

What I Like about Subud

By Marcus Bolt

Throw yourself wholeheartedly into any spiritual group that appeals to you, whether you believe in it or not, and hope that in your case a miracle may occur.... (*Carl Jung in a letter of advice to Rowland H.*)

Intuitively, I did exactly that forty years ago, and a miracle did occur — I am now sane.

During my forty years' Subud membership, I have often been exasperated by many members' belief systems and attitudes, as well as being frustrated — even hurt — by the organisation's actions, almost to the point of handing in my membership card. But I have never ever once considered stopping practising the latihan. In fact, I plan to be doing it on my deathbed — come what may.

And that's the first and the main thing I like about Subud — the latihan and its process.

As an example, last Monday there were just two of us at latihan in a rather large rented hall. For the first fifteen minutes I sashayed around the floor, doing the most remarkable ballroom dance movements.

'Wahey! Not bad for a 66-year old dude,' I observed to myself, as the day's stresses were sloughed off.

Now, the moves may not have looked much to a professional dancer, but inwardly they felt authentic and graceful — quite the light fantastic. Then my latihan changed as my mind began to be 'creatively worked' — a whole chapter of the book I'm rewriting smoothly downloading, solving many of the structural problems I'd encountered earlier in the day. For the last five minutes, I stood thoughtless at the centre of a huge inner space, grateful to be sentient and alive. Then I sat down feeling refreshed and satisfied, had a chat with my co-exerciser and went home. Whatever it is, wherever it comes from, however the latihan works, 'I'll have what she's having.'

Apart from more creative, the latihan process has made me, over time, more open-minded, more compassionate — even a little wiser — and definitely saner. Of course, a cynic may say all that's merely the side effects of growing up. But I'm not so sure when I think back to the place of anxiety-depression I started from.

The second thing I like about Subud is how simple it is to do the latihan. You don't have to prepare for it before you join, or pass any exams after. In fact, the latihan process doesn't depend on anything, be that belonging to a group, becoming a helper, or reading Bapak's talks; neither do you need to study Indonesian, have a religion, change your name, get circumcised, visit Bapak's grave, do charity work, run an enterprise, or worry about your ancestors for the latihan to work. All you have to do is practise it regularly, follow where it leads — and try to give up your perceived 'bad habits' along the way.

Contrariwise, the third thing I like about Subud is that you can, if you feel so inclined, pick'n'mix from all of the above (and more) cultural idiosyncrasies and make up your own belief system (but please, try not to foist yours onto me — I have my own). And the fourth thing I like is that, although there is tacit pressure to embrace a corporate doctrine (fundamentalists are everywhere), no one can actually stop you doing the latihan, or even expel you, if you don't wish to toe the party line.

The fifth thing I like about Subud is that members of all religions, as well as agnostics and atheists, can and do latihan together without ripping each other's heads off. This also goes for all races, all ages, all sexual orientations, rich and poor, clever and stupid. (And, as a bonus, I like the fact that men and women don't do it together — inter-gender relationships are difficult enough, thanks.)

The sixth thing I like about Subud is its social life. At any gathering of any size that I have attended over the last forty years, the absence of heavy alcohol consumption means there's far less aggression and sexual predation than at, say, my local golf club's social evenings. More importantly, I treasure the endearing friendships I've made, deeply enjoy the warmth generated in close-knit groups and love (and need) the sense of belonging — all while being aware none of these things are unique to Subud.

The final thing I like about Subud is its internationality. Subud has given me the opportunity and the motivation to travel all over the world — not bad for someone who has never lived more than thirty miles from his birthplace.

And these are the reasons why I've stuck with Subud, warts and all, for forty years.

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