

Towards A Bigger Subud

By Marcus Bolt

Assuming our sentient existence is not a molecular accident, but is either the creation of a transcendent source, which we refer to as 'God', or a small unit of a pantheistic 'is-ness', the maxim 'We are created in the image of our Maker' makes conceptual sense to me. Our human creative abilities reflect the way we are made, just as whatever we write, or paint, or create, intimates what and how we are.

Whatever brought us into existence[1], its major creative technique appears to be a developing from a rudimentary to a complete state, via staged maturation - similar to the way in which a work of art or an embryo in the womb develops. When fully formed, an entity or an abstract collective such as a society or a religion will entropy and die, unless it adapts to changing circumstances and starts afresh. This evolving [2] pattern of growth can be seen reflected not only in our planet's and our species' development but also in the unfolding of our history, our sciences, our cultural efforts and our belief systems.

As an example, in the past, most people took the Bible as literal truth, whereas today only Christian fundamentalists do, while thinking believers may read it for its poetic mystical symbolism, or might plumb its psychological, sociological or anthropological depths and so on. At face value it describes a universe consisting of a smallish, flat, geocentric world sandwiched between the extremes of heaven and hell and peopled by warring tribes. Its Abrahamic God comes across as mean, revengeful, intolerant, and petty - not very 'almighty' at all (if He were around today, His social worker would recommend an anger management course for starters). The Bible was obviously written by men with far less scientific knowledge than even my own meagre schoolboy chemistry and physics.

Three thousand years later, our understanding has evolved to such an extent that even my nine-year old grandson can get to grips with the concept of the Big Bang and that it happened fifteen billion years ago, that we're still expanding and may well eventually entropy back to heatless nothingness. He also takes it as read that our earth is part of a tiny solar system in the outer arm of a minor spiral galaxy that is 120,000 light years across, that most stars he can see are the suns of other solar systems or are galaxies hundreds of light years distant, and that what is visible and measurable is only a minute fragment of what is actually out there in all

directions[3].

And now Quantum Theory reveals that atomic particles, of which we are made, can be in two places at once at the same time, and that, as a consequence, parallel multi-verses may exist in which we live out all our possible lives.

Compared to that small-minded universe of the Bible, this is beginning to evolve into a Creation that's pretty awesome. And awesomeness is definitely a quality I would like my Creator to have, for the vaster the universe - the more outlandishly incomprehensible whatever created it is - the more reassured and relieved I feel that there is something greater than us all.

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If we accept the premise that we reflect our evolutionary nature in everything we create, including our institutions, it follows that Subud is no exception. It too has evolved, from a nameless grouping of a handful of Bapak's friends in the pre- and early postwar period to the international organisation of some 10,000 souls we know today. But all organisations eventually reach their evolutionary apogee and, if they don't adapt and change, they run down and expire. So, my question is: at what stage is Subud now?

Worryingly, the symptoms of evolutionary entropy are all there. The predicted mega-growth never happened and membership is in decline; the enterprise concept has failed and no 'new culture' has emerged as foretold. We seem to have become worn out, paradoxically resisting 'change' while claiming it as a benefit of the latihan. We now employ a codified, insider language coupled with a newly intensified belief in Subud being the only way. We have also created our first dogma in that Bapak's talks and his organisational strategy are believed to be the immutable words of God - all of this tilting us inexorably towards cult status and its inevitable narrower and narrower appeal.

Being, out of interest, an avid and generally appreciative reader of the retranslated *Bapak's Talks* (I get a great deal out of them - he was a very interesting man), it appears to me that he too was evolving - growing in understanding as he gained more spiritual experience as well as becoming more worldly-wise as he travelled the globe. It does seem foolhardy, therefore, to take all of Bapak's words as gospel, when he himself was maturing (compare, for

example, Bapak's precursor to *Susila Budhi Dharma*, written circa 1930, to the definitive version of 1954). It seems equally foolish to rigidly defend and perpetuate into the twenty-first century an organisational structure set up in the '50s by an elderly Muslim gentleman steeped in Javanese culture; for even if one believes our Creator 'speaks' through humans, it must be obvious that the message will be characterised by the person through whom God is speaking, just as a note played on a violin will have a different quality if played on a trumpet.

By instituting such tenets of belief, are we in danger of petrifying Subud's growth potential? Or, are we already, like the dinosaurs, evolving up a dead end, incapable of responding to a changing world?

It is my belief that the Subud Bapak created is both a foundation and springboard with the potential to continue evolving through divergence. All great teachers create something similar if attuned to promulgating truth rather than their own grandeur, because they *want* their followers to achieve even greater heights than themselves, be they engineers with apprentices, professors with students or spiritual leaders with disciples. And in case anyone disagrees with me, here's a favourite Bapak dictum:

Every person will find the right way towards God for himself, and what may be the right way for one may be completely wrong for another. Therefore you must not suppose that you have to follow or become like Muhammad Subuh. You must become your own self and you must develop your inner self if you want to find the way to God. You must not follow or imitate anyone else, because you must find your own way to God. Usually, if there is a teacher, he teaches his followers to do exactly the same as he does in order to reach what he has reached. But this is really wrong, because not only between a teacher and his followers but even between two brothers of the same parents there is already a big difference; not only in outward appearances but also in their character and in their whole being. So surely you can understand now that what is the right way for a certain teacher to find God is not necessarily the right way for his pupils. (*Bapak speaking to applicants in Singapore, 1960.*)

Bapak is exhorting us here, like a good parent, to grow up, to take responsibility for ourselves, because he knows that a pale imitation of his way of doing things would lead to stagnation, entropy and extinction.

In writing about Subud's possible demise, I am referring solely to the Association, not the latihan, which I believe has always existed and has been 'discovered' and re-presented many times - as Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Quakerism etc. and now Subud. Therefore, I do not believe Subud owns the latihan. The proof

is if I were to leave, I could still continue to do it, unfettered. In fact, any member could walk down the street asking everyone they meet if they were interested in receiving free an amazing phenomenon that could help improve their lives, and if they were, the contact could be passed on to them at any time in a back bedroom or garage. The latihan will not ask, nor care, if they are atheists or agnostics, rich or poor, mentally stable, male, female or gay. Anyone can receive the contact if they are willing, along with the ability to develop and deepen it with regular latihan.

This may be Subud's saving grace, because I foresee a not too distant time when members such as myself will pull away from an organisation in its death throes and start small groups with a new, more informal and unencumbered set-up. My group, for example, would have no helpers, no constant referral to Bapak's cosmology as the only way of understanding or expressing the process, no emphasis on enterprise and developing a Subud cultural concept; there'd be no religiosity and no desire to change the world - just pure latihan, respect for one another and a common interest in exploring and sharing our uniquely individual experiences. And let's see where it goes....

I can do this now, because after forty years of latihan, I feel grown up enough to actually disagree with Bapak on certain issues [4]; I am confident enough to add my latihan as a leavening to what I learned on my psychotherapy course, thereby creating my own cosmology, my own *Weltanschauung*. I can use my latihan to solve problems and enhance my creativity; I am at ease enough with my 'Maker' to dialogue over such topics as 'Why would an entity of your calibre want me to worship you? I wouldn't like my kids to 'worship' me... I'm OK with respect and gratitude, aren't you?' and so on.

Even if I leave the organisation, I shall always be grateful to Muhammad Subuh for doggedly following his calling to share the latihan - where would I be without it? - just as I am grateful to my parents for giving me the firm ground and space necessary for growth. But there came a point where I had to throw off their nineteen-thirties' and -forties' attitudes and beliefs, as now I have to leave behind the Javanese mysticism and culture of Bapak, who said, and I re-quote, "Therefore you must not suppose that you have to follow or become like Muhammad Subuh. You must become your own self and you must develop your inner self if you want to find the way to God..." This feels to me like entering into the bigger, more 'stand on your own two feet' Subud that Bapak so clearly wanted us all eventually to

arrive at.

FOOTNOTES

1. I am finding it more and more difficult to subscribe to the theory of a 'personal God out there' and am beginning to favour a more Buddhist/pantheist concept of a great 'is-ness', an eternal entity that constantly explores itself and all its possible manifestations through sentient beings, such as humans, created within and from itself. Believing that it explores its own scope for light and dark, love and hatred, peace and war, is the only way I can justify to myself the existence of evil in the world - how could evil and suffering exist if there was a transcendent 'God of Love'? How could He, and why would He, allow it unless He had an oxymoronic ungodly streak? On the other hand, I've always enjoyed the Incredible String Band's lyric: 'Whatever you think, it's more than that...'

2. Not to be confused with 'Evolution', the science, which no longer subscribes to the idea of evolutionary 'progression'.

3. He doesn't yet appreciate the concept of how critical the maths is (something I empathise with wholeheartedly) not yet grasping how computer simulations can tell us that only a universe 15 billion years old and a similar, but expanding, number of light years across, containing at least 10^{18} stars could have produced a carbon-based life form such as ours. And that if our universe's gravitational fine-structure element had been 10^{-30} instead of 10^{-40} , everything would be 10^5 times smaller and 10^{10} times denser, which would mean our sun would only burn for a year, we would orbit it every 24 hours and spin on our axis once a second. A pretty alarming thought.

4. One thing I take issue with Bapak over is how he seemingly damned all Western culture as being 'from the lower forces' and somehow, therefore, not worth diddly-squat. My latihan has instilled in me a new understanding and appreciation of both ancient and contemporary groundbreaking architecture, painting, sculpture and dance, as well as a love of modern-day acting, film making, writing, journalism, dance for camera, computer graphics and so on, especially when displaying the qualities of 'excellence' and 'nobility' Bapak was so keen on. How come he missed it?