did not really know what to do about them. It was not long, in fact, before I was to feel separate and withdrawn from both my wife and my children. I would watch her take them off to various clubs and outdoor activities and the gap between us just seemed to be getting wider and wider. When we were together there was very little to say between my wife and myself. There were lots of sad silences and I remember long journeys in the car were the worst: just the noise of the engine almost the whole way! I suppose by this time we had become "non-husband and wife" to each other and the lack of sharing, the emotional isolation, our absence to each other was becoming unendurable...

I, in spite of latihan warnings and advice, continued to hope for some sort of magical change that would sort it all out. There were a couple of occasions when I thought this might, in fact, happen because it seemed the latihan was becoming directly involved.

The first occasion was quite unlike any experience I had yet had...I came downstairs one morning surprised to find my wife cleaning the kitchen windows and singing happily! This was nothing short of a shock because my wife was not one for such happy housework!! At the same time, my own feelings were- unusually- extremely negative and for some reason I associated them with the need in me for a latihan. So I mentioned to my wife that I was just going

upstairs to “have a bit of latihan.” Just as I was leaving the room my wife suddenly said to me: “Oh, I meant to say to you I had this funny dream last night...” She then went on to recount how she had “heard this really beautiful, motherly, singing in the night and it was so lovely!” At first, she thought that perhaps the television had been left on and eventually she went and saw that it had not. Then she realised that it must have been a “dream” and so she just lay back and enjoyed it. Again, she said it was like a loving mother singing to her! As soon as she began to tell me about this, all my negative feelings lifted and I, too, felt really happy so that I no longer felt the need for a latihan. I felt she had had a latihan-type experience for herself. This was confirmed for me when I read a section of one of Bapak’s talks given at the Cilandak Congress in 1971. He talks there of “a beautiful singing that can occur in the night when you are in the presence of a person with a highly developed soul” (which I take to mean “a person who has experienced the latihan”) And, because the experience was so happy, I really felt positive about our future.

The next experience happened several months later and was not so positive. This time my wife recounted a dream in which a burglar was trying to break into the house by cutting holes into the glass in the front door. “And guess what?” she said, “the holes were perfect circles with lines in them; they were your Subud symbol!” She had described the Subud symbol clearly but I could not help but see that it was not being welcomed into her life now. Perhaps the door was the barrier in her to Subud and the latihan was coming into her life (as a burglar cutting the circles in the door) in a way that the Bible says the Holy Spirit can come: “like a thief in the night.” I did not feel hopeful. I had the impression that the latihan was unwelcome; it was being resisted. It looked to me now that Subud was not going to magically unite us. The latihan was not something that would force anything or anyone. I knew that. So I now began to feel a bit more fearful about what was going to happen.

At the beginning of all this, my wife had been brought very low so that she looked tired and drawn and clearly unhappy. But she obviously worked things out for herself, perhaps with friends who were unknown to me at that time, so that she got on top of it all. She started going out more and doing more things independently of me. She began to look happier and even younger. True, we did try going out more together for awhile but it was too late: decisions had been made. I simply had not caught up yet!

As it was, there was to be a bit more time because there was a Subud World Congress coming up at this time and it was in England. Every 5 years (it used to be 4) Subud members from all over the world have a chance to get together at what is called a “World Congress.” Because Subud does not belong to any particular country, these are held in a different country each time. To date, these Congresses have been held in Indonesia, the U.K., Japan, Australia, the U.S.A e.g. This one was going to be held in Windsor and it seemed too good a chance to miss; it might, in fact, be my only chance to see such a gathering at first hand. By now I think the prospect of a week or two apart seemed like a good idea to both my wife and myself. In fact, in the lead up to my going things seemed a lot more relaxed between us and by the time I left our difficulties had temporarily taken a back seat. I can see now we BOTH had new and different things to occupy us!