

Editor's note: The following article is a reprint. It was previously published in Subud Voice and The Headless Way.

Subud and Buddhism

by Leonard Oliver

My background is Christian and the latihan has given me experiences with a distinct Christian flavour. However, since the age of sixteen I have been deeply interested in Buddhism and for over thirty years it has provided inspiration and consolation in my life. The latihan in its searching way has shed light on those aspects of Buddhism that have influenced me. So, with a degree of inner conviction and gratitude, I would like to share my thoughts on what are for me key elements in Buddhism.

I have encountered the Buddha as an historic person and as the originator of an immensely profound and rich culture. I have been moved by the Dharma, the wealth of spiritual guidance, including the Brahma Viharas which are the four great virtues. These are loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. They are given distinct and helpful definitions. Loving-kindness focuses on the well-being of others and is expressed in small, everyday acts of kindness. As in Buddhism the division between self and others is considered an illusion, there is little wonder that one person's pain draws out another's compassion. Sympathetic joy celebrates the successes of others without a hint of meanness. Equanimity is about being grounded and responding to life's vicissitudes from a place of calm.

One view of the four virtues would be that they are obviously desirable and worth cultivating. Buddhism, however, insists that they will flow spontaneously and appropriately if the inner state has settled deeply into its original clarity and alertness. This is a practical truth. Buddhists are very keen on a skillful approach to life. I am reminded of how in Subud we employ simple but skillful means. We find it essential to approach the latihan attentively, in a state of quietness and surrender.

There is a telling story, with practical import, concerning the Zen master Ikkyu. A man asked Ikkyu to write down a maxim encapsulating his wisdom. Ikkyu wrote the word 'Attention'. 'Is that all?' said the man. 'Will you add something more?' Ikkyu wrote 'Attention, Attention'. 'Well,' said the man, 'I don't see much depth here.' Ikkyu then wrote his final note, 'Attention, Attention, Attention'.

In response to Ikkyu's story, it would be reasonable to ask what essentially should be the focus of attention. The answer points to that original clarity, the source of the four great virtues. This is known as the inner Buddha-nature which is boundless awareness itself. It leads us to discover a fascinating link between Buddhist and Subud experience.

As those who have enjoyed Harlinah Longcroft's History of Subud will know, in Jogjakarta after the war the Subud movement was provisionally known as Kasunyatan. This is a word with its root in a term familiar to Buddhists. Sunyata means emptiness. This is not simply a philosophic notion concerning the inner nature of sentient beings, but an experiential truth. Again we encounter the Buddha-nature, that state of being completely unmasked, open and alert. Some Buddhists use the term 'surrendered' in this context.

It was in 1947, during a testing session with Bapak, that the name Subud was received. Apart from the familiar definition, it was said at the time that the word means 'empty', 'round', 'zero'. Reflecting this, in an early edition of Bapak's *Advice and Guidance for Helpers*, Brodjolukito says, 'Personally I am convinced that the right state is a condition of zero.' I find in this simple, lucid phrase a bridge between the latihan and essential Buddhist experience which is both sure and heart-warming. I value such connectedness. It is relevant to my personal experience and to our shared view that the latihan taps the well-springs of the great enduring religions, Buddhism included.

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<http://www.raymondo.demon.co.uk/subud/leonard.htm>