

Preachy Testing

by Merin Nielsen

On a recent weekend, the Australian national helpers visited Subud Brisbane. The general testing session with the male members of the group was greatly appreciated. Personally, I seem to always find a lot of benefit in 'body testing' and other innocuous kinds of 'practice' tests. Later that week, though, one of the national helpers said in an email discussion:

Whatever it is that you call it, seeing that you relate to it personally and expect it to relate to you personally, to this extent, it is a personal God. If you wish to replace the term 'God' by 'universal life force' or anything else, be my guest. I just found that for all purposes other than a theological discussion, the term God is just the simplest term humans have always used to refer to whatever it is we try to relate to through the latihan.

Okay, so it can be called whatever a person wants to call it. However, while this may seem boring, I'll simply call it TWIRTIL (That-Which-Is-Related-To-In-Latihan). So, during the national helper visit to Subud Brisbane, we tested: 'How the latihan is involved in our work' vs. 'How TWIRTIL would have the latihan involved in our work'.

Now, for the sake of a little thought-experiment, let's substitute TWIRTIL for one of the following terms at random:

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| 1. our somatosensory cortex | (a neuroscientific entity) |
| 2. Shakti | (a Hindu entity) |
| 3. our superego | (a psychoanalytic entity) |
| 4. the Rainbow Serpent | (an indigenous Australian mythic entity) |
| 5. our inner thetan | (a Scientologist entity) |
| 6. Avalokitesvara | (a Buddhist entity) |
| 7. God | (an Abrahamic entity) |

During the Subud Brisbane men's testing session, several completely different questions referred to TWIRTIL and were tested about, though each referred to TWIRTIL in terms of just one particular option out of the seven now suggested by this article. Nonetheless, you can substitute any of the above options for TWIRTIL in phrasing just about any test.

Now imagine you are a relative newbie in Subud, one who happens to feel a bit unsure of himself, a little in awe of proceedings, unfamiliar with Subud protocols, and somewhat self-conscious about being less experienced in the latihan. There you are with a dozen other long-term Subud members present. After testing you aren't too sure what you've received, but it strikes you that nobody said anything about how the test was phrased. No one so much as batted an eye at testing 'how our somatosensory cortex would have the latihan involved in our work'.

You think: "Hmmm, what's the rational significance of this? Everybody here must regard our somatosensory cortex as That-Which-Is-Related-To-In-Latihan. Aha! They always seemed a bit cagey about possessing any doctrine in Subud, but that must be really what the latihan is all about. How interesting - and all along until now I was inclined to think it was Avalokitesvara, which my religion (Buddhism) taught me about. Well hey, since I now have direct evidence of the latihan, having experienced that it, at least, is something real, I suppose maybe I'd better go along with these guys and believe in the same as what they're believing in."

You, a devout Buddhist, have just been converted into a budding neuroscientist. How could that possibly have occurred in the absence of any preaching??

Play with the above scenario. Maybe you'd like to start off as an indigenous Australian believer in the Rainbow Serpent, who gets converted to Psychoanalysis. Or, perhaps, begin as a worshipper of God (the deity of the Abrahamic religions) who becomes a Hindu. There are dozens of possible configurations based upon just these seven options for TWIRTIL. But how could any of these conversion experiences plausibly happen in the absence of any preaching? Well, actually, preaching takes many forms!

So, this article looks into different ways in which preaching sneaks into testing sessions. Its presence is not necessarily obvious to anybody, which is why it's a particularly serious problem for Subud, as an organisation that is proclaimed to be non-religious. Despite being inadvertent and sometimes difficult to spot, preaching in our organisation is pervasive. In fact, it's immediately obvious to most people from outside the Subud cultural sphere, especially if they have already been led to believe that Subud is a religion-free zone, but this article focuses on the preachiness that infiltrates testing.

Below, I offer examples of [A] The Loaded Question; [B] The Leading Question; and [C] Begging the Question. Also, five sub-sections discuss aspects of [A] before examples [B] and [C] are reached.

[A] The Loaded Question

e.g. On topics that imply religious beliefs, not discussing them with everyone present before the testing occurs.

During that recent Subud Brisbane testing session conducted with the national helpers, two of the tests undertaken by the men concerned: (a) 'How the latihan is involved in our work' vs. 'How the 'Will of God' would have the latihan involved in our work'; and (b) 'What is the influence of our latihan on our ancestors'.

Why is this bad? Well, (a) implies believing in a 'personal' God and that He, She or It has a direct interest in each of us, to an intimate level. Moreover, (b) implies belief in an afterlife, along with certain Javanese beliefs. By espousing such premises with an air of authority, it's easy to make it seem that they must be central beliefs for Subud members and that accepting them is somehow expected. This was shown by the above thought-experiment. Thus, at the moment when any 'belief-system-based' testing is first proposed, in effect, an act of

'preaching' has occurred - unless the proposed wording comes with some kind of invitation to discuss the optional nature of the beliefs implied by the wording.

When a question is phrased for testing, the speaker typically does not (we would hope) mean to impose his or her belief system on those present. We can suppose he or she is just trying to communicate 'a' legitimate way of conceptualising a certain content, whose meaning may go deeper than words possibly can. Accordingly, we can suppose that he or she is not trying to impose what they view as 'the' legitimate way of conceptualising this content. After all, there seems to be no such thing as a 'neutral' way of conceptualising anything. To phrase any 'inner' content, for example, by expressing it in the words of a testing question seems to necessitate relying on some sort of theory-laden viewpoint or belief system. In other words, it's apparently futile to insist on using any 'concept-neutral' language for such purposes.

That's all very well. However, as Subud is supposedly a religion-free zone, it's crucial to make it emphatically plain that no particular conceptual framework is officially endorsed in any sense. A listener may or may not be comfortable about relying on the speaker's belief system. In any case, at a testing session, the speaker should stress that no set of concepts they choose to apply is 'official'. Otherwise, they are being negligent. Using a belief system to communicate 'deep' ideas is not necessarily preaching. But presenting one particular spiritual perspective, accompanied by the evident assumption that this will be wholly acceptable to everyone, does add up to preaching. Such behaviour embodies a certain attitude of complacency, which automatically transmits the subliminal message that 'this is the way to see things'. One could argue that it's up to people to decide for themselves whether to apply the wording and concepts presented, or to discard them, but, in that case, what's needed would be an explicit opportunity to make the decision, as afforded by a little time!

While the speaker might well be using the moment to make other people view things their way, this does not mean they want others to see things their way in general. The trouble with testing sessions, though, is that there may be little or no opportunity for feedback from those present. As I mentioned earlier, a listener might be shy or unsure of themselves, in awe of proceedings, unfamiliar with Subud protocols, and self-conscious about being less experienced in the latihan. And a listener might not realise that the speaker does not want everyone to view things their way. Therefore, it's vital for this to be made totally clear - that the speaker is really not trying to impose a particular viewpoint as if it's 'the' right perspective - that instead they are merely expressing things in terms of an optional set of concepts.

In dutifully responding to enquirers, Subud helpers have been known to define That-Which-Is-Related-To-In-Latihan as 'God'. In so doing, they've been known to explain, in all innocence, that this is just a convenient name for TWIRTIL, and definitely not the 'God' which people worldwide have historically referred to by that term. It's claimed, furthermore, that anyone who mixes up Subud's usage with the term's historical usage is making an error of presumption because in the Subud context it's clearly regarded as not meaning anything besides TWIRTIL. Moreover, the story goes, the fact that 'God' refers to That-Which-Is-Related-To-In-Latihan absolutely does not mean that the latihan is some special way of putting us in touch with the God of religion in any traditional sense!

What's really going on?

I find these claims, or disclaimers, rather awkward and slightly bizarre. If TWIRTIL isn't meant to be mistaken for the God that is still traditionally referred to, why muddy the waters by calling it 'God' in the first place? The nature of God is another discussion, and please note that here I am not denying God. Meanwhile, though, I see three possibilities for interpreting this habit of referring to TWIRTIL as God. (1) The helper uses the term 'God' just because it's conceptually convenient and suitably abstract. (2) The helper is simply following Bapak's custom of referring to TWIRTIL as 'God', which has become a piece of traditional Subud jargon that's too hard to change. (3) The helper really does believe that TWIRTIL is God, but denies that this is what they think, so they can't be accused of religious proselytising. (After all, what would you expect somebody to think you were referring to by, say, a term like 'joy' or 'human rights' or 'cosmos'? In spite of these being somewhat abstract words, you'd expect to be able to use them more or less successfully within normal conversation because there are well-understood social conventions as to what each one means.)

Possibilities (1) and (2) both obviously muddy the waters, since billions of people all round the world, who have never even heard of the latihan, already attribute intense significance to the term 'God'. So, if you state that TWIRTIL is God, but you don't mean that God, then you're trying to requisition a term that's clearly and thoroughly pre-assigned to other purposes. And under these circumstances, it's an unsubstantiated conjecture (basically an instance of religious doctrine) to suppose that this 'thing' we are talking about is that God. Who knows what TWIRTIL is? Perhaps it is our superego or Shakti or our inner thetan. If you assert that it's anything in particular, you could be wrong. And if you assert that it's something with any sort of religious complexion, you are liable to be offending somebody by contradicting one or more of their religious doctrines or spiritual beliefs. Such an assertion is therefore automatically inside the religious ballpark, and you might not see yourself as preaching, but your words will be heard that way, loud and clear.

It may be argued that our joint experience of the latihan supplies a well-defined reference for whatever term we happen to use, allowing 'God' to represent an appropriately simple and powerful symbol for TWIRTIL among Subud members. Possibility (1), in this light, stands for the point that traditional religious language may be helpful, since for many of us it's a verbal form via which inner reality seems more easily communicated, bearing a ring of truth that's unavailable in other forms. In response, I would simply note that this cannot be assumed to apply to us all. Indeed, for lots of people 'God' represents an extremely confusing and/or anxiety-raising notion. Possibility (2) meanwhile signifies a lazy habit which, with little effort, could be usefully abandoned at testing sessions. Possibility (3) doesn't bear elaborating.

How 'God' is understood

It's highly probable that the majority of people who have practiced the latihan of Subud (ever since it was founded) have tended to refer to TWIRTIL as God, but it is, nonetheless, a religious doctrine to say that we're personally relating to God in a special way through the latihan. And 'majority view' is no excuse for disseminating such a restrictive interpretation. It's hard to see how you could seriously declare that 'God' means nothing more than TWIRTIL and equally hard to see how God necessarily has anything in particular to do with the latihan.

The idea that most people's God is involved is no more than a speculation. Implying that the latihan puts us in touch with the historically referred-to God is effectively an instance of dogma. If you say that it is about God, then good on you, but please don't go imposing that notion on others. Although the term is, obviously, already extremely loaded with social, cultural and emotional baggage, there's really no problem whatsoever in people applying it for their own use. The trouble is that 'God' is applied almost indiscriminately to the latihan within testing sessions and various other Subud settings so that loads of built-in religious speculation is directed onto the experiences of other people present, who are tacitly and improperly presumed to be amenable.

Worldwide, people from dozens of different religions, denominations and belief systems regularly get together to talk about 'God'. They can do this only because the term already has a well-known, vaguely understood meaning which is resoundingly nothing like TWIRTIL. The 'outside world' is where people develop standard meanings, prior to having anything to do with Subud, which is something more likely to happen only if they can get past its apparent religiosity. This arises from our widespread usage of terms that are standardly religious, not to mention controversial. Our Subud culture remains new to anyone who is a new member and is utterly unknown to potential enquirers about the latihan. They are quite liable, nevertheless, to come across sundry references to the latihan as contact with 'the Power of God', as verified by practically any glance at Subud literature. Yet, this is all based on an ingrained facet of Subud 'culture'--treating the latihan as contact with God, per se, thus conferring misplaced religiosity on its practice. Consequently, at testing sessions, it would inevitably be inferred by any normal person unfamiliar with Subud that it must have some kind of collection of officially approved doctrines.

In Subud testing it is not just God's existence that is implied, but the nature of God as 'personal'. It's reasonable to ask, for instance, whether there is ever any state or attitude that God would have a person be in or adopt. In the Abrahamic religions the probable answer would be 'yes', but Subud is not a type of religion, is it? One could reply that the latihan clearly is a personal experience, so we relate to TWIRTIL personally, but going from 'personal thing' to 'personal God' indicates an extraordinarily narrow window of interpretation, unjustifiably confined to one particular religious context. Obviously, many Subud members see it that way, but many probably came to see it that way just because it was always the 'approved' way. In any case, that's their business. The concern now, on the other hand, is that this particular way of seeing things is continuing to be preached, a situation which hardly encourages genuine personal development.

Other sorts of thought-experiments

The above thought-experiment, outlined at the beginning of this article, is applicable to another test that was blithely posed during the recent national helper visit to Subud Brisbane: 'What is the influence of our latihan on our ancestors?' This time, though, possibilities (1) and (2) are just not plausible, and whoever puts forward such a question for testing would have to admit that it does imply believing in an afterlife because it portrays our ancestors as being still around. No matter what anyone believes about ancestors, which is all fine, testing sessions should not be used for propagating religious beliefs. Therefore, unless it came with a preliminary invitation for discussion in the context of its religiosity, carelessly presenting such an undiscussed, unsolicited question and testing about it must also count as preaching.

There's no official Subud account of an afterlife or what we relate to in the latihan. If you want to pin it down as God, you may as well put this statement at the top of a list of Subud doctrines and apply for religious tax-exemption status. Preaching in Subud is not only hypocritical, it imbues Subud with religiosity that deters many people from trying out the latihan and puts others off from staying with it for very long. It's hard to tell how many turn away for this reason, since we never hear of the first kind, and there's no record kept of the second kind. But turning a blind eye to our own organisational hypocrisy has pretty much the opposite effect to making the latihan more available.

Loaded questions are also liable to supply self-confirming results which reinforce an unfounded and unreasonable bias. I mean that if a person already believes, for instance, that we can influence our ancestors through the latihan, then their receiving on the topic is quite likely to confirm that the relevant ideas are valid; whereas, if a person believes, say, that there's no such thing as life after death, their receiving on the topic is liable to confirm this understanding just as clearly. So, just for example, if a Subud group of devout Roman Catholics were to test regarding the role of the Virgin Mary in enhancing the latihan, they would be quite likely to receive that in some way she does. For sure, within Subud there are various fairly common views, such as that there is a personal God directly connected to each human being through our souls, but this does not make it okay to promote any such view in testing sessions. While having good intentions, those who introduce this kind of religiosity may not realise they're doing so, and others present may not even notice that peer pressure is being applied to accept an implied belief. Yet, unjustified presumptions thereby get promulgated via humble acquiescence to the tone of authority, along with awe of the majority - without anyone recognising this has happened!

Facing practical realities

During the recent testing session in Brisbane, when I found problems with the intended content of tests, like those on group harmony and ancestors, I merely declined to undertake them. This is a quite well-known, reasonable response, and it's what I'd advise anyone to do. Also, I personally had no difficulty in 'translating' the meaning of the religiously biased phrases which were used to fit in with my own belief system. But it was easy enough for me for three reasons: (a) I already have a well-established spiritual perspective to refer to; (b) I'm old enough, these days, to recognise and resist the pressure to adopt any particular way of interpreting spiritual reality; and (c) I've come across all of the usual testing topics before, so I'm pretty quick at assimilating the concepts involved in the framing of questions.

These three advantages may not be possessed by newish Subud members. Naturally, with respect to them, no helper is expected to do anything about factor (a), but something ought to be done about factors (b) and (c). That is, firstly, we need to ensure that the phrasing of questions is plainly not about any conceptual framework being seen as superior or preferable to any other. This can be achieved through an open and up-front recognition that the concepts and wording used are essentially optional and based on expedience only. Secondly, prior to any test whose content is indicated by concepts of any quasi-religious nature, a reasonable amount of time should be offered for those present to assimilate, and maybe 'translate' for themselves, the meaning that's involved. Members may well be new to the use of religiously coloured terminology away from the world of standard meanings! (I admit

tricking myself into believing many things when younger--things spoken of authoritatively in testing sessions, which appeared to be fully accepted by my peers.)

Discussion is needed in order to acknowledge that anyone can substitute the wording for other words or symbolism that they might be more comfortable with, while possibly keeping much the same 'content'. For example, perhaps somebody would like to mentally substitute "according to the Will of God" for a phrase like "in a way that is most psychologically healthy". Any such wording would be up to the individuals, in line with their own belief system. But they can only have the opportunity to perform this substitution if they are forewarned of the testing topic, given a few moments, and permitted to feel comfortable about allocating their own interpretations of spiritual reality. Nobody's personal understanding should get forced on others, and an obvious way to help prevent this is by first discussing any questions that are built on religious understandings, supplying a chance for those present to reflect on the content.

It's great when Subud members talk with one another about their respective spiritual beliefs. When you hear such talk, you can either join in or ignore it without judging it. Similarly, if someone insists on testing about questions that don't interest or 'gel' with you, then you may still join in or ignore it. It's vital, though, that they don't simply assume you are, or should be, interested. Otherwise, they're setting themselves above you. Testing may provide experiences that let you develop your own understanding of whatever the questions mean to you, but understanding tends to involve concepts. The wording of questions may introduce religious concepts to testing sessions with little or no time to recognise their origin. Irrespective of your receiving, these can linger in the back of your mind and frame your interpretation. Words may be perplexing at the best of times, but without any review of the topic, whatever some question and answer mean for you is thus likely to be affected by the kind of concepts selectively introduced by somebody else!

The potency of testing

A possible counter-argument is that, during testing sessions, if too much time was spent catering to the mind, it would be at the cost of direct experience through the latihan. Well, 'too much' of anything is bad, but our inclination to belittle and disparage the mind is perhaps half the problem, as it's always playing a necessary role. While latihan practitioners tend to agree that it works best with minimal theorising, this doesn't mean the mind is an enemy. I maintain that some reasonable time for discussion should be set aside, since the latihan and the mind aren't in some adversarial opposition. During testing or latihan itself, of course, the mind ought to be in a surrendered state - like every other human faculty - but at other times the latihan can naturally work through the mind - like any other human faculty.

Sometimes the importance of testing is downplayed compared to that of the latihan. Conversely, I suggest that testing is a delicate yet powerful tool - and I, correspondingly, find much value in 'practice' testing. I consider that the phrasing of questions, however, calls for immense care and sensitivity, especially in the presence of people who are new to testing. As I see this, it's a highly significant process calling for prudence, inherently bringing together latihan and language - two very special, very potent experiences that wouldn't appear to naturally have much in common. This makes testing all the more amazing, but also somewhat

precarious and deserving proper attention.

Often in the wording of topics for testing, I notice that a suitable degree of caution is missing, and that certain common phrasings appear to be almost casually deployed. The use of 'God' for TWIRTIL is just one example. Whenever people frame questions based on their own sets of mental concepts for other people to receive answers to, a profound burden of responsibility is inevitably entailed. This can be at least somewhat discharged by explicitly inviting discussion, over some reasonable amount of time, to consciously recognise the question-framing process. It's not about wasting time trying to settle on any mutually acceptable vocabulary, but simply about admitting an awareness of wider possibilities. It may suffice to establish what a term like 'God' is not intended to mean, though a degree of more detailed discussion would perhaps be due in the case of testing about, say, the ongoing state of our ancestors.

I emphasise again: the problem is not that some content or form of wording may feel jarring or uncomfortable to one person or another. In a way it's exactly the opposite, since the troubling aspects of these tests tend not to get noticed, when they really should. The central worry is that certain intentions or motivations that people bring to group testing sessions, which often significantly determine the content, have the effect of illegitimately 'steering' the beliefs of newish Subud members in certain biased directions. I emphasise again that, although this tendency seems to pervade Subud fairly comprehensively today, it appears to be primarily inadvertent. That is to say, the people who preach in Subud are generally oblivious to the reality that they are preaching. Meanwhile, those who are subject to the related, subtle peer-pressure are often largely unaware of it. Those recognising it, though, are also liable to quickly spot the hypocrisy of an organisation saying it's non-religious, while appearing to officially endorse specific spiritual beliefs.

[B] The Leading Question

e.g. Testing about regularly reading Bapak's talks as a practice for Subud members to adopt.

Actually, this topic did not come up during the Subud Brisbane visit by the national helpers, but it has been tested about at least twice by Subud Brisbane men on 'kejiwaan days' held in the past six years or so.

Testing about this is something like arriving at a Methodist Sunday School and asking who thinks they should read the Bible. Simply by focusing on the notion of reading the Bible, such a question is obviously loaded for each individual to answer in the affirmative, pushing the presumption that the Bible is indeed beneficial to read. On top of this is immense peer pressure for the Sunday School children to support the idea, since, naturally, they would seek to please any authority figures present and to conform with the majority of other kids. Things are similar in the case of a Subud testing session, where the pre-implied message is that regularly reading Bapak's talks is undoubtedly of benefit, and, at least in relation to newer members, peer pressure plays a role that's comparable to its influence at any Sunday School.

Most Subud members are pretty soon familiar with most of the practicalities of what is and what isn't sensible in terms of the exercise - how often to do it, in what circumstances, what

effects to watch out for, and so on. All this is the very basic advice that's appropriately made available by the helpers (or whomever) - as relatively experienced practitioners - and so there's no need to read Bapak's talks in order to get a decent appreciation of these points. Thus, providing there's no emotional pressure involved, it's completely plausible for someone to clearly receive that Bapak's talks are useless to him or her. The idea of regularly reading the talks, indeed, only gets brought along to testing sessions by members who think it's their duty to persuade others that Bapak's talks are valuable (for purposes other than dealing with the latihan's pragmatic aspects). So, despite undeniably good intentions, they end up taking advantage of a testing session to impose this personal belief about the talks. For sure, in Subud it's a fairly widespread opinion that Bapak's talks are beneficial for members to regularly read, but this doesn't make it okay to 'officially' promote the view as if it were a doctrine.

Please note, I'm not concerned with testing about God, or an afterlife, or reading Bapak's talks, if this occurs purely among people who already agree on the relevant beliefs. The real problem arises only when such testing is conducted in the presence of Subud members in general settings - unfairly presuming their tacit approval! They are not expected, of course, to embrace any specific beliefs about the nature of God, ancestral influences, life after death, the position of Bapak or any other spiritual matter, considering that Subud explicitly refrains from promoting any religious doctrines. On the other hand, if a number of Subud subscribers to an Abrahamic religious view, or Bapak 'devotees', for example, wish to get together separately from any general Subud setting, then clearly they should feel free to test about anything they want. In that situation, they'd be getting together not as ordinary Subud members, but as members who happen to accept the same belief system of some sort from Javanese kejawen to Calvinism, Taoism, Wicca or whatever.

[C] Begging the Question

e.g. Testing about 'the group' in any sense of treating it as an entity with states of 'harmony' or 'welfare'.

This topic was tested about during the recent national helper visit to Subud Brisbane.

This particular kind of testing is, all at the same time, amazingly vague, irresponsible and very misleading. It's vague in the sense of lacking a clear context. That is to say, any bunch of circumstances may be positive or negative in one way, but precisely the opposite in another way - yet somehow it is assumed that a mysterious sort of general context can and does apply, and takes final precedence. In terms of group harmony, for instance, there are various possible complexions of meaning and separate facets of a group's situation that could be interpreted as most relevant, whether subjectively or objectively defined. It's also irresponsible because it allows us to overlook and escape addressing all those irksome, icky, nitty-gritty details of life and mundane reality where nothing's ever perfect; where mental struggle, not to mention, emotional compromise is almost always called for just by saying to ourselves, "Oh well, even if there are unexplored ramifications, testing has indicated what the situation is, overall." Additionally, such testing is misleading in tending to assume that a group or organisation can possess some 'well-being' of its own, whose importance may override the well-being of its individual constituents. Therefore, testing of this kind is both misguided and perilous, particularly when organisational decisions, such as those which

typically involve practical committee discussion, are based on it.

The underlying concept behind such testing is the simplistic supposition that some mysterious, all-encompassing basis for guidance (a.k.a. the Will of God) necessarily exists as the one-and-only 'right' way to go. Riding on the back of this is the absurd notion that there is generally some single, recognisable prevailing 'state' that a complex, multi-contextual group of diverse individuals can ever be in, let alone aspire to. There's no good reason to believe that this 'way to go' or this 'state to aim for' even exist, yet testing is always interpreted on the assumption that they do. The error goes: "We know group harmony is a thing that can be helped with testing because testing is a thing that can help with group harmony." The sanguine manner in which this kind of test is presented, furthermore, reinforces unconscious acceptance of these 'hidden premises' on the grounds that they appear to be core understandings which are collectively favoured.

Here's a brief note on 'context'. Contrasting 'how a situation is' and 'how God would have it' does not supply context. For example, 'How do I walk?' vs. 'How should I walk?' can have many contexts: walking in the garden, walking for exercise, walking down the aisle, walking past a tiger, walking on board a boat, walking in the desert, walking toward an old friend, and so on. Again, 'How is the state of my work?' vs. 'How would God have my work?' can have many contexts: work when there's deadline pressure or when there's none, working with a team or working alone, work training new staff or work when I'm being trained, working in my head or working manually, working for a boss or for myself, and so on. (Last year Brisbane helpers tested on how it is 'for the group' to acquire a new building sign. Was that in terms of finances, membership numbers, community awareness, aesthetics, self-satisfaction or what?)

Conclusion

I readily concur that traditional religious language is helpful to some of us, and its use is not necessarily preaching. But being originally based on religious belief systems, its use is certainly preachy if a speaker assumes that the listener readily accepts (or would be advised to accept) the general system of belief on which the respective concepts are based. Again and again in Subud, this happens. It occurred several times at the testing session in Brisbane recently. The person posing this or that question casually assumed that everyone present was conceptually on the same page and fully prepared to agree, for instance, that 'God would have' a person be in a certain state, that some spiritual life exists after death, or that 'group harmony' can be legitimately and usefully tested about.

The danger is in Subud settings becoming a platform for the expression of only particular 'authorised' spiritual beliefs. It's sad to be part of an organisation that duplicitously says it's not religious, yet effectively validates the preaching of religious doctrines, such as: that the latihan represents a unique relation with God; there's an afterlife (in which our ancestors benefit from our latihan); and God takes a direct, personal interest in the fate of latihaners, whether as individuals or as groups. I'm also deeply disappointed that all this unnecessary, publicly obvious religiosity must repel many fellow citizens from directly enquiring about the latihan, whereas it could be of value to them.

The influence of preaching at testing sessions has been, and continues to be, extremely potent throughout Subud in the long run. It makes Subud more religious and, thus,

hypocritical. This alienates a great number of people, causing lots to leave and many more to stay away. Those staying away may or may not have been disposed to use traditional religious language, but we'll never know. Subtle preaching occurs in various Subud situations, apart from the testing sessions, where it appears to be usually non-deliberate. It's not conscious, overt or explicit, but unconscious, covert and implicit. It takes place by default, thanks to those holding court failing to acknowledge the variety of viewpoints involved.

ADDENDUM

Father Mulcahy is paying his bimonthly respects to the Bishop.

"So how is it going with that likely new convert, Father, the Chinese businessman who recently immigrated? We'd like him to come on board, what with all that money for the donation box."

"Well, Your Grace, I spoke with the fellow last week, but though he's amenable to most of our teachings, he can't accept the Resurrection. The idea that Christ rose from the dead seems too much for him to believe."

"Just tell him it was a coma, Father. Explain that there was some error in translation."

"Beg your pardon, Your Grace, but it's a not a matter for joking about."

"I know, Father, and there's nothing funny about it. Just tell the man that the Lord Jesus was in a coma. Death is really just a very deep coma, you know. Besides, he's Chinese, so he won't know any better."

Father Mulcahy frowned in thought: "Well, I could say that, though sooner or later he'll find out the truth."

"The 'truth', you say, but what truth is that, Father?" asked the Bishop.

"That Christ rose from the dead, Your Grace, and then he'll know I lied to him."

"Come, come, my son. You'd only be lying if you meant that Christ didn't rise from the dead. And that's not what you'd actually mean, is it?"

"But Your Grace, surely it would be a deception, at very least, to use the word 'dead' in such a strange way."

"Words, my son - just words - readily substitutable! It's what you mean that matters, not how you happen to express it."

"So we're saying that 'dead' doesn't actually mean dead?"

"It's a matter of perspective, Father. Better to take it as saying that 'coma' doesn't always have to mean coma."

"Only, if our Chinese friend talks with anyone else about it, he'll soon discover that we tricked him."

"Ah, my son, who is he going to talk with except us? Anyway, we can say it's a Catholic Church term, used in a quite specific way in this unique context."

"Oh, I see!" Father Mulcahy exclaimed, "It's one of our special understandings then, like with the word 'infallible!'"

"Sure, and if he ever learns enough English to know that other people use 'coma' differently, he'll be only too willing to put the issue aside. After all, by then he'll probably have been telling other Chinese folk that Christ rose from a coma."

"But Your Grace, we both know that Christ really did rise from the dead, don't we?"

"Yes, Father, but expand your mind. 'Coma' can mean 'dead' if only we open up to the infinite possibilities of the Lord."

"Of course, Your Grace, of course."

