

What Happened?

By Cenred Harmsworth

Pak Subuh was an extraordinary human being who passed on to us an extraordinary gift.

For many of us, back in the early days of Subud, the potential seemed phenomenal. At the time there were plenty of spiritual groups, gurus, movements, sects whatever—a veritable smorgasbord—all convinced that they had ‘the answer’. Yet for those of us who had just joined Subud, it was as if we had chanced upon the ultimate—the *latihan kejiwaan* was so real and compelling, such a direct experience, and seemingly with no baggage, dogma, rites or rituals. One would often feel awe-struck by that special feeling after latihan, or the spiritual power, the light, that pervaded large assemblies of Subud brothers and sisters, as at National Congresses. You could almost cut the atmosphere with a knife, it was that real.

So the question now has to be: What went wrong? What happened? Why is Subud seeing such a decline in numbers? What about all those ideals many of us held when we were younger? Were they just fanciful imaginings—symptomatic of our youth?

With regard to your experience in Subud ask yourself the following questions—as objectively as you can:

- Do you harbour resentment?
- Are there people in Subud who drive you nuts?
- Do you keep putting disharmony down to ‘purification’, believing that ultimately it will prove beneficial—what an old Indonesian helper used to call ‘useful friction’?
- Do you find it difficult to communicate with some people for fear of being judged, e.g. that you are acting from your ‘heart and mind’?
- Further to this, if you are relatively new (say, less than three years), do you find some of the more ‘advanced’ members somewhat intimidating?
- For longer-standing members, are you somewhat discouraged after having had this wonderful dream about Subud, to find that after all these years, you’ve got much the same people, with much the same issues?
- Does it seem that nothing is changing or moving forward—and when you raise this concern with your Subud brothers and sisters, they either rationalise: “We are not ready yet;” “It will be our children; we are merely paving the way;” or, worse, they personally judge you for bringing it up!
- Is there something about Subud that makes you feel embarrassed, if not ashamed? You shy away from talking about it with other people. Indeed at times the whole thing seems a tad ‘amateurish’. You feel you should not judge, but these thoughts do cross your mind.
- Are you confused because you feel fantastic after latihan, only to find some people on all sort of weird trips afterwards? Or, worse, a meeting is scheduled after the latihan and it goes ‘horribly wrong’, and you go home

feeling confused and exhausted!

- Do all those aspirations Subud had all those years ago seem to be slipping away? Indeed you are seeing wonderful things happening *outside* Subud which at one time you hoped Subud would be involved in. In other words the world is moving on (doing it) while Subud is making other plans (talking about it)!
- Does it not seem odd that time and time again, things do not seem to work out despite constant testing—including of course Subud enterprises?
- With regard to testing, didn't you think this would have opened a path for us through the stormy waters, i.e. given us guidance, when the fact is, it hasn't?!
- Do not you think it odd that although during testing one may feel the 'rightness' of something and a deep connection to an inner intelligence,— facts are facts—it has not helped Subud to progress?
- Have you found that testing 'results' did not reflect what actually happened? Or worse, you followed the testing to the letter, and things simply just did not work out, no 'flow' occurred, despite more and more testing. It is odd really, is it not?
- In fact from time to time do you feel depressed about the situation in Subud?

A disproportionate percentage of members appear to be family members stretching sometimes across three generations. New people are not being opened, and in fact people are falling away. *Subud seems tired.*

The big questions we then need to ask are:

- People have given their lives to this. What has gone wrong? Why has Subud not grown?
- Why are there ongoing pockets of disharmony—often stretching over years and years?
- Where is the *proof* we were led to believe would manifest in the world as a result of people doing the latihan?

So on the positive side now, can you relate to what follows?

- Do you still find the actual experience of the latihan thrilling because it is so real?
- Do you look forward to going to latihan?
- Do you think it would be wonderful if everyone could experience the latihan?
- Would you like to see things change, *really change*, for the better—somehow?
- Or does all the discouraging talk above appear to relate to another Subud

group somewhere else? In other words, you may have heard of such things, but your own group is fantastic. (And, on that note, there certainly are such groups.)

Background

A number of people in Subud have asked me to write this article. The reason for this is that way back in the mid '70s a series of events occurred which appear to have echoed on over several decades—mainly due to misunderstanding and ignorance. Many people feel that Subud has reached a point where things must be cleared up and/or put on the table—as there is a pervasive sense of decline in the organisation. I would also sincerely hope that Subud judgements such as, 'This is all too heavy,' 'This is from the heart and mind,' etc. are not applied to this article, as this is the sort of thinking which goes to the very heart of why Subud is in the state it is today.

I was opened in 1971 and became a helper several years after that. In 1975, through another Subud colleague, I became aware of the Regional Helper for Central Java, one of Subud's largest areas, if not the largest. Letters were exchanged, and something 'came through' that left no doubt that we should visit this person. His name was Murhariyanto, affectionately called 'Mas Totok', and he was the nephew of one of Bapak's most respected helpers, the late Pak Sudarto. Apparently Pak Sudarto had opened Mas Totok when he was a young boy. We also became aware that Mas Totok's father, i.e. Sudarto's brother, had been 'opened' many many years earlier. This raised certain questions about the relationship of Javanese spiritual tradition to the Subud latihan—as it seemed that Subud was not alone, that there were others opened independently of Subud.

Newly married, my wife Julie and myself borrowed some money and hopped on a plane to spend three weeks in Indonesia. This was our first trip overseas. During this time in Central Java we found that many doors opened up; we felt tremendous love, warmth, and 'safety' and we also received a lot of sound advice. At the time we had a clear sense that this was something we *had to do*, something that was important for us and that we had to experience, something that would stay with us long after we left.

We found Mas Totok to be a very approachable, likeable person who was relatively well educated and spoke reasonable English. He was also very courageous in the way he expressed his views, views that seemed to me to be based on integrity and strong values. He said things that some of us were perhaps only thinking—and had the guts to uphold these views, often in quite confrontational situations. Like all of us, he had his foibles and peculiarities, but this in no way detracted from the content of the experience for those in his presence.

It is also worth mentioning that, apart from Mas Totok, when we were in Central Java we met a number of other very impressive people who were not in Subud, yet appeared to be opened, some of whom had profound spiritual knowledge. One of these people was a highly regarded and well-known Christian priest.

Our experience in Central Java was very powerful and convincing; however, on our return we kept the experience to ourselves despite constant questions and badgering from our Subud brothers and sisters, almost all of them helpers. After a month or so, we were invited to dinner with some helpers who were curious (to the point of obsession) about why we had so 'mysteriously' disappeared off overseas to Indonesia—yet did not go to Wisma Subud. We finally explained the reason and also gave an account of our experiences in an objective and matter-of-fact manner. One event led to another, the result being that some Subud members, again nearly all

helpers in the Melbourne group, invited Mas Totok out to Australia. This had quite severe ramifications for Subud, particularly in Melbourne, but also internationally. The Subud organisation felt we had made a choice, ostensibly turning away from Subud. This was an incorrect judgement, as no such choice had been made. As I remember it, a message was received from Cilandak that the people involved with Mas Totok must choose between Mas Totok and Subud.

People were therefore *asked* to make a choice; it was not something done of their own volition. Hindsight is a wonderful thing; perhaps this whole episode could have been handled quite differently. But then again, people were very keen to meet Mas Totok: some certainly had misgivings about Subud; some specifically wanted him to visit for purposes of 'spiritual training', i.e. they were feeling spiritually 'stuck' in Subud. The end result of this was that for ten years we were out of Subud—and a number of people still are.

In the mid '80s, through a seemingly miraculous series of events, the company I was working for sent my family and myself on an assignment in Indonesia. This was one of a number of quite extraordinary 'coincidences' which I will not go into here, but it culminated in Bapak's passing one year later. We were essentially there with Bapak for the last year of his life—to *the exact day*. Further to this, a relative of my wife's married Bapak's granddaughter, and along with Sjarif Horthy, I was asked to be best man at the wedding—as a result of which we became quite close to Bapak's immediate family.

Basic Principles

The experiences I had with Mas Totok have remained alive for me. This man, who was a simple farmer, was a Regional Helper for one of Subud's largest groups. However, he had his own distinct principles. These were as follows:

God is not divisive. God is not interested in structure, bureaucracy or impressive titles and is only really interested in his creative masterpiece, the human being—and that we should ultimately find divinity within.

Subud emphasises bodily movements, but over time the latihan should deepen and become quieter; the body becomes still. The latihan certainly cleans and purifies, but generally, as this process advances, one does not keep making the same movements over and over for years. The latihan becomes like deep, true, mystical meditation. Mas totally accepted that we are all different, and that some people will continue to move, sing, and so on. But his point was that God lies within; there are very deep places within us, sublime spiritual dimensions. And once you enter those places, the body becomes very still. This is because you are no longer part of the body, or, at least, not in the body.

Subud is in some respects fiercely protectionist—whereas 'God' is free. The Subud word 'mixing' can be seen to be part of this. On the one hand, it makes a certain sense: for example, if people run off in all directions, trying out this, that and the other, it can devalue, if not colour, the experience of the latihan. On the other hand, it 'ring-fences' Subud. There has to be a compromise, a certain freedom available, and an openness to other paths. Indeed to many Subud people during this period, those people who were with Mas Totok were 'mixing'. You could come at this from many angles, but at the end of the day Mas was a helper after all, who was invited over to Australia—he did not ask to come—yet in Melbourne there ended up being two 'groups' etc.

There are other groups/religions that experience this inner awakening. It is given different names and guises but this is the same direct spiritual initiation all the true

teachers and spiritual masters have passed on to certain followers throughout the ages. We have the word 'latihan'. By the very fact that it is a foreign word, we in the West have given it a kind of *aura*, which seems to make it especially ours, a special Subud thing. However, latihan is a common Indonesian word meaning 'training' or 'exercise'. We also know that *latihan kejiwaan* simply means 'spiritual training'. Mas Totok called it just that, in English, 'spiritual training', no aura, straightforward.

You can do more than two latihans a week. You can do latihan daily. You can open up more and more deeply within—to deeper and deeper spiritual levels. Every great spiritual teacher has taught this truth: that the Kingdom of God lies within. I learned from Mas Totok that the more effort we put in, the more quickly we can progress and the deeper we can go. (However, because too many latihans for some people can result in mental disturbance or instability, Bapak's guidelines in this regard need to be respected and any additional latihans should only be undertaken subject to advice and guidance from helpers.)

The role of the helper is very important—it is to bring about this inner opening successfully and permanently. One responsibility of the helper is to ensure that the person can eventually do latihan ('train') by himself or herself, i.e. without the need for a group or guidance from a helper.

The spiritual man or woman is very normal. By 'normal' we mean no ego trips, no piousness, no 'holier-than-thou' attitude, no 'we are the chosen few' syndrome, but very, very normal, —very approachable if you like.

The spiritual man or woman loves all of God's creation. This is a tough call given the stresses of the modern world we live in; however, witnessing how Mas Totok continuously saw God manifest in all things was impressive. In fact, this word 'love', what does it really mean? There were times in Central Java when we experienced a deep, burning, pure, Godly love—unconditional and selfless. This was the single most important thing that happened to us at the time. We knew what 'love of God' really meant—and that God *is* love. It was interesting on our return to Melbourne being exposed to all sorts of criticisms and innuendo from Subud regarding 'the source of Totok's power': 'Totok's energy is from demons associated with nearby volcanoes in Java,' etc. Understandably there was a lot of emotion around at the time; however, one thing was for sure: to personally experience this Divine Love placed things in perspective. We had certainly never experienced this in Subud.

The spiritual path is not an easy path. Be courageous and accept what the Divine lays out for you. What happens is ultimately for your own good, no matter how tough things seem at times. For all the 'blissful states' that one either hears about or experiences for oneself, we still have to go through what we have to go through. What must be, must be. So understand that this is part of the clearing process; it will pass. Indeed being on this path is almost like accelerating the working out of our 'karma'.

Go with the spiritual path; don't go with the group, any group, if it is going to hinder your spiritual development. Life is very short; people will not remember much about you twenty years after you have left this material plane. But as we read in the scriptures: '*To God your heart is an open book*'. This spiritual training can enlighten you; it is an extraordinary gift.

Also, it is important to note, Mas Totok had the greatest of respect for Bapak.

Gurus

In the early Subud days, how was it that there were certain Indonesian helpers who appeared to have 'got it' after only a few years. What occurred that enabled them to have this extraordinary spiritual understanding, wisdom and power—apparently so quickly? Were they different from us, were they advanced souls and therefore ready for it? In my opinion that was *not* the reason. The reason, at least according to my personal experience, was that these people had the benefit of being in close proximity, and being personally assisted, by an individual who had great spiritual knowledge and power. Those who were fortunate enough to be near Bapak for extended periods of time, were very aware of this other-worldly, pervasive spiritual energy. In fact people used to travel from all parts of the globe to experience this, even for short periods of time. Many would later comment how this seemed to 'accelerate' their spiritual progress. Subud shies away from words such as 'guru'; nonetheless in the East it is generally part of people's practice to spend as much time as possible in the 'presence of the guru', as this is viewed as being very beneficial. This is assuming of course that the 'guru' is a person worthy of such a title.

Organisation

There is no doubt that as an organisation grows, some form of structure and organisation is required. But how many people have I spoken to who have actually found Subud's obsession with this side of things a complete turn-off. So the focus has to be on your spiritual growth and development. This is what you will have when you move on after this life—not the group. A key insight from the time with Mas Totok was the following. Anybody can organise a group, which among other things can provide personal recognition in terms of position and titles. This can make people feel good and appeal to their egos. If that's what turns people on, let them do that. But the world is full of organisations everywhere. You have been given a great gift. Focus on that, not the group; the group can come later. *Nurture your own spiritual growth and development.* This is not selfish: the reason I say this is that as you grow and become clearer and clearer, your value to the world increases immeasurably. As you open up, you increasingly radiate a certain vibrational quality, a Divine Light and selfless love, which has an effect on the people you interact with. In some cases there will also be an increase in creativity and inspiration.

As Bapak taught, the latihan is all about people becoming what it means to be really human. People are less influenced by desires that might otherwise hinder their better judgement. Mas Totok talked about cleaning and growth; he talked about the vast spaces that lie within. This is where the 'heaven' worlds are to be found. These inner spaces are imperceptible simply because we are all clogged up; we need to be cleaned and cleared. The *latihan kejiwaan* does this clearing away, we do 'open', and it is almost like something appears out of nothing—but in fact it is already there. In my personal experience, once uncovered, this other side is as real as the material world we perceive with our five senses. I recall him mentioning that the short time allowed within Subud for latihan, i.e. half an hour, often was just enough for 'cleaning'; it did not provide the time for spiritual growth and the deepening required to penetrate these wondrous inner dimensions. I am sure that there are many Subud people who would debate this, but if you sit quietly for half an hour after your latihan, you may feel the difference and the benefit; I would be surprised if you did not. What then if you went even longer, plunged deeper? One of the most worthwhile things Mas told me was that once you realise that these inner planes are there, you can open yourself deeper and deeper.

Where to Go from Here

Subud will slowly fade away over the next twenty years unless something changes. Pockets of people will probably still continue with the latihan, many of them relatives

and children of current members. Those who receive strongly will carry on, feeling very blessed that they were given this contact.

Helpers and Other Roles

Subud will need to change; the helpers in the West have by and large not been good examples. Anyway it seems that most Subud members are now or have at some point been helpers. People will not be drawn to an organisation where those who have been doing the latihan for years and years behave poorly; nor in this day and age will they tolerate any form of spiritual arrogance. People simply need to experience the inner awakening and from time to time have simple non-authoritarian explanations. Interestingly, nowadays people appear more and more reluctant to take on roles within Subud, particularly organisational-type roles such as being a committee member. Perhaps a reason for this is that they feel, “Enough is enough—it is just too painful—I do not need it.”

Structure

The structure needs professional analysis; it needs to be changed and modernised. At the moment for its size, it is over-layered, over-bureaucratic, and stifling.

The Lingo

We should move away from historical concepts and language that have either not served us well or create bad impressions. A good (bad) example is ‘Subud Youth’ which sounds like something from WWII Germany—certainly not ‘cool’. We need to leave behind us rhetoric such as: ‘This is from the heart and mind.’ Okay, we know so much emanates from these areas, and, sure, we can differentiate: someone is ‘mindy’; someone is very emotional; another is very quiet and deep; but welcome to the real world—an impure heart can often be a channel for righteous actions. People usually try their best, give what they can. You may think something is from an impure channel. Listen to them, respect them; if you have another view, share it. But do not judge them. Everyone constantly acts from the heart and mind. The ideal is that once we are opened we will get deeper and deeper insights and understandings—the waters do become less tumultuous—but we will continue to use the heart and mind. For example, tomorrow at work, right? We do it everyday....

What Will Help Subud Revitalise and Begin to Move Forward Again?

Subud needs to have courage and confidence. Subud should seriously consider abandoning the concepts of the past, such as being against self-promotion, or, at an individual level, adopting Islamic names etc. We should also consider waiving the three-month probationary period (a shocking term really), and simply tell people who are interested: “If you feel this is what you have been led to, well, confirm that; go away and think about it for a few weeks, talk to whomever you want, come back and we will take it from there. But realise that this is something that takes commitment and patience, something that is to be respected.”

Bapak set down guidelines. Bapak was human; he did make mistakes. Furthermore this is a new century now, while Subud arguably is anchored in the middle of the last one. We should challenge the old ways of thinking.

We acknowledge Bapak’s legacy. Some of this legacy comes from his Javanese background; that’s fine. But now we must move on, move forward, modernise. This does *not* mean another bout of protracted meetings with helpers flying around the place; that would merely be replaying the old gramophone record and would continue to deplete funds which are scarce anyway. I am talking about a new way of thinking that is based on a deep connection to the highest of sources. By tapping into this universal wisdom and power, we experience a consciousness that transcends the

mundane world, this material reality. Indeed we have the opportunity to really experience pure Divine Love; it is there and we have the key. From this there will emerge a complete change in the way we think about ourselves, others and Subud—and then we will be able to talk about this to others with total conviction and sincerity, not preaching, certainly not with a feeling that ‘we have something that you don’t’.

This is a different approach, it is about connecting with other people *internally*; even modern quantum physics acknowledges that everything is connected. Blind ego goes out the door when we get this: that we are all one. It is as if we are going back to the ‘knowledge of the ancients’ but combining that with the modern era, this scientific age. Indeed Bapak (and Mas Totok) use to talk about long forgotten ancient civilisations made up of people who were very spiritually evolved. It may have been necessary for us to go through what we’ve been through, but now we may be ready to really move forward and bring the two together: the highly developed intellect of the modern man and the inner spiritual connection to the Divine which has been long forgotten. In talking to interested outsiders about the latihan, we simply talk about this amazing connection within: the ‘connectedness’ with all things. We do not dwell on ‘purifications’, hearts and minds’ etc. We understand it as it should be understood, that is, as a wonderful thing.

So how do we achieve this connection, experience this love, this ‘new’ way of viewing the world?

We do this by giving the necessary time over for our own personal spiritual training and development.

Whether we move forward with the term ‘helper’ or call it something else (if anything at all) is inconsequential; any individual who is opened deeply has the innate ability to open other people deeply.

Such individuals are channels and witnesses to a flow that comes directly from their own deep connection with the Divine Source. People joining them will perceive this flow or vibration—in the same way we perceived this vibration around Bapak or his immediate helpers.

These individuals are also aware that being a channel or facilitator for this deep inner connection to the Divine is a responsibility of considerable importance and significance, and when people in a state of anxiety join with them for latihan, they will provide encouragement and assistance as required. This assistance would take the form of spiritual training, not necessarily protracted explanations. They understand that the benefit to these people is beyond measure—and consequently will take this role very seriously indeed.

And for those who are doing the latihan the most important thing is to be aware that the flame of the *latihan kejiwaan* is always working, clearing, training. We are growing all the time. Fan this flame—this is a gift—it is something to treasure.