

BOOK 2

**ASSIGNMENT
SUBUD**

ASSIGNMENT SUBUD

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Ballads, songs and snatches

WHEN the last page of this book has been written, a part of my life will have come to an end. For the past five years I have lived the life of a twentieth century gypsy, pitching my two-day camp in Calcutta, Bangkok, Singapore, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Manila, Tokyo, Cairo, Zurich, Paris, London, New York, or San Francisco. Bapak had told me in January 1960 that I should leave Ceylon and get a job that would take me “from place to place to place” (*A Reporter in Subud*). And he had added, seemingly by way of consolation for recommending this nomadic existence: “Visit Subud groups. You are courier.” It so happened that I was then given the kind of professional job that necessarily took me from place to place to place and, necessarily also, made me and my family exiles from our home in Ceylon.

In the past 30 months I have spent a total of four months at home – made up out of bits and pieces of four days, one week, ten days, or a fortnight. Once, recently, I was able to spend a longer time at home – 40 whole days and 40 nights. It was the strangest thing. I felt as awkward as a stockbroker at a boys’ camp. My little sons stopped treating me as a peripatetic uncle who dropped by to deposit a bag full of toys, disrupt their lives for a few days and vanish into the clouds. They discovered they had a father.

It has been fun, it has been lonely, exhilarating, depressing, boring, rewarding, sometimes pointless, sometimes wonderfully meaningful – all these, simultaneously and separately. I have learned and unlearned many things, about myself and other people.

As to being a “courier”, I have discovered that there was less to this than met the eye. I have never seen any special aptitude in me that qualified me for such a function. I had a job that enabled me to visit Jakarta and other Subud centres oftener than most people could and, because of this, I had the opportunity to carry and deliver messages from group to group and, on occasion, to and from Bapak. That was it.

But, there was something else: I noticed that people in Subud had a role to play – some an active role, some a passive role, some a

role extended in time and space, some a series of brief roles, some were hard roles, some easy.

Husein Rofé had a role to play – to take the Subud contact to Europe. Meredith (now Roland) Starr, Ronimund von Bissing, Aubrey Walton, Reginald Hoare, Douglas Kibble, their wives, and a few others, whose names I do not know, had their role to play – to prepare the ground for Subud's first major step outside Indonesia. John Bennett had a role to play: he was the man who brought to Subud the hosts he had baptized and gave Bapak his first home and tabernacle outside Indonesia. Pierre Elliot had his role – his organizing skill was taxed to the limit in London and Paris. Margaret Wichman, June Sawrey-Cookson, Sheila Ross, Maria (then Olive) Kibble, Olga de Nottbeck and many others played their roles in the early years of Subud in England. John Ross had his brief and brilliant role. Eva (now Iaina) Bartok had the finest role she has ever played in her life – and without a trace of make-believe. Bob Prestie had his role – to start Subud in the United States. Victor Gebers played his role in South Africa, Ian and Mariani (then Bulbul) Arnold in India and Ceylon, Isaac Gerson and Sooty Banda had their respective roles in Ceylon – one prepared the nucleus of people who were able to receive Subud and the other kept alive in them the sense of miracle which sustained them, keyed up and expectant for the coming of Subud. Icksan Ahmad played his brief, scintillating role and left the scene,* Dan Cahill was given a Robinson Crusoe role, toiling bearded and alone in his island atop a Manhattan building, constructing a boat with which to communicate with the world outside.

But that was long ago. Only seven years ago – but already, long, long ago. Since then there have been new players and new roles. Every Subud member of our generation has his role. And, looking back over five years, mine has been the role of the wandering minstrel, clad in my spiritual shreds and patches, always moving from country to country, group to group, telling stories about Subud experiences and Subud people. Some of these stories are still new and leave the taste of newly minted coins on my tongue. Some of them already have the patina of age. Some I have told over and over again, often to the same listeners. But they never seem to pall

*In Sooty Banda's characteristic cricketing metaphor: "A hundred before lunch."

either on me or on the people who hear them – not because of the quality of the telling, but possibly because as we grow older in Subud there are new meanings and richer connections.

When *A Reporter in Subud* had been written, I thought I had told all my stories. But I was wrong. There is more to tell and here it is. This is possibly my last appearance as a story teller. I have learned from the experience of others in Subud that it is essential to recognize one's role, play it, and, when it is done, to be willing to leave it. There is nothing more pathetic than an actor clinging to his role after the theatre is closed, declaiming Hamlet in a pub. In Subud it is the same. We must surrender our costumes and be ready to play a new role if called – even if it is only a passive walk-on part.

Bapak has indicated to me that it is now time to stay home, although home will be in another country. When the last page of this book has been written, my role will have changed. And by the time this book is published, you will probably find, if you knock on my door, that I am at home.

Safety in numbers

At first, most of us were desperately keen on increasing the numbers in our groups. When I received the contact I felt as though I had won a sweepstake and, like the spendthrift I am, set off on a big splurge, scattering my winnings wherever I went. Another man described his reactions differently: he felt he had discovered a mountain of gold big enough to satisfy the needs of all and he saw it as his duty to share his secret with everyone he met. A group of Moslems in Ceylon had a different response. Each year for several years they had met a Moslem “messenger” – as they put it – who appeared every year, unannounced, in the jungle lands of the South, to tell them of the coming of a new Messiah and vanished as suddenly – no one knew where. The year that Subud came to Ceylon, this messenger did not appear in his customary haunts. They took this as a sign that they were to carry his message to other Moslems. But when they had been opened in Subud, they found to their astonishment that, for the first time in their experience, they could talk about spiritual matters to non-Moslems as well.

They carried their message to their friends, acquaintances, their customers in the bazaar and, within a week of Subud being started in Ceylon, Moslems, Buddhists, Christians, and Hindus of a vast variety of interests and occupations received the contact. One early enthusiast in a crowded bus was trying to persuade a friend to come to Subud. The friend put up a stout and very vocal resistance. But a stranger sitting across heard it all and came over to be opened next day.

Some of our oldest friends avoided my wife and me like the plague because we were trying to sell Subud as hard as we could. We declaimed, we swore, we begged and pleaded, we cajoled and threatened and argued with fire in our eyes and dazzling words on our tongues. Some came just to keep us quiet. My parents, for instance, listened in silence as I spoke. They must have wondered what had happened to their ever loving son whom they had known as one of the most bellicose anti-religionists of their time; their son (who at 16 had declared himself an agnostic, at 17 an atheist, at 18

a nihilist, between 19 and 24 a Trotskyist) seemed, for the first time in his life, to be in *favour* of something. This must have touched and amused them vastly. A few days later I found my father in the latihan room waiting to be opened and heard that my mother had gone upstairs to receive the contact from Mariani Arnold. After many years I was able to cry that evening. I felt real remorse and a sense of gratitude that I had been allowed to make some recompense to my parents who had tolerated my erratic enthusiasms in magnificent patience mixed, perhaps, with amused scepticism. My father had tried to make me see that before I set out to reconstitute the world in my image, my image should be reconstituted, but he had not got very far. A few days later, my friend Mohammed Sideek told me that my father had said: "I still know nothing about Subud, but I feel certain that if Subud has been able to penetrate Tarzie it must be something to be reckoned with."

Our zealous proselytizing, we realised later, had much simpler motivations than we would admit at the time. There was safety in numbers. Big organizations give small people a feeling of bigness and security. As individuals we were exposed to ridicule and even political persecution. The bigger we were in numbers though not in soul, the less vulnerable we would be.

We were all seated around in the living room of Lesly (now Ronald) Jayatilaka's house in Colombo listening to Icksan Ahmad – the first of Bapak's assistants to visit Ceylon – giving clarifications about Subud experience when I realized that I had an appointment with a group of people who, if they could be persuaded or browbeaten into joining us, would strengthen our organization financially, if not spiritually. As I was making my way out, Icksan called out: "Tarzie, where are you off to now?" I told him my mission. "Better sit down," he said. "Relax. Can meet them later. Tomorrow or next week." I was straining at the leash. "Not necessary to work so hard for Subud," Icksan added. My enthusiasm thus deflated, I sat down and sulked.

In the evening, seated under the trees at my club, Icksan asked us to receive for a while. Then when the sediment of disappointment had been removed from inside me, Icksan explained why we should not be over-anxious about bringing in new members:

"There is a right time to come to Subud. There is also wrong time. If you bring someone at wrong time he comes to see miracle or receive cure or to see Icksan hypnotize with smoke from Dunhill

pipe! Then because no miracle, no cure, no hypnotize, he go and not come back. Inner open, but plant remain stunted. One day it become right time for him to receive spiritual gift. Then he need. But he not come to Subud then because he say to himself: 'Agh! I already know Subud. Useless. I go elsewhere.' So you lose one customer!" We laughed loud with new understanding. The Subud press gangs ceased to prowl or, at any rate, not as enthusiastically.

We began to sense when we should speak about Subud and when we should not. Bapak had told us once that we would know when and to whom to speak. "No propaganda," Bapak said. "Propaganda only for politics. God does not need propaganda."

But, Bapak said it was also our duty to speak about Subud so that more people could receive the contact. How could we do this, we asked, unless we sought people out and spoke about Subud?

"People will seek you out," Bapak said.

And ask about Subud?

"No. About other things, About house for rent, or about children, or about marriage, or (turning to me) about some news. If you speak to them rightly about these things then, if it is God's Will, you will find them speaking about things which will *naturally* enable you to tell them about Subud."

Sooty Banda understood this first among the people with whom I was intimate in Colombo. He could sense when to put the heat on and when to turn it off. He would say: "If a man has a stomach ache and goes to a doctor he may be advised to eat a banana. If he *has* a stomach ache he will eat the banana and ask questions afterwards. But if he has *no* stomach ache but asks the doctor: "Tell me, doctor, what is good for stomach aches?" And the doctor says: "Eat a banana," he will say: "Now, doctor, why is a banana better than a pineapple for stomach aches?" And then all hell breaks loose. Arguments, arguments and counter-arguments. So we should speak about Subud only if the man feels he has a stomach ache. Then he might be willing to have a banana and ask questions afterwards."

Loaves and fishes

IN those over-eager years everything was exaggerated and, to one or two of us, even apocalyptic in scope and urgency. The evidence that people would move involuntarily in the latihan or when testing, was regarded as a miracle. The fact that an “incurable” patient had taken a turn for the better was a miracle. That Icksan Ahmed, a young man of 33 and with only 4 years of experience in Subud, could bring such power to us and display such mature balance in his responses, explanations and attitudes towards us, was a miracle. The rapid influx of people wanting – demanding even – to be opened, was a miracle.

The word was being bandied about so much that Icksan felt he should indicate the need for a sense of proportion. In the presence of the whole gathering he called me to his side. “Nice watch,” he said. “Icksan?” I asked, not understanding. “Icksan like to see Tarzie’s watch” he said. I handed it to him. “Shock-proof?” he asked. Yes it was. “Water-proof?” Yes it was. “Anti-magnetic?” Yes it was. “Self-winding?” Yes it was. “Calendar?” Yes. “Aaaah!” exclaimed Icksan. “Miracle! This is true miracle. Cures by Great Life Force, latihan movements, spreading of Subud, not miracle. For God, no miracle. Everything possible for God. So what he does is not miracle. But Tarzie’s watch, Icksan’s Parker 51, camera that Eva Bartok gave Icksan, jet aeroplane – real miracles.”

We began to see then that the difference between God’s work and man’s was one of quality.

Those were the early days of the Sputnik era, and human beings had begun to think and talk in confident tones about the conquest of space – as though they had invented space itself. God took a back seat while the scientists strutted on the stage, even more confidently than before. Everything seemed possible for man. Man indeed had begun to assume, without reservation, that he was the lord of the universe. But Icksan’s demonstration with my watch made those who heard him think again. I remember Dudley Senanayake, a former Prime Minister of Ceylon, remarking sotto voce, “when we talk of men conquering space we should realise that all man has in

fact overcome are some of his *own* limitations. “

That is one of the beautiful features of Subud explanations that were “received”, as Icksan’s example of the watch had been. Everyone who heard it was able to respond to its truth – but the appreciation of this truth depended on the individual’s focus of interest and scope of understanding.

But, despite this experience, we continued to exaggerate our responses and their expression. Even our understanding of what we were told in explanation or clarification was dramatized or hyperbolized. For instance, when we heard that Bapak’s food was usually prepared by his daughter or by Subud helpers, our imagination ran amok with possibilities and interpretations. It was explained to us that food was influenced by the state of the cook, that a woman who cooked her husband’s food in an angry mood would be feeding him her anger. Immediately, individual Pure Food Acts were introduced in our households and we demanded purified food. Of course, what we received was food ... laden with thinking and spiced with anxiety.

At this time of glorious and exhilarating confusion, two very dear friends of mine Mr. and Mrs. A. invited Icksan and Mariani to lunch at their house. Mr. A. who was an excellent amateur cook himself and Mrs. A., a charming and adept hostess, decided that nothing but the best was good enough for Bapak’s helpers. They did the marketing themselves – an unusual feat for well-to do families in Ceylon – selected the meat, fish, vegetables, and the condiments themselves. They swept and cleaned out the kitchen and the house with their own hands. They cooked the banquet between them with no help from the servants. When their guests were seated, they served the meal themselves.

And neither Mariani nor Icksan could eat, They pushed the food to one side of the plate and then to the other, but in spite of their valiant efforts, could eat no more than a few morsels. They made polite excuses and left, Mr. and Mrs. A. were desolate that day and worried about this strange phenomenon for weeks.

By the time Icksan came on a second visit three months later, they had got over their shyness. And when they had come to know him fairly intimately, they decided to broach the subject:

“Icksan, you remember coming to lunch with Bulbul ? “

“Yah. Yah. Nice lunch.”

“But neither you nor Bulbul ate a thing.”

“No? Really? Funny!”

“Icksan, tell us the truth. We want to know why. Don’t bother to be tactful.”

After a pause:

“You must have cooked the meal by yourselves ? “

“ Yes, Icksan. We selected and bought the food, we cleaned the house ourselves. We cooked the food ourselves.”

“Much better if servants had cooked.”

“Why, Icksan? We thought you could not eat ‘heavy’ food.”

“That is why. You both just opened. Everything coming out. When you cook you thinking, thinking ‘must be pure.’ So food become heavy. If servant cook, better because mechanical. No thinking. Not good food, but better than *thinking* food.”

Mr. and Mrs. A. laughed with us and have been laughing about it ever since, but they have never forgotten the look on their guests’ faces at lunch that day.

I suppose we all have a little clearer idea now of what is involved in preparing Bapak’s food. But the trouble arises because Bapak does not seem to follow the rules himself.

During a visit to Bapak in my first year of Subud, Bapak asked his son Haryono, who was driving the car, to stop at a bazaar. He led Haryono, Prio Hartono, and me to a road-side eating-house. He ordered 4 plates of nasi-goreng fried rice with bits and pieces of omelette, bean curd, and onion mixed in. The meal was “spiked” with *blachan* – a sauce made of powdered dried fish, chilli, salt, and vinegar. Bapak ate with us. The meal was nothing special but it was tasty and large enough for a grown man. Bapak himself paid the bill and showed me that the entire meal for four had cost only something like 50 American cents. Prio interpreted Bapak:

“Bapak says he brought you here because as a journalist you should know how the ordinary people live in Indonesia. This country is very poor still, but people can live because, thanks to God, food is still cheap.”

But the best food story in my Subud repertoire is much more recent. Two months after the 1963 World Congress, I returned to New York on my way home from London. Bapak had decided to leave at once for Jakarta, cancelling his journey to Europe. I was asked to fly ahead to Tokyo and join the Tokyo group in making preparations for Bapak’s visit.

My instructions were: “A hotel would be better than a home

because Bapak would like Aminah* to have a rest from the kitchen before she returned home. For Bapak and Ibu, a room with a sitting-room for receiving visitors. For Usman and Aminah a double room and bath.“

When I arrived in Tokyo I found that every hotel room had been taken. Tokyo, the biggest city in the world (12,000,000 people), and a great tourist centre, suffers from a constant shortage of hotel space. This occasion was particularly bad because they were having a pre-pre-pre-Olympic Games track and field meet and all the hotels were choc-a-block with muscle-bound men and women. We tried every possible trick in the book. My Asahi Shinbun colleagues tried, the Japanese Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association tried, Mohammad Mahroof, an old Subud member – who was Ceylon Ambassador in Tokyo – tried. But there was no room for Bapak. Then we found that one of those Subud “coincidences” had occurred. Mrs. Jenny (now Ruth) Roberts, whom I had met at the New York congress, offered her house for Bapak. Her husband, a Vice-President of the Coca-Cola company, based in Tokyo, had left a day or two before for a conference in New York. He was not in Subud. The house was one of the best in Tokyo, standing in its own grounds, sumptuously furnished and well appointed. Mr. Roberts’ chauffeur and car were available and so was their chef, a reputed Japanese cook. The house was prepared for Bapak and Ibu. Mahroof and I drove to the airport and found almost the whole of Subud Tokyo present.

Among them was an old friend of mine, S.H. Thaha, a Ceylonese jeweller whose opening I had witnessed in Tokyo two years previously. He was a skilful gemnologist, an experienced merchant, and a great raconteur of stories from his Islamic tradition. But I was to discover that he had hidden his deepest talent. Thaha-san had been away in north Japan – nearly 250 miles away – when he heard that Bapak was arriving. Abandoning his chances of making a favourable deal with his business associates there, he took the earliest plane to Tokyo. He told me that he was considering emigrating to the United States. I suggested that he should ask Bapak’s advice about this.

**For 8 months Aminah Usman had cooked or supervised the cooking and served every meal for Bapak and Ibu, in addition to doing her duties as Ibu’s lady-in-waiting and helping with the women’s groups.*

Soon after Bapak and Ibu had gone upstairs at Mrs. Roberts' house, Aminah said to me that we should explain to Mrs. Roberts that her chef should assist Aminah to cook Bapak's food rather than plan and cook the meals himself.

I protested that the whole point of my having been asked to find a hotel was to let Aminah rest and that she should regard Mrs. Roberts' house as a hotel and her chef as a hotel chef.

With enchanting patience Aminah said: "If we were at a hotel, there would have been no way for me to cook. So I could have rested and Bapak and Ibu would have eaten hotel food. But now that we are not in an hotel but in a house with cooking facilities, I must cook for Bapak. Don't you see?"

I saw. I saw how deep was her understanding and how abiding her devotion to Bapak and Ibu. I also saw how superficially slick – clever my legalistic argument had been that even though my "solution" would have given Aminah her well earned rest, its real motivation was to justify my failure to find a hotel. Thaha-san whispered to me: "Tell her I will cook. I want to cook for Bapak. Mrs. Usman can rest. I will not use the chef. I will cook for Bapak." I told Aminah of Thaha-san's offer. She smiled very indulgently and asked me to explain to him why it would be better if she cooked for Bapak.

Thaha-san and I went away together. I tried to explain why it would be right for Aminah to cook for Bapak, although she thanked Thaha-san for his offer. But Thaha-san was not having any diplomacy that evening. "Why can't I cook for Bapak? Why are you preventing me from cooking for Bapak? I would give anything for the chance of cooking for Bapak ..."

I gave it up. How could I explain these things through the mind and with words, especially when I did not really understand them myself?

Next morning Thaha-san and I met again at Bapak's house. Bapak wanted to go on a picnic. We were to go to visit the wrapping foil factory belonging to Takeo Omori, one of the Japanese members. The Tokyo committee was to pick up some packeted Javanese food for Bapak's lunch at the Indonesia Raya restaurant downtown. Packed in three cars we arrived at the factory soon after noon. I noticed Omori and his colleagues suddenly looking extremely solemn. After a moment or two the terrible truth came out: we had forgotten to bring Bapak's food. Thaha-san

turned ponderously toward me and gave me an old-fashioned look, which he held till I quailed. Then, turning to the Japanese committee, he said: "Leave it to me." He nominated a few as hewers of wood and drawers of water. There was no mistaking who was now in charge.

Takeo Omori, immensely relieved, gave Bapak and Usman a conducted tour of the factory. I was chased away from the "kitchen" and spent my time as usual telling stories to my Japanese brothers – the same stories, the same understanding, the same tears, and the same laughter.

Thaha-san put on a laboratory apron and rigged up an ad hoc kitchen in a small room. The whole operation must have taken an hour. Not longer. Bapak and Usman were invited to eat. I began to panic again – expecting to see Bapak leave his meal in one minute flat. But no. I saw Thaha-san flitting dish-laden between Bapak and Usman and between the kitchen and the table for over half an hour.

Then Bapak came out with Usman, a broad smile on his face. He said: "Good. Best food. Hot, like Indonesia." Then he called Thaha-san over and advised him that he should move to the United States and open a restaurant "in a big city".

"I was thinking of Washington DC," said Thaha-san.

"Yes, Washington is good," Bapak said.

Jubilant, Thaha-san invited us all to eat. There was enough for everybody – glistening white rice, chicken drenched in thick curry gravy, egg-and-onion fry, canned salmon sambol, okra salad, fried dry-fish, bananas and cream. As I finished my third helping, Thaha-san gave me a friendly slap on my back. Whether it was a gesture of forgiveness or triumph I shall never know.

The pot and the plant

ONE day the Government of Ceylon sent its auditor to the Colombo Zoo to check the inventory. The investigating officer reported that one item – a box containing a culture of meal-worms used for feeding the birds – had not been listed and, with the crassness of bureaucracies, sent a clerk to count the meal-worms for the inventory. The Director of the zoo stood by and watched the performance in vast amusement. The counted worms were put on one side as the checking proceeded. After a while, the Director asked the clerk to recheck the lot already counted. To the clerk's consternation, there were several more worms than he had accounted for before. Then, understanding dawned on his face as he realised that the worms were multiplying almost before his very eyes. The exercise was obviously pointless and the audit clerk went away a sadder but wiser man who had realised that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in the Government's financial regulations.

I often think of those meal-worms and that frustrated audit clerk when I encounter the continual change in understanding of Subud experience and Bapak's clarifications in myself and among my brothers and sisters in Subud.

For instance, for a long time, I, like many others around me, regarded Bapak as a guide to success and security in this world, a sort of spiritual Dale Carnegie. Latihan was a kind of Pelmanism-without-tears, and testing was a do-it-yourself Aladdin's lamp. I would ask Bapak every imaginable kind of question (what Mohammed Usman aptly called "spiritual questions from the mind") about my job, about the political situation in relation to my worldly prospects, about economic security, about my physical health, all questions designed to produce reassurance from Bapak that my condition in this world would not be too uncomfortable, if not actually sumptuous. I suppose I still do but not with the same insouciance ever since I discussed this with one of Bapak's older helpers in Indonesia the evening after Icksan's funeral.

He said: "I am surprised that so many people ask questions

about their worldly life, their physical body, and other material things. Bapak is only interested in our spiritual growth. In our soul, not in our material being. He is interested in the plant growing in us, not the pot. In fact, it may become necessary for the pot to be smashed to make it possible for the plant to grow as it should ... Like Icksan.”

Bapak said the next day: “Icksan’s soul grew to its maximum possibility in this world in four years of Subud. His soul was still a little boy when he lived here but now it can grow.”

And, perhaps because he saw me still looking sad, added in indulgent amusement: “Icksan is now free of this world. He can now visit you without a BOAC ticket.”

This sort of concept, I find, is still difficult to understand and we will still make such remarks as “Mr. X was in Subud. But he lost his job quite inexplicably.” Or: “Mr. and Mrs. A. are both in Subud but they are seeking a divorce.” Or: “I have been in Subud for five years but I am still as broke as I was before.” Or: “Mr. Y was doing the latihan diligently. But he had that nasty accident recently.”

I too have found it very difficult indeed to accept the notion that the pot is less valuable than the plant. The pot is here and now, tangible, solid and utterly real. And the plant? The plant is still in the realms of poetry. But through our own and other people’s experience, many of us are beginning to understand the relative significance of the plant and the pot.

Jim Dawson (this is not his real name) was a foreign expert working for the Government of an Asian country. It became apparent to their new associates that the Dawsons were not very happy – within themselves or with each other. Jim was a master at his job and did it painstakingly and meticulously. But he was addicted to gin. At every party he drank – not much, but far too much for him. His friends were appalled at the difference in Jim at the office and Jim after a few drinks. He was a highly cultivated man and conscientious about his work, but gin turned him into an inchoate jelly of self-pity and maudlin sentiment.

His wife Pam was of a very different mould. She winced visibly whenever she noticed that Jim was drinking. She was contemptuous of what she called his “effeminate nature” but never dreamt that she was intimidating him with her masculinity. She scorned and abused him for his drinking and lamented the fact that it was “dragging her down”, never realising that the gin haze was

his only refuge against her abuse. Jim began drinking in the office too. He hid a bottle of gin in his desk drawer and, as he put it, “sneaked a snootful every half hour.”

He had tried to join Alcoholics Anonymous and a Gurdjieff group in Europe but Pam had stopped this with a well-directed whiff of verbal grape-shot. Anything not strictly church was a lot of mumbo-jumbo in her view. One morning Jim telephoned an acquaintance and made an appointment to see him at once. “I need help,” he said. “I have come to see you because I heard you were in Subud. Tell me about it.”

He listened attentively and said:

“I’d like to receive the contact. But I am terrified that Pam will disapprove. I will have to do this without her knowledge.” The friend offered to speak to Pam about Subud. Jim was aghast at the thought. He was sure that this would be disastrous. He was told that it would be better if they both joined Subud together. It was out of the question. The friend suggested that Jim should wait, as Pak Subuh was coming there in a few weeks. He sneaked out during office hours and had an interview with Bapak who advised him to attend the latihan that evening when he could receive the contact. Jim said that his wife would be angry and that it would be better if he waited until his wife would be willing to accept Subud. Bapak said that in his case it would be advisable to receive the contact immediately and that his wife might change her attitude later.

That evening he was opened and felt the action of the latihan immediately. He attended latihan whenever he could. His main preoccupation now was how to get to the latihan and not how to hide himself in the seductive security of the bottle. He became accustomed to being without gin for longer stretches. One day he found himself, quite confidently, announcing to Pam that he was going to the Subud House for latihan. He answered Pam’s questions forthrightly and heard her say: “I think it’s a jolly good thing you have become interested in something other than booze.” After that he attended the latihan regularly and quite openly.

A few months later Jim and Pam were motoring along a lonely road on their way to a vacation resort. It was a hot, muggy afternoon and Pam, who was driving, fell asleep at the wheel. The car shot off the road and into the scrub jungle below. Seriously injured, they both lost consciousness. A few minutes later the doctor

of the hospital at the vacation resort about 80 miles away, happened to pass by and saw the over-turned car. He rescued them and took them to the hospital where, after attention, they revived. Pam had broken a hand and was badly bruised. Jim had multiple fractures in both legs and in one of his arms. They were moved to the hospital for surgery.

When Jim's friend went to the hospital to visit him, Jim said, rather ruefully: "Isn't it fortunate that the good Lord sent the doctor along just at that time?" The friend nodded in sympathy and murmured something about protection in Subud. "But can you explain why the Lord didn't take a protective look at us five minutes earlier?" asked Jim and lapsed into bitter silence.

The friend made some wise-crack about the need for Heaven and Earth synchronizing watches but it fell with a dull thud.

Pam left the hospital within a fortnight but Jim had to have several operations and stayed in the hospital for many months. The friend came as often as possible and did the latihan by his bedside. Eventually Jim was able to walk with the aid of crutches and had to go through the painful process of getting his muscles – including the steel muscles in his hip – to carry him with the aid of a stick. The accident did nothing to improve his relationship with Pam. She became increasingly irritated by his physical helplessness and her contempt for him turned into a burning resentment at being saddled with a cripple.

During Jim's long stay in hospital Pam became romantically interested in another man. When eventually they returned home to Europe, they tried to make a go of their marriage but it would not work. She returned to Asia and her romantic interest. Suddenly Jim felt free. He had never taken any steps to free himself of his wife. His sense of liberation had a deeper source. He had none of the stock responses of a man whose wife leaves him for another man. There was no sense of wounded vanity or the customary antagonism toward the other man or resentment that his wife was leaving him when he was physically handicapped. He was able to accept this new situation in his life, and acceptance had brought freedom.

He was able to take his new state with equanimity and even considerable nobility. His only concern was for her state and future.

As for him, he had the latihan, he had returned to his old job and was doing satisfactory work and, most wonderful of all, for the

first time in his experience, he found that his son and daughter were able to communicate with him without pretence and false notions imposed by society. Jim no longer drank. He was clear inwardly and outwardly, for the first time in his life. His letters said that he was consciously and positively happy. He even joined Alcoholics Anonymous in order to help other frightened people hiding away in bottles as he had been. His old friends find that meeting Jim is an exhilarating experience. They have never before seen such a consistently happy human being.

Jim remarked recently: "I now have some idea of the mysterious ways of the good Lord," and his eyes twinkled merrily.

To Jim Dawson the meaning of the story of the pot and the plant must be very clear indeed.

But it would be a mistake, I think, to imagine, like the fakirs and the human sacrificers of old, that God's will for us is necessarily harsh. I have seen something since I came to Subud that I would never have been able to appreciate before: that there is an obligato of God's mercy accompanying the cruelty and harshness that we experience in our lives.

To balance the story of Jim and Pamela Dawson let me tell you another which happened very recently – a few days before the World Congress in New York.

I had arrived a few days before the Congress and was staying with Sherman and Laura Labby in their loft apartment in West 22nd Street. One morning they both left the apartment together on some professional call. I was still being lazy in bed when the telephone rang. A woman's voice said: "Is your name Tarzie? Hurry up and get over here to 22nd and 5th. There's been a terrible accident."

I asked: "What? Who ..." but she had rung off. I drew on a pair of slacks and ran to the intersection. There was a large crowd in the middle of the street, the traffic jammed on either side of it, and a checker cab, with its front dented, stopped in the middle of the street. A woman came up to me and told me that Laura had asked her to call me. My heart in my mouth, I asked her what had happened. She burst into hysterical tears, sobbing: "Oh, oh, oh, that poor boy, that poor boy..." She was obviously not going to be much help so I shouldered my way through the crowd and asked the policeman what had happened.

"He ran across the street and was hit by this cab. Went seven feet up in the air and fell right here."

“How badly was he hurt?” I asked.

“Look at the cab, man. Just look at the cab. He was barely conscious when I sent him to St. Vincent’s hospital. If you hurry you might find him. In the taxi I prayed all the way to the hospital that Sherman had had enough time to receive the latihan before he died. The nurse refused to let me go into the examining room, “Serious accident,” she said, “the doctors are now with him. His wife is there in the waiting room. You wait there. I’ll let you know.”

I found Laura sitting, straight-backed, in a deep state of shock. I sat beside her and, after a while, tried to receive. I felt a dull pain on my left hip but, inside, it seemed to be light and fine. I told her this. But the moment I had said it, I became frightened at the sudden thought that this might mean that Sherman had been hit on the left side, and that his inner was light and feeling fine, but that he was dead. I called Whitmore Ovington’s house where Bapak, who had arrived a few days before, was staying and asked Usman to tell Bapak what had happened.

Bapak advised: “Ask Laura to remain quiet. You do your latihan for ten minutes. Don’t think about Sherman. Just do your latihan. Tell Laura that Bapak will pray for Sherman. He will be all right.” Relieved, I told Laura my news.

Again, horror rushed through my head. I figured, Bapak is only interested in our souls, not in our physical bodies. Perhaps what Bapak meant was that though Sherman would die, his Inner would be all right. But, just as Laura must have felt, I preferred Sherman tangible and around in this world where I lived than light and free in the next world. I did the latihan. A few minutes later the nurse came in and solemnly asked us to go into the casualty room.

And there was Sherman *sitting* on the bed in his underpants and shirt, smiling incredibly. “Hi,” he greeted us. “Just look at them pictures!” The doctor showed us the X-ray photographs. “Not a bone broken,” the doctor said, still astonished. I looked at Sherman’s body. Not a scratch. Not a drop of blood. Laura was still speechless, crying and laughing like rain through the sunshine. Sherman was actually able to walk to a cab. We went back home and did a latihan.

Sherman told us later that the moment he was hit, he was aware of his being thrown up in the air and that he was in a state of latihan. When he fell on the asphalt he was speaking in latihan. Laura who had by then rushed up to him realised this but everyone else was sure this was delirium.

The next evening the three of us walked to the Subud House, a few blocks away. Bapak and Ibu passed by in a car on their way to the latihan. We stood by on the sidewalk, Sherman and Laura barely able to keep their gratitude from flowing out in tears. Bapak was pointing Sherman out to Ibu and laughing as though the whole thing was tickling him pink.

The cop on the beat recognised me the next day and asked after Sherman. I told him he was all right and that he had gone back home directly from the hospital.

“Yaw kiddin’,” he exclaimed. “It jes’ can’t be. Seven feet up there. It jes’ canNOT be.”

I mused on my way home that if God could do, he could also undo, if it was His Will.

Faster than God

THE continuing difference in our understanding of Subud became evident in many departments of our life as time went by. At the start we were all in a hurry. We felt we had hit the spiritual jackpot but it took us time to realize that the results would take time to appear. Bapak and his helpers spoke of how the latihan would purify our bodies inwardly and outwardly and how our limbs would “become alive and responsible”.

Icksan once said, “When body has life, our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, all become worship of God. When sex organs become alive, sexual activity becomes worship. Even bodily functions become worship.”

Many of us expected changes to take place in a year or two or at the most four, which we had cannily set as the deadline, since Icksan was then only four years old in Subud. I hope I shall not give offence to anyone if I tell a story here that has amused many people wherever it has been told before. In 1958 when John Bennett visited us in Ceylon, some of us took him and his wife Elizabeth to visit Anuradhapura and Sigiriya, the ruined monuments of the ancient Sinhalese kingdoms.

That night we stayed at the Sigiriya Rest House which stands in the shadow of the magnificent “Lion Rock” – the fortress-palace-in-the-sky built by King Kasyapa. John Bennett, who had just spent a week in Jakarta with Bapak, regaled us after dinner with accounts of what Bapak had told him about the action of the latihan. We heard of Bapak’s assurance that our bodies – our limbs and our inner and outer organs would become “alive and responsible” as we developed in our spiritual life through the practice of the latihan.

We retired to bed late that night, tired but exhilarated with what we had heard. Sooty Banda and Mohammed Sideek shared a room. At breakfast next morning, Sooty who always had a great deal of bantering fun with Sideek, caused a burst of laughter with his story of the “experience” Sideek had “received” after they had gone to bed. At about two o’clock in the morning Sooty thought he heard Sideek whisper his name. Figuring that he must have imagined it,

he went back to sleep. Then he heard Sideek whisper again – this time a little hoarse.

“Shut up,” said Sooty in the customarily endearing terms he used with his friend Sideek.

Silence for a while.

Then, again, Sideek’s whisper came through, hoarser now and even a little excited.

“What is the matter?” asked Sooty. “Seen ghosts?”

“Sooty,” whispered Sideek in a strange voice. “My sex!”

“What is the matter with it?” Sooty asked.

“It’s alive!” breathed Sideek. The wonderful truth was out at last.

“What do you mean it’s ‘alive’?” Sooty asked, his voice edged with scepticism, alarmed that Sideek might be taking him for a ride.

“Yes, it’s alive,” said Sideek. “I can *feel* the vibration.”

“Yeah?” said Sooty. “So you can feel the vibration?”

“Yes, I can even *hear* it,” panted Sideek.

This intimation was startling enough to impress even doubting Sooty. He reached across and switched on the light and, from the tangle of bed-clothes, something leapt off the bed and out of the window. The rest-house cat had been warming itself against Sideek’s body.

Gamely joining in the laughter, Sideek protested that Sooty had exaggerated the story but his face showed us that he had learnt that we would have to wait awhile before our bodies would become “alive and responsible”.

The eagerness to progress fast persisted in all of us. In Bapak’s words, we were trying to “go faster than God”. Some of us wanted to see progress in ourselves, others looked for signs of the efficacy of the latihan in rapid changes in the political situation of the world.

This concern for the immediate transformation of the world had, at least partly, arisen from our reading more than we perhaps ought to have into an early clarification about the pace of Subud. Someone had asked Bapak the reason for the fact that none of the older spiritual traditions had spread by such easy means as seemed possible in Subud. In Subud a man who had been opened for only a short while was able to transmit the spiritual contact to many others and they, in turn, to many more. Bapak replied, smiling, “This is the Atomic Age. Therefore God has provided a means of progressing at atomic speed.”

One evening Bapak was giving us a friendly talk in Colombo

on the spiritual possibilities of the beings in this world. He said that every man and woman in this world had a different limit to the spiritual development possible in his or her life. Through the sincere practice of the latihan we were trying to reach this limit. Certain souls, he said, might reach their potential as soon as they were opened, some within a few years, others within 32 years, and still others within 42 years. Vadic Siriwardana, who had a naturally precise mind, could not bear this vagueness and asked in a voice drenched with anxiety:

“Bapak, can I be *certain* in 42 years?”

Bapak’s laughter was spontaneous and unrestrained and his face was wreathed in compassionate amusement. Vadic told us later that he needed no further answer to his question.

In this respect the difference between us and the Indonesian Subud members who had the advantage of living near Bapak was remarkable. Vivienne Pope who lived at Tjilandak for over a year had noticed this very clearly. Meeting her there once, I asked her what had impressed her most about her Indonesian colleagues. Her reply was that the most outstanding difference that she had observed in their behaviour was that no one asked questions about how much they had progressed in their spiritual life.

Most of us are continually concerned about what changes (for the better, of course) there were in us between five years ago and now, between last year and this. We were always making internal balance sheets. But in the case of the Indonesian members Subud had become integrated with their lives and they seemed to grow without the self-conscious stock-taking with which we troubled ourselves. If in their testing they showed deeper sensitivity and inner development, they thanked God for His blessings. If they committed a mistake, they thanked God that they had the means for cleansing themselves. There was no heavy breast-beating or public remorse. Win, lose or draw, they did the latihan and went about their ordinary lives.

This observation helped me to understand something that Bapak once said to me in a very reflective mood as we stood on the top of Mount Faber one mellow tropical evening, looking out over the city of Singapore.

“Truly Subud people are lucky. When they receive good fortune they are grateful to God and when they are not fortunate they are mindful of God.”

I thank God that I had sufficient sense to refrain from making the moment hideous with questions.

Off with our heads

I HAVE heard some Subud members lament that they have not observed any marked change in themselves after three or four years in Subud. This always surprises me because it seems to me that those of us who indulge in what we have called spiritual stock-taking are bound to find some differences. From the simple fact that those who complain about their static state have persisted in the latihan for three or four years, can we not justifiably conclude that something must be taking place within them to make them return again and again? Otherwise why should they come to latihan? Subud houses, particularly in the first few years, are not the gayest and most attractive places in which to spend two evenings a week. Continued shoulder-rubbing with Subud people has never led anyone up the social ladder or to advancement in business. On the contrary, Subud members have often become regarded as social pariahs or political outcasts and, on the whole, Subud groups are notoriously impecunious. Attending latihans and banging one's head on the floor – as I did for several months – or swinging one's arms or body about, week after week, month after month, year after year, cannot be described as fun. Unlike in traditional churches and temples there is no “holy” music, no massed choirs, or throbbing of drums at the latihan. There is neither grand decor nor antiquity in latihan halls. There are no set pieces, no feast days, no moving commemorative orations, no elevating and eloquent sermons. The latihan does not “take us out of ourselves” – rather does it put us back into ourselves – hardly ever a pleasant prospect.

Why then do we go on and on unless some value is being received? And does it seem possible to receive any value without experiencing some change which makes it worth our while to continue?

Carmen de Silva of the Colombo group asked Bapak one morning how she could be certain that she was progressing. From the eagerness with which all of us craned forward to hear Bapak's response it became evident that the same problem was present in everyone. Bapak said: “When a seed is planted and begins to grow,

its appearance above the ground may be an ‘experience’. From then on its growth does not give it evidence of change. From outside it can be observed to be at this height one day, at this height the next week, at that height a month later, and so on. But, for a long time, the plant has no knowledge of its own growth. Later when it begins to bear one fruit, then another, and another, then it may find measurable change in its life. Bapak advises patience.”

By their fruits they shall know themselves.

But I feel that the difficulty arises often because, unlike a plant, the changes in us are, more often than not, inner changes. Only outward change is easily noticeable and sometimes even spectacular. Inner change is relatively subtle. And, as Bapak has explained, our senses and our minds and hearts – encrusted with the influence of lower than appropriately human forces – are too insensitive to feel and measure spiritual development. We seem to require an inner instrument to assess inner change.

Prio Hartono once gave us an analogous clarification: “When you are driving a car your attention is focused outside, in front of you. You are unable to see what is happening immediately behind or around you. For this purpose we are given a rear-view mirror which reflects what was previously concealed from our awareness. The latihan kedjiwaan, if it is God’s Will, will give us a spiritual mirror to enable us to feel what is happening inside. The more sincerely we do our latihan the clearer the reflection will be.”

When I heard this explanation I rejoiced in its lucidity and was sure that the nagging questions within me would cease. But of course it was not that easy. The yearning for certainty returned shriller and more insistent. The mind said: “All that is very well – but it is all in the future, some day, in never-never land. What is the good of that for me here and now?”

When I told Prio Hartono these reactions he was helpful again when he said: “Bapak says modern people want proof. They can have proof even now if they will look!”

And of course there was proof when one looked. Part of the trouble had been that we were looking too hard, too deep, and too close.

When I look at my Subud life I recognize certain small but distinct changes that may not be easily visible to the naked eye.

I see for instance, that there has been a revolution in my mental attitudes towards political problems, society, human relationships,

traditional values, and money. I realize that my early militant non-conformism had made me as rigid and bigoted as the forms and people I had been rebelling against. I realize that my revolutionary political ardour – like that of most revolutionaries or liberal reformists – had trapped me like a squirrel in a revolving cage. I realize that there can be no political solution to any significant human problem unless there is a significant change in human beings.¹

I realized that I had been wearing a cloak of hard urban values which had prevented me from being sensitive to the feelings and needs of simple people. Only intellectual brilliance and bloodless verbalisms could excite me. I realize that our life training has been to regard the mind as the most exquisite phenomenon in the universe and to look upon feelings and emotions with suspicion and contempt unless they could be frozen into high art. I saw that I had been terrified of showing or accepting love – the word itself embarrassed me to the quick.

When a Fleet Street colleague once remarked to a group of us drinking beer at The Feathers, that we seemed to be incapable of talking about anything except gin and sex, I countered with bland certitude: “*Is there anything else?*” Urbane laughter. Clever. Cynical. Brittle. This was the life, Koestler, Kafka, Kierkegaard. In the beginning was the Mind and the Mind was God ...

And here we were, only a few years later, beginning to trust our emotions and even the sensitiveness of the physical body more than the subtle argument of the mind. After the 1963 Briarcliff Congress at which 350 people from all over the world had relied more and more sincerely on inner guidance from testing in latihan, John Lake of Los Angeles remarked in loud dejection: “Oh God! I suppose I shall now have to screw my head back on.”

I saw then how it was for me and most other Subud members who had been trained and nurtured in the religion of the mind – how much more willing we had become to give our minds their proper place as relatively inefficient computers for calculating our way through our worldly lives, but no more.

What more convincing proof of change could we need? But I

¹ *Bapak once asked us: “Can a carpenter make a table better than himself?”*

expect many of us will continue, as I will, to demand more and more proof until the latihan becomes indistinguishably integrated with our daily lives.²

² *Bapak's words are: "Until the Outer and Inner come together".*

Private islands

MANY of us have been through the phase of wanting to quit our jobs soon after coming to Subud in order to retire to some hermitage of our own. I have already told the story of Bapak's response to my announcement that I was leaving journalism to spend the rest of my life on an island* belonging to my wife's family.

Since then I have observed that there are many kinds of island refuges. Tom and Mary (these are not their real names) were as sincere a Subud couple as you would wish to meet. After two years in Subud they felt that latihan done with the group were not so beneficial as those they did at home. They decided that they would take leave of absence from the group and do the latihan at home instead. There was nothing uppity or offensive about their attitude and no one asked them to return to the fold. They came to the group one evening when a visiting Indonesian assistant was present and heard him say – apropos no one in particular – “it is easy to be strong when there is no opposition. It is easy to be pure when there is no temptation. If we are really strong and pure, we would wish to share our gifts with our brothers and sisters.”

They came back to the group latihan.

There are other islands – South Pacific Bali H'ais about which Bapak's Indonesian helpers have frequently warned us. Many of us have gone through the period of isolationism in which we imagine that the inability to cope with ordinary life – work, common social or professional contact even with people in the bus and the train – is a sign of having arrived spiritually.

I once remarked to Anwar Zakir that such attitudes reminded me of the Dowager Duchess who, having joined the Labour Party, decided to travel by bus. But when she boarded the first bus she scrambled down again exclaiming to her companion:

“But my dear, there are *people* in it,”

Anwar's comment was: “But the Duchess at least was not pretending.”

* *A Reporter in Subud*

From the point of view of ordinary human responsibilities, perhaps the most dangerous island is the one that beckons the breadwinner away from his job. Having been sorely tempted myself, I understand some of the inner involution of forces which accompany this fever and something of its results. I see it like this:

A man and a woman meet and fall in love. They suddenly find themselves charged with a new force. Their separate lives which may previously have been a series of varying degrees of boredom, are now revitalised. They see with new eyes and hear with new ears, That is why one often hears lovers explain their feelings in terms of identical likes and dislikes: We both love the same flowers, the same kind of music, the same kind of books, and the same kind of people ... and so on. The world within and without takes on fresh colours, new meanings, miraculous connections between thought and thought, event and event. Life is suddenly vital and sweet. When they get married this sense of exuberant life continues for a while.

But the business known as Settling Down starts within a year or two. Because of the circumstances of life in a modern community, a pattern, a sameness begins to appear. He has to go to work at the same time each morning, eat the same sort of breakfast, exchange the same sort of kiss with his wife, catch the same train, arrive at work at the same time, eat the same kind of lunch at the same time every day, buy the same sort of newspaper with the same sort of sensational news,* and return home at the same time to the same wife and the same welcome and the same dinner, and the same slippers ...

It is the same for her. The same chores in the kitchen and with her children, the same time-table, the same radio-programme, the same paperback with the same blonde on the cover ... The band-box fragrance of marriage disappears. The sense of the continually renewed freshness of life is no longer there.

The consciousness of two people united through a common relationship with a new real vital world outside, runs out. Sooner or later, they are thrown back on each other and their resources of mutuality. With no infusion of energy from outside, they now begin to analyse and measure their own relationship. Do you love me? Do

**My wife Haryanti horrified me in pre-Subud days by asking quite seriously: "If the news that you have been bashing your brains to publish tonight is so vital and significant, why don't you print the same news three days running?" I now feel that she may have had a point.*

you *really* love me? I love you more than you love me. If you love me why don't you *show* you love me? The beginning of the end. Disaster or slow attrition until death doth them part.

I feel that a remarkably similar process seems to occur in those of us who go through this period of island-chasing. Many of us come to Subud after an adult lifetime of unanswerable questions, dead-end theories that we elevate by calling them "our private philosophies of life," political attitudinising, and stretches of insupportable boredom. Then we receive the contact with the Great Life Force. A grand romance with God begins. Life begins to have a meaning, subtler layers of meaning. The world seems as wonderful as it did when we were children. The trees look tall again, their leaves are actually green again. People who were separated from us through prejudice or mutual fear of entering into a new relationship, are accepted like long-lost brothers and sisters. The terrors we had of showing sentiment – even genuine sentiment – or love of other beings, vanishes. The more sophisticated among us who would not have minded being caught reading Frank Harris' "Lives and Loves" but would have been acutely embarrassed at being caught reading the Gospels – now become unconcerned about appearing old fashioned or "un-progressive." Life and the brave new world opened to us were too precious to be frittered away on spurious histrionics.

Then the process of Settling Down begins.

Because of the circumstances of life in a modern community a pattern, a sameness, begins to appear. We must go to the same Subud centre on the same days of the week, every week. We meet much the same people. We do much the same latihan for long periods. Life outside Subud goes on in the same old way. Politicians talk just the same. The newspapers carry the same stories every day in different words. And worst of all, the jobs to which we devote the best part of our days, seem more "same" than ever before. The love affair with God is over but the marriage still remains. So what is the answer: Give up the job, of course! Rest awhile. If there is a little nest-egg tucked in somewhere, bring it out. Reduce our wants. Spread our scanty means out as far as they will go. The world is too much with us. Getting and spending we lay waste the Subud power we have received. We argue that this is why we do not seem to progress. So the job must go. We will stay at home.

With no relationship with the outside world, we are now

thrown back on our own resources. With no new experiences from the daily work-a-day world to excite us, we begin to discuss, analyse, and measure our relationship with God. Do you love me? Do you *really* love me? I love you more than you love me. If you love me why don't you *show* me you love me? Why am I not given my due spiritual recognition? Is this the right path after all? It had better be. Maybe I can be a Real Helper (who invented that phrase?) by 1968. After all, Sjaf has been in Subud only four or five years more than I. Group latihans? Perhaps that's where I'm collecting all this spiritual dust. Better stay home and do my latihans alone. Or better still, why not call a few of the boys – I mean those I know are not likely to be too full of dirt – and set up a small private group?

Deeper and more complex doubts. Disenchantment. The beginning of chronic crisis ... Or, why not try Zen?

Life in Subud

WHEN will it be possible for us to say that Subud has been integrally woven into our daily lives? One quick answer is: When we don't need to say it. But like all such answers, it illuminates quickly but the light it gives vanishes as fast. I like to think that for most of us it will not be an impossible achievement in this lifetime.

There is some evidence for supposing that this wish of mine may not be entirely fatuous or impertinent. Let me say straightway that this evidence is not from my own experience but from one or two hints that I have heard Bapak drop, and from my observation of the lives of a few Subud people in Jakarta as well as outside Indonesia.

Bapak remarked at the Briarcliff Congress that the fact that so many Subud members participating in it had been able to conduct all the business of the Congress without rancour, bitterness or anger or "desire to misunderstand" showed that the practice of the latihan had already had some influence on their inner lives.

But, of course, we can damage ourselves by making the mistake of letting our imagination blow it up out of due proportion. We could, for instance, commit the hideous error of ignoring the evidence in our individual lives which reveals the chasm between what we are and what we hope we shall be, and how far we have yet to go to bridge it. Such self-delusion is bound to cause us traumatic disappointment when, inevitably, these unpleasant facts thrust themselves into our awareness at critical moments in our relationship with ourselves, with others and with God.

Bapak once said to us: "You practise the latihan twice a week for half an hour each time. Later you will need three latihan and, later still, you will feel the need for doing the latihan more often. When progress is made you may reach the time when being out of the receiving state will be as uncomfortable as being out of water is to fish. The latihan state is the proper medium for a real human being whose Inner and Outer are in constant touch with each other."

This impressed me so deeply that at the first opportunity I told

Bapak that I wanted to stop being a journalist.

Why? asked Bapak.

“Because in my job I have to criticize people every day, sometimes very harshly. An editor must believe passionately in certain standards and opinions and to defend them he has to attack others. Doing this every day of my life makes it very hard for me in Subud. I collect more dirt in my job than I seem to be able to throw away in latihan. This is a losing battle unless I change my profession.” Bapak answered: “Your profession is journalism and it is right that you should criticize others according to the policy of your newspaper. But the trouble arises not because you criticize but because of your passion. It is not necessary to leave journalism to progress in your spiritual life. Bapak will put it another way. A man may be a butcher by profession because his grandfather and his father before him were butchers. Circumstances have made him a butcher. But this need not prevent him from receiving the Grace of God and from progressing in the latihan although it may be more difficult for him. He does not need to stop being a butcher. He needs to become a *good* butcher. He should learn to cut efficiently and neatly and he can do this only if he does it without passion. His Inner should not be involved in this activity. Only his skill.”*

I wish I could claim that Bapak’s advice effected an immediate and profound transformation in my professional performance. The truth is that I went on in much the same way as before and still continue to be involved in what I write. As a matter of fact, things got so bad that a year later I asked Bapak again how we could be expected to progress spiritually if we did not hide ourselves away from the dust and grime of material life.

Bapak is the only human being in my experience who can really chortle: amused, detached and indulgent. He chortled:

“If God had intended that you should be a hermit, He would have put you in a cave.”

We keep coming back to the old Subud question: Are you sitting on that chair or is that chair sitting on you? Are you eating that food or is the food eating you? Are you drinking that whisky

*During his visit to Paris in July 1964 Bapak advised Laurence Petric of Chile who has a meat business to breed his own cattle so that he could control the supply and quality. One of the ladies present said that she had thought being a butcher and being in Subud would go ill together. Bapak’s reply was: “Better a good butcher than a bad priest.”

or is the whisky drinking you? Are you running a newspaper or is the newspaper running you?

Since that time I have been living a different kind of journalistic life: working in newsrooms in Madras, Bangalore, Kerala, Orissa, Lahore, Dacca, Karachi, Chittagong, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Hong Kong, and holding journalistic workshops and seminars from Karachi to Tokyo. Mercifully, I have been away from Colombo and journalism in Ceylon where I was not strong enough to practise my profession without passion and have now been given a job to do in which only such skill as I have is involved.

In the process, I have been privileged to observe Subud members here and there whose lives have been increasingly infused with the strength they derive from the latihan and guided by their inner spiritual understanding.

It has been a rewarding experience to meet Subud brothers in Indonesia who live their daily lives deprived of many of the creature comforts which most of us take for granted. I know one Subud family with six children whose income is no more than the true equivalent of \$4 a month* and they are regarded as relatively well-to-do. Their real sustenance is derived from the latihan. The guidance through their lives is their receiving through testing.

I was present, one day, when a Subud member in Jakarta came to Bapak with a serious life problem, the solution to which would have affected the entire future of his family. All he asked was: "Bapak, is the indication I have received correct?"

Bapak nodded. Nothing more was said and, apparently, nothing more was needed. I know that the indication was obediently followed without prevarication or any interpretation calculated to soften the pain it caused in the human heart of this Subud brother. It was the simplicity of faith that I found most impressive.

On a recent visit to Jakarta I discovered Sjafrudin busy studying for his law examination. I asked him whether it was not difficult to concentrate on a heavy law book after a six year lapse. Sjafrudin said that it was easier than he had imagined it would be. He had found that his mind "closed" when he read an unimportant passage and "opened" when it had to remember a significant passage for the purpose of the examination. He simply accepted this as inner

*At the time of writing, the official Exchange rate is 45 Rupiah to one US dollar. The open market (no one calls it the black market) offers 1800 Rupiah to the dollar. Rp 6000 a month is the salary of a senior government official. (March 1964)

guidance to his preparation. Our old teachers would be horrified if they heard of this strange approach to sacred matters like examinations and the law. But I am sure we need have no worries that Sjaf will get by.*

This simplicity of faith was best exemplified – in my experience – by Icksan’s life. He had a small import business which he had started on a bank loan. This was his family’s sole means of existence. But when Bapak wanted him as his assistant on his first visit to England and Europe, without any hesitation Icksan put a padlock on his door and went away to London. For nearly two years he was engaged in opening new members and guiding groups for Bapak in London, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, California, Ceylon and Singapore and by the time he returned, his business was a wreck. He was preparing to resurrect it when Bapak took him again to Colombo and Singapore, where he died.

Subud members who were very close to Icksan asked Bapak what they could do to help Ismana, Icksan’s young widowed wife.

Bapak said: “Ismana is Bapak’s daughter. It is Icksan who needs help. The debts he had in this world should not be allowed to burden him where he is now.”

In a matter of weeks all this was settled; Icksan’s simple direct faith, thank God, had been justified even in material terms.

There were other Subud members elsewhere who, because they have not had the opportunity of living near Bapak’s physical presence, have probably given me even more reason to hope that my life too could be more and more inner-directed by Subud. Such families I have encountered in the United States, England, Germany, India and Ceylon. They go about their normal life occupations – commerce, medicine, accountancy, industry – but their inner attitudes, to the people they meet and to the circumstances of their life work, have undergone a remarkable transformation. Their reliance on the guidance they receive through their testing and the resolution with which they obey inner indications – even when it seems disastrous to the mind – constantly fills me with admiration. I often think how marvellous for them that they are becoming as little children.

But what is most impressive is that like little children, they have not found it necessary to withdraw from life or society in a way

**He did.*

which attracts undue attention to themselves or jeopardizes their professional position.

They participate in the social activities that convention and business thrust at them, and even contrive to enjoy themselves much more thoroughly and conscientiously than they ever did before – always returning from a state of diffusion to the sanctuary of receiving. These are the truly “sly people” who have discovered the secret of renunciation – that the ascetic’s cave and the devotee’s temple may be found within themselves. They may have found the key to the words of the Lama who, asked by a newspaper reporter whether it was true that he could fly into the clouds, replied,

“I can refrain from flying into the clouds.” *

* *During Bapak’s most recent visit to Calcutta he was asked this question: “A Superman may prefer to create rather than to procreate might he not?” Bapak replied in English: “Superman normal. God is normal.”*

Of coincidences and wills

ON a Monday in the winter of 1961 I arrived in Calcutta for meetings with three Bengali editors. When I checked in at the Great Eastern Hotel I was handed three messages. One of the editors I had to meet had gone away to Tokyo on a free “facility flight” provided by the new Air India Boeing service to the Far East, another had gone to Berlin on a similar facility offered by Lufthansa and the third had gone to Delhi for an interview with Prime Minister Nehru. They were all returning to Calcutta on the next Thursday and had asked me to wait if I could.

I was livid. I muttered obscene imprecations against Bengali punctuality and, as I walked to my room, I wondered what I was going to do with myself and my time for three days. I knew no other journalists in Calcutta and foresaw three whole days of tedium. At the same time, my mind was uneasy. I had learnt from experience that the improbable confluence of circumstance that is usually dismissed as “mere coincidence” is never explained away by a label quite so facile. Often we cannot see any meaning in coincidence and we may not find it even in retrospect, but I have a deep inclination to believe that there is a meaning all the same. I decided that I would shower and then receive for a while before sitting down to write some letters. As I sat down at the desk I suddenly remembered that Ian and Mariani Arnold were in Calcutta. I telephoned. As I said “hallo” Ian answered, “Tarzie? That’s not you, is it? Mariani and I were talking about you just five minutes ago.” I asked how they knew I was in Calcutta. Ian replied that they had not known but, being aware that I was a professional vagabond, they had hoped that I might be around about that time. He asked me to come to dinner and they would tell me why they had been discussing me.

About a week before, John Bennett had written from London to ask them to make enquiries about a hermit named Shivapuri Baba who lived in a forest in Nepal. John Bennett had heard of the Baba’s name some 25 years before and had received recent indications that he should visit the Baba in the near future or he

would not be able to meet him at all. Bennett wished to know whether the Baba was still alive and where he was to be found. Ian and Mariani had made enquiries in Kathmandu and had been told that the Baba had attained Samadhi (Eternal Peace) some three years before. But they felt that this information was wrong. Knowing that I was wandering about in this region, they hoped that I would be able to go to Kathmandu and make further investigations.

As the enquiry had originated from John Bennett it seemed plausible at that time that Bapak might have been interested in Shivapuri Baba. We believed – hoped, rather – that the Baba was one of the “Mahatmas” who, according to what Bennett had told us, would begin the process of “bringing millions in India into Subud.”

Well, here was the meaning of my coincidence: I had three free days, there were daily Royal Nepalese Airways flights to Kathmandu and here was my assignment. We tested and received indications that I should go.

When I went to the Nepalese Consulate to get a visa, the Consul asked me what my interest in Kathmandu was – whether I would like him to lay on some appointments for me with journalists in Kathmandu. I told him that my mission was to visit Shivapuri Baba. “Shivapuri Baba?” he exclaimed. “Why, he attained Samadhi three or four years ago.” I felt that this was not right – that the man was telling me what he thought was true, but that he was mistaken.

But on my way back to the hotel I thought I should abandon the idea of going to Kathmandu. Here was I, trying to play a game of Stanley and Livingstone with the awkward difference that in this case Livingstone was officially dead. But when I got back to my hotel I found there two American friends of mine who had arrived that morning in Calcutta on their way to Kathmandu. They hoped that I would join them. More coincidences. I told them about my assignment and they had a whale of a time laughing at my romanticism. “It’s like looking for a black cat in a dark room and the cat’s not even there!” they said.

At the Royal Hotel in Kathmandu, I went to the “Yak and Yeti Bar” to have a quiet drink and figure out a line of action. There I found an old friend of mine, Rawle Knox – Delhi correspondent of the Sunday Observer, London, with whom I had an appointment

in Delhi in two weeks' time. Rawle had been with the party of journalists covering Queen Elizabeth's tour of India, Pakistan, and Nepal, but had broken away and come to Kathmandu to write a story of the Gurkhas coming down from the hills two weeks in advance to make preparations for receiving their Great White Chief. Rawle told me that he had written a satirical story that morning about the pace of modern travel. An American tycoon had arrived in Kathmandu on the day before on a round-the-world trip which he was determined to complete in 40 days, cutting Phileas Fogg's record in half.

In Kathmandu this atomic tourist had chartered the only helicopter available in Nepal, whizzed off to view Mount Everest from the air, and had taken the next plane to Delhi a few hours later.

Rawle said, "I contrasted this feat with the performance of another man in Nepal who had done the same trip in 40 years – mostly on foot."

"What's his name, Rawle?" I asked

"Shivapuri Baba," said Rawle.

More coincidences. Hardly able to conceal my excitement I asked Rawle to tell me all he knew about the Baba.

Waving a large hand out of the window, Rawle said "He has been living for 35 years in one of these forests up there ever since he returned from his journey. They call it Shiva Forest – the forest dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva – and he is called the Baba or Father of Shiva Puri or Shiva's forest."

Rawle still wonders why I vanished so swiftly.

I charged downstairs to find some vehicle to take me to the Shiva forest. Downstairs, I asked a man in a flier's uniform if he could advise me about hiring a car. "Where do you want to go?" he asked. "Shiva forest," I replied. "To visit Shivapuri Baba?" he asked. "Are you a disciple? I am Capt. Jaisingh of King Mahendra's air force. I am a disciple of Babaji. There is a hiring car driver who has taken me to the forest. I will send for him."

The coincidences were crowding in too fast for my mind to comprehend them. Driving up towards the forest in a 1928 Overland, I made conversation with the driver. "If Babaji set out on his journey in middle age, took 40 years to walk around the world, and has lived in Shiva forest for 35 years, he must be very old indeed," I remarked. "Oh yes," said the driver wagging his head in

affirmation, “he is 500 years old.” He must have seen the look of unbelief on my face for he added:

“There are sceptics in this country too who think he is only 200 years old.”

Shiva forest is within five minutes drive from the Kathmandu airport, When the forest was torn down to make room for the airport, the King had built a little stone cottage in a corner of the forest which he barb-wired off for the Baba.

But this was only five years before. Previously the Baba had lived in a cave in the forests standing on the higher slopes of the Himalayas. There he had lived and meditated for 30 years. He had come to Shiva Forest, lower down, when he was becoming too feeble to fend for himself. Now he was looked after by two men – one a man of about 65 and a youth of about 22 or 23. Shivapuri Baba was sitting in an armchair among the lime trees outside the cottage sunning himself. The light filtered through the trees and made intricate patterns on his white robe and long white beard. He greeted me smiling, as though he had known me all his life. Indeed it seemed to me as though he had been expecting me. There was a teapoy with a can of du Maurier cigarettes on it and a small stool near him. I took the stool and began to explain my mission.

“Babaji,” I began. “A friend of mine named Mr. Bennett of London has written to a friend of mine in Calcutta named Mr. Arnold ...”

“Please inform Mr, Bennett,” Babaji interrupted, “that he is right in feeling he should come to see me without delay as I shall not be available for long.”

I sat in stunned silence for a long time I now felt sure that this certainly was one of the “Mahatmas” we had been led to expect. Babaji gazed at me smiling for several minutes without a word.

Eventually I broke the silence. “Has Babaji heard of Subud ?” I asked.

“Subud? Muhammad Subuh of Indonesia? Yes,” he replied.

“Who has told you about Subud?” I asked.

“One hears,” he replied.*

“Is Subud the right way for me?” I asked.

“Why do you doubt? Subud is the right way for you and for

**I learnt recently that a lady Subud member had visited Shiva forest long before I did. But that he should remember so much even if he had discussed Subud with her was amazing.*

many others who follow Muhammad Subuh," he replied.

I said that because of my upbringing and education I was always full of doubts about everything.

He spoke of the need for keeping the mind clear: "Put a barbed-wire fence round your mind," he said.

"That's easier said than done," I replied.

"It's not as difficult as you might think. It's like this: many people, friends and others, visit your home. You entertain them, you indulge them with whisky, tea, etcetera. But if you stop entertaining them – they will not come back. Only the worthwhile friends will remain. It is like that with thoughts and doubts. They will keep coming back as long as you entertain or indulge them."

We talked for a while and when he seemed to be getting tired, I shuffled about, preparing to leave .

"Babaji," I said. "Some say you are 500 years old. Some say you are only 200. What is the truth about this?"

"Is it important to you?" Babaji asked.

"I am a journalist and have an insatiable curiosity," I replied.

"It is not important how long a man lives. By certain practices such as Brahmacharia (celibacy) a man may live very long. It is more important what he does with the life he has – whatever length it is. He must learn to worship God in that time. But if you wish to know, I was born in 1826."

I did some rapid mental work and came up with 136,

I asked, "Does a man need several lifetimes to learn to worship God?"

"He can do so in a decade," he said.

"And if I can't do this in ten years?"

"Then you might as well adopt a religion," Babaji said, smiling sardonically.

I left and returned to Shiva forest 8 months later, He was feebler now. He spoke about his impending death. I spoke with him for three days. His mental clarity and wisdom continually amazed me, Everything Babaji said served to confirm my experience in Subud. He spoke about the latihan as though he himself had experienced the state.

As I bade farewell I asked him if I could bring my wife with me on my next visit. "Of course you may," he replied. "But you will have to hurry next time. The candle has burned a long time and is about to sputter out."

A few months later he was dead.

I received news of his death a few days before Prio Hartono was due to visit and stay with the Kuala Lumpur group on his way back home from an extensive tour of Africa, Pakistan, India, and Vietnam. Whenever I thought of the Baba I felt a strange and uneasy sadness which I could not understand. I tried to apply Icksan's favourite test within me. "Is it heffy or is it light?" It was heffy. This was beyond me. The old man had double the life-span of an ordinary man and had expected to die within two years of my first visit to him. Why should I feel this sadness?

One morning I asked Prio to test with me the state of Shivapuri Baba's soul. "Not now. Later," Prio said. That evening after latihan, the group assembled in our living room. Prio, in a voice which had unusual authority and a strange formality, said: "Mr. Vittachi has a question."

I looked up at him. What question? Why this sudden formality? Surely not my question about Babaji? Surely not? That was my private question to him. The group knew nothing about Shivapuri Baba. "He wants to test the state of Shivapuri Baba's soul," Prio said. I began to seethe with indignation. Prio asked one of the ladies to stand up and receive the test. Her reactions were very plain. There was great sadness and heaviness. Her breathing even showed signs of asthma – the condition in which the Baba had died.

My anger was now charged with great sorrow. I could not bear it any longer and ran upstairs to my bedroom where I sobbed uncontrollably almost till dawn. Early in the morning Prio, who had obviously not slept the whole night, came to me with sympathy frowning his face,

"Why were you so upset?" he asked.

"Look, Prio," I said, "this was *my* question. What do these people care about Shivapuri Baba? They don't know him. I wanted to be sure whether my *own* indications were right or wrong. But you tested this in public with someone else. It is still not proof to *me*".

"Maybe I was wrong," Prio said. "Perhaps it would have been better to test with you. But at that time, because it was your question your mind was involved in it and your testing would have been influenced by it. If you like, let us test now."

I said, "No, Prio. I am sorry I was mad. I understand now. But can you explain how it is that such a good man's soul can be in this state ? "

Prio received for a long time. Then he gave me one of the most valuable clarifications I have ever heard:

“Let us take the case of your Buddha,” Prio said. “He gave up his wealth, his wife and child and became an ascetic. He tried very hard to understand the nature of the Universe through the effort of his will. At that time – as now in India – there were many people who believed in self-torture and tried by the exercise of their will to reach understanding. The Buddha also, by using his will, decided to fast in order to reach Salvation. He fasted for 49 days till he became only skin and bone.

Now, the will resides in the human heart, in the human body. At the end of his fast, the Buddha’s body and his human heart had become very weak. What do we surrender in our latihan except our will? Nothing else. We only have our will to surrender. When the Buddha became so weak he was able to surrender his will. When he surrendered his now-weakened will, he was able to receive. This is what is called Enlightenment. He then broke his fast. He realised that self-immolation by an act of will was not the way to Enlightenment. He then preached the Dharma of Moderation – the Middle Path.

But what happened in the case of the Shivapuri Baba? He too became an ascetic. He left the company of his fellow beings and lived and meditated in the jungle. To do this a tremendous strength of will is necessary, Every day the will becomes stronger and stronger. But, because Shivapuri Baba was not living in the ordinary world of materialism and confusion, his mind became clearer and clearer. So many things he *said* to you sounded sweet and true. But his will was strong. He died before he could surrender his will. He died too young.”*

Perhaps it was to enable me to appreciate this explanation that those strange coincidences took me to Kathmandu.

*At 137.

The philosopher's stone

DURING one of my recent visits to Jakarta, Bapak said that a group in Germany had asked whether testing was not the heart of Subud experience. "This is indeed so," Bapak commented. "Without the experience of testing it is not possible to gain faith in our inner development."

Later, I discussed this with Sudarto, Brodjo and Prio whose experience and faith in testing is phenomenal. They would test at the drop of a hat. Brodjo told us how at the start he could not convince himself that the indications he received were reliable – except when he was testing in the presence of Bapak. Brodjo said: "So I practised even in small things. If I wanted to go to meet a friend I would test 'Is he at home or not?' And, even if I received 'no', I would go to his house to check my testing. In Jakarta this is not easy. We have no telephone or motor cars. And *betjas* (cycle-rickshaws) are expensive for us. Like this I became more and more sure that the Inner had a means of receiving direct knowledge that the mind had not."

For people like myself who have been taught from the time we were babies to regard the human mind as the ultimate refinement in the Universe, this has been a very difficult attitude to accept even as a working hypothesis. How was it possible that the truth came to us only when the mind had stopped? And how can there be "knowledge" – direct or indirect – without cerebration?

I remember a Subud member whose mental equipment is undoubtedly impressive, telling me five years ago: "This testing thing. This is the one thing in Subud that I cannot accept. If testing is true then we have at last found the Philosopher's Stone. The ultimate secret which was denied to the Alchemist has been handed over to us for the asking. It is patently absurd."

I must say that I was inclined at that time to agree with him. My difficulty was to understand why a spiritual loafer like me should be given this fantastic gift while people who had devoted their lives to a spiritual search had been passed over. And how could we be sure that the mind was not interfering in the process of testing from

within and dictating to the Inner what answer it should provide?

I remember one early occasion when Bapak was testing one of the women in the Colombo Group. She closed her eyes and made some extremely fluent movements of her hands and body signifying, it seemed, that the answer to the question posed was “good” or “light” or “yes”. I whispered to Icksan: “Good Subud actress”. Icksan whispered back: “Are you sure it is acting?”

I shut up discreetly but I could not accept this “performance” as evidence of this woman’s having received the truth.

Icksan often used me as the guinea-pig for many of the early exercises in testing we were put through. I “let go” as sincerely as I was capable of and responded to the tests. But my mind was ticking away like a time bomb ready to burst into hot denunciations of all this as sham and superstition.

When Bapak visited us in Ceylon someone asked him about the present state of the soul of a celebrated spiritual teacher whom some of us had followed for many years. Bapak asked me to stand up and test this. I closed my eyes, relaxed, and suddenly felt an enormous overpowering weight upon me. I fell like a log. There was no choice or pretence about it. My fall was heavy and graceless.

Bapak said, rather sadly it seemed to me, “Still here, in this world.”

Then my mind began to gnaw at it: Did I or didn’t I? Did I fake it or was it real? If I had fallen deliberately, surely it would have been more fluent, more graceful. But perhaps my mind was being cleverer than that. It could have skipped one step and played it more subtly. But surely that wasn’t the answer I *wanted*? And so on. All the while something deep inside me was certain about the reality of the overwhelming force that had borne me down and about the spontaneity of the movement, of the feeling of sadness and torment that had coursed through me. But the mind denied all this evidence. It refused to acknowledge as truth an answer that was completely unpalatable to its tastes and values and its notions of fundamental justice.

This intellectual doubt seemed to be supported by a conversation that took place in Singapore some time later.

I asked: “Bapak, would I be right in thinking that none of us can test correctly?”

Bapak smiled and nodded agreement. I went on: “Then why does Bapak test with us at all?”

Bapak's smile became broader: "Injection," he said laconically, making a prodding gesture with his finger.

From then on I felt I was justified in refusing to test individually or as part of a group. For a long time I actively scoffed at people practising testing. I would submit to testing only with Bapak or with one of his authorized assistants. All the while, however, there was a deep, persistent, nagging suspicion that it was essential to practise testing without such an injection of force which would not be always available when something important had to be submitted for testing. Since the most attractive feature of Subud as a way of life was, for me, its concern with individual growth and responsibility, it was necessary to learn to rely on one's own inner capacity. Therefore, whenever I did latihan with the Arnolds in Calcutta or with New York members who placed a great deal of value on testing, I participated. Such experiences, supported by an occasional shot in the arm from Bapak, eventually convinced me that it was necessary to test and equally important to learn to follow the inner answers I received. Let me hastily add here that I have never been capable of as much submission in this respect – following the indications given by the test – as many others I know or as much as I myself often wish.

It was a tremendous relief to have got over the phase of believing that one should test perfectly or not at all. It is like writing. Many people who want to write, never write anything because they wait until they can write a masterpiece. The result, of course, is that they write nothing at all.

Not long ago we received an object lesson in testing from one of the members in the Kuala Lumpur group. Peter Kibble – very young in years but old in Subud (he had been opened six years before when he was barely 18) submitted a problem for testing. It seemed a trivial or rather an "unspiritual" kind of question, but since it was very important for him, the group agreed to participate in testing it. Peter is in charge of a department in a large commercial house in Malaysia. That morning he had received a cable from Bangkok instructing him to meet a plane bringing two of his bosses to Kuala Lumpur on the following day. Peter found that there were two planes due from Bangkok – one in the morning, the other in the afternoon. He had so much work to do that he had time to meet only one plane – not both. He wished to know which he should meet. We "tested" the first plane. It was a unanimous NO.

Then, instead of logically assuming that he should meet the other, we tested that too. Everyone seemed to receive a confused response. (We realized later that this was because our minds which were convinced that it had to be the second plane, were interfering). We suggested that Peter should submit to the test alone while the rest of us received the force within us. Peter's test showed that he should NOT meet even the second plane. It was so clear to him that he determined that he would not meet either plane.

I must admit I was afraid that Peter was taking a serious risk since young executives like him are not permitted mistakes based on what would be regarded in the commercial world as mere whimsicality.

On the next evening Peter came in looking like a cat who had swallowed a brace of canaries. He had received another cable informing him that the visit had been postponed.

I single out this experience for relating, not to show that our testing was right, but to record our gratitude that Peter Kibble had shown that one of us was capable of that degree of faith in Subud testing – done, let us mark, without the help of Bapak's presence or even one of his assistants.

My certainty about the validity of testing really came to me during a session with the New York group. There were 15 helpers present, and a moderator read out written questions put to the group. The helpers would receive for a while and then put it to the vote. How many Ayes, how many Noes and how many Indifferent? The Ayes had it or the Noes had it as the test went on. I had to choke on the protests that arose inside me. This idea of majority decisions on such matters horrified me. In my ordinary experience, the majority has generally been wrong – the minority was more likely to be right in arriving at critical decisions. Instead of protesting, I decided to participate in the next test and check the response in myself.

A Catholic Bishop had written to ask the group to test his question. He had applied for Subud membership not long before. He was a Ban-the-Bomb demonstrator and had been charged with obstructing the police, endangering the public peace etc. etc. He had decided to plead guilty at the trial and would certainly be sentenced to a term in prison. He now realized that peace could not come through such action but from submission within and he was anxious to join Subud. Would the group waive the three month

probationary period and open him at once so that he could “have the solace of the latihan in prison?”

My mind said, “Why bother to test this? It is obviously right that a concession should be made in this case.”

My heart said, “What a fine human being. Of course he must be opened immediately.”

But when I submitted to the test, the Inner said No. It was firm and definite – No.

The answer itself did not concern me much. It was the clarity of the response and the fact that it overrode the wishes of the heart and mind that made an impact on me.

Thereafter, all my criticisms of the democratic methods of the New York group lay down and died. I realized that, at our level of receiving, such rough and ready methods as the counting of heads were the only means available to us just now. Later, God willing, there would be sharper indications and unison of response within a helper's group as there is among the older helpers in Jakarta.

My experience received profound confirmation at the World Congress when the members of the Executive Committee of the Subud International Services organization were being chosen by testing. From the ten names nominated by the Congress I had privately marked out five as the most effective group for the work ahead. One of those I had rejected was a friend of mine who agreed with me that he was the last man to be on such a committee. At the testing session my mental judgment received two major blows: Four of the five I had picked were eliminated. And I was called upon by Bapak as one of those who were to test the candidature of my friend. Again my head said No, my feelings said No, but as soon as I began to receive, my body reached upward and my hands rose high in profound acceptance of this man as being right for this task.

I learned two valuable lessons from this experience: It gave me an explanation of the continuing failure in the world of politics to find the right people for the right tasks. It also showed me, without room for any doubt, that we now had a real possibility of making value judgments from a more reliable instrument than our hearts and minds had so far proved themselves to be.

One more testing story. A friend who, I feel, would prefer to be nameless here, related to us a spiritual experience he had received before he came to Subud. He was in a state of great nervous tension and sadness one night when he decided to pray. When he was deep

in prayer he saw a clear, bright greenish-blue light above his head. It came nearer and nearer and seemed to spill over his head and bathe his shoulders. He said he felt that it was "like Heaven!"

Soon after he came to Subud, he told Icksan about this incident and asked whether it was a "true experience".

Icksan told him that he could test it for himself.

First Icksan tested my friend's response for "light" and "heffy" which, in Icksan's connotation, stood respectively for Yes and No. Then Icksan asked him to receive whether it was a true experience.

The answer was "light" – Yes.

"Yah, yah. True experience," said Icksan. But something in the tone of his voice may have seemed odd, for my friend asked:

"Icksan, what is it?"

Icksan: "You wish to test whether this experience is from God or not?"

Yes, he would like to test this.

He received. The answer was a resolute No. He protested, "But Icksan, it says No! How can that be? The experience was like Heaven!"

Icksan: "You test again."

Again it was a clear No. My friend's heart and mind wanted the answer to be Yes but his Inner said No.

Then Icksan asked him to test whether the experience was from the human level.

No.

Was it an experience from the animal level?

No.

Was it from the vegetable level?

Yes. It was from the vegetable level.

Then Icksan explained that human beings should, if they are purified, live at the proper human level. But we live at the material level. The symbolic colours associated with the vegetable level are blue and green. Thus, when we receive an experience from the vegetable level we are receiving it from a level actually higher than we are at. Even an experience from the vegetable level is "already like Heaven" when we are living at the material level.

Since then I have been less inclined to talk as glibly as I used to about "lower forces". Even in Subud the Law of Relativity applies.

Not teaching but learning

ICKSAN touched my hand during one of the mass latihans held in the first week of his visit to Colombo where some three hundred people were opened in three weeks. Icksan was introducing us into the simple mysteries of the helpers' function. He pointed to a young man who had just been opened. With his eyes tightly closed he was reciting words from the Koran, punctuating them with loud affirmations of Allah, Allah, Allah!

Very gravely, Icksan whispered, "Notice how easily he speaks name of God. Funny! You see him next week. Maybe not so easy!"

A few days later, Icksan indicated the young man again. All he could do in his latihan now was to utter a rasping sound like Augh, Augh, Augh as though he was in pain within. There was no sign of triumphant vindication on Icksan's face. It was still grave as he said, "Now better. Now real. Not so nice as Allah, Allah, Allah as in beginning. Now ugly, but true. From inner, not from teaching."

We learnt much from Icksan's refusal to compromise with the value of truth learnt from experience. Gently, but firmly he thwarted every attempt by some of the helpers who, following the old traditions of priestcraft, couldn't resist the temptation of teaching.

Icksan said to us:

"Subud not teaching. Subud receiving. If people progress through latihan Bapak happy. Icksan not jealous. In Subud only experience. Bapak say, 'If Bapak is teacher and he know ten things he teach only nine. Because if he teach ten, then – no pupils. No pupils, no teacher! Funny!'"

I had often heard Icksan, Sjafrudin, Asikin and Prio say, "Bapak says that the only sin is teaching." I felt I understood, but the old mind was asking for appeasement and at the first opportunity I asked Bapak why he considered teaching such a deadly sin.

Bapak explained (Anwar Zakir interpreting): "Through the practice of the latihan we are made more and more sensitive to receive directly, by each individual – according to his special needs as seen by Almighty God. Each man thus receives the guidance proper to him at the time he needs it. A teacher can teach only from

his mind. He can give information and guidance of a kind that can be generally applicable to everybody. It is like the difference between ‘special’ medicine and patent medicine. But in ‘special’ medicine what is good for one man might be bad for another. So in Subud each man receives what he requires, and anyone who *teaches* Subud goes against the Will of God because what he teaches may not be what is truly indicated for a particular man or woman.”

But, continually, the falseness embedded within us would burst through in our actions and thinking. For instance, we used the word “Brotherhood” without any real content of feeling. Even at the time when our group was going through its first massive spell of purification, when we could hardly pass each other on the stairs without bristling, when rival cliques, freed from the spurious decorum of society would abuse each other roundly – we still liked to refer to ourselves as a Brotherhood. The Brotherhood idea was great but the trouble arose when some of us wanted to be elder brothers.

It was ugly. But now we can look back on it and realize that it was nevertheless real. We were like that within us, and out it came: heavy gobbets of undigested learning, twisted hates which had previously been covered over by a thin veneer of social propriety, lumps of malformed egoism suppressed under the lid of social mores, bits and pieces of meaningless relationships – all these were disgorged in an extended spiritual Bacchanalia.

When I went to Bapak’s house to take my leave of him on my first visit to Indonesia, Bapak asked me, “What is the chief impression you carry away with you from Jakarta?”

“Brotherhood, Bapak”, I replied. “I have just had a glimpse of what real Brotherhood means. Our group is not a brotherhood. There is so much quarrelling. I don’t know what is happening to us. I am one of the worst!”

Bapak laughed as he said: “There is no reason to worry or to envy the group in Jakarta. You should have been here to observe this group a few years ago – at the start. Much worse than you in Colombo!”

Bapak’s explanation of this process which nearly every group in the world has experienced was translucently simple and clear: “Consider a well of water with plenty of mud and dirt at the bottom. You begin to clean it. You scoop a handful of mud off the bottom and throw it on the bank. The water, which seemed clear

before, is now disturbed and muddy. But the well is already a little cleaner.”

The experience of cleaning out the well has taken many and strange forms from which it is possible to learn a great deal about ourselves and the people around us.

A life-long friend – let me call him Anil – had come to Subud. His life had seemed impeccable. He was a model student and a spectacularly proficient athlete. He never had a harsh word for anyone and people used to refer to him – in the stuffy public school phrase – as a ‘Real Gentleman’. Anil was married when he came to Subud and his wife joined at the same time. A few months later he came to me with a story which surprised me because it was contrary to his nature as it had appeared to us. He had fallen in love with another girl, and was determined to divorce his wife and marry again. He wanted advice about how he could do this without hurting his wife for whom he had a deep regard.

Fortunately, Bapak was with us at the time. I suggested that he should tell Bapak about his predicament but he recoiled in horror. I was able, however, to persuade him to tell his story to Icksan. Anil sat on Icksan’s bed and Icksan and I sat on the chairs as the story was told. When Anil was nearing the end of his story, we heard Bapak walking down the corridor towards Icksan’s room.

Anil stopped mid-word and breezed rapidly out of the room.

Bapak entered smoking a cheroot and sat on the chair I offered him. I sat on the floor. There was a long silence during which Icksan and I looked deliberately away from each other. Bapak raised an enquiring eyebrow at us. We tried to avoid his gaze. Bapak then asked us what the problem was. I murmured that we were just passing the time of day. Icksan looked as bland as he could. Then Bapak, pointing with his cigar at the depression left on the bed clothes by Anil, said:

“Tell him that it is necessary to understand this situation. People before they are opened, get married from passion and wanting. People may therefore get the wrong partners. Later the man comes to Subud. His inner begins to grow. Then he feels: ‘Hm, A is not my real wife. B should be my wife.’ So he divorces A and marries B. His inner continues to grow. He may feel later that B is not his real wife, and so he divorces B and marries C who, he now feels, is nearer his ideal. Later he feels that C too is not his real wife and may even feel that, after all, he might have remained with A. He may have married

A from passion and they may be the wrong partners. But when both come to Subud they may be able, if it is God's Will, to change in such a way that they *become* the right partners for each other."

In a state of semi-stupefaction, I told Bapak about Anil's problem. Bapak said, "Tell him to speak to this girl about Subud."

A few days later she was opened in the same room in which Anil's wife was doing the latihan. Some weeks later Anil found that he was no longer interested in divorce and decided to break off his new relationship. He said to her, "You may think badly of me but I wish you will not stop going to the latihan."

The girl's reply astonished Anil:

"Why should *you* advise me to continue with the latihan? Subud is not your property. It is mine also. Of course, I will continue with my latihan."

I have lost track of them now and have no idea of how they are doing. But I shall always be grateful to them for what I have learnt from their experience.

Symbolism in Subud

I REMEMBER reading recently a celebrated Protestant theologian lamenting what he called “The Lost Dimension of Religion”. He was referring to the meaning of the symbols of Christianity. He said that the modern church was losing the battle against atheism because it was trying to explain on a horizontal plane ideas which could only stand up on a vertical plane. In other words, it was futile and even ridiculous to try to explain religious symbols at a factual level. For instance, he said if one tried to explain the noblest Christian myth – the story of the Fall of Man – factually one would, in effect, be saying that about 6000 years ago a young couple named Adam and Eve who lived in Iraq were exiled for petty larceny and they were terribly embarrassed. Since then their descendants have never been able to live down the social stigma ...

Late one night in Bapak’s flat in Paris I asked for the true symbolic meaning of the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Bapak asked: “You mean about snake and apple?” He closed his eyes briefly, tuning in for the answer. Then he leant forward and in a confidential stage whisper said: “Top Secret”. We burst out laughing at the glorious notion that a story which had been bandied about in so many faiths for thousands of years should still be a top secret. That none of us know the meaning of the story nor, evidently, were ready yet to understand it, was only tolerable because of the laughter and the dexterity with which Bapak had parried the question. But there have been redeeming moments over the past seven years when Bapak has shared with us his understanding of the symbols and myths of spiritual experience. I have never ceased to be astonished by the fact that Bapak’s experience is not confined to Islam alone but ranges freely over nuances of symbolic meanings also in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism. I shall probably never cease to be astonished, and delighted, at the feeling of dead-centre accuracy and clarity that Bapak’s evaluations of symbols and his use of analogies arouse in me. It is like a magnesium flare, illuminating brilliantly and quickly.

My understanding of Bapak’s explanations of some of the

parables in the Christian gospels have already been recorded (*A Reporter in Subud*). There have been other moments when Bapak's words have opened up the truths locked in the symbols of other faiths. And when they are shown to us, we also see that the great myths and symbols which have sustained humanity for centuries have many terraces of meaning, each perfectly valid and satisfying at its level. When Bapak is travelling about he speaks in the metaphor familiar to his audience: of Christian or Jewish symbols in the West, Buddhist or Hindu symbols in Japan or India, and Islamic symbols in Indonesia.

During Bapak's visit to New Delhi in September, 1964, Bapak showed us how we had misunderstood the symbols of Buddhism and Hinduism. Even those who used these symbols every day had lost sight of the original meanings which gave them validity and life.

For instance, the statue of Buddha representing him either naked or clad very lightly, symbolised that he was in a state of surrender. Depicting him in a state of *samadhi* or tranquillity did not mean "concentration" or "meditation" which needed effort, but rather total surrender and submission to the Will of God, because *samadhi* or tranquillity is possible only when one's will is submitted to God's Will, when they become one.

On another enormously profitable day Bapak told the Delhi group in one of his fireside chats about the meaning of the yellow robe worn by the Buddhist monks and fakirs.

The yellow robe, Bapak said, symbolized the fact that its wearer had received the highest value, God's Grace. This value, in its turn, was symbolized by gold which, in its turn, was symbolized by the colour yellow. One who had received God's Grace was symbolically entitled to wear the yellow robe. Since he had received the highest value there was no need for him to display it or draw external attention to himself. He could afford to be "normal". He could now live among ordinary people and wear ordinary clothes. But unfortunately, the symbolic meaning had been lost long ago, so that people still clung to the rags of the symbol and lived apart from other human beings, in poverty, rejecting the world into which God had put them.

A woman in Delhi who said she wished to come to Subud brought along a *Swamiji* – her guru – to appraise Bapak spiritually before she would join the group. Apparently, Bapak did not pass the test for she never returned. But Bapak had noticed the *Swamiji*

carrying a *japamala* or rosary with which he prayed during the *Darshan* (or sight-audience) that Bapak gave to him and his spiritual protégé. I, for one, am grateful to her and the *Swamiji* for paying Bapak that visit because it provided the opportunity for an incandescent clarification of another religious symbol – the bead rosary.

The original and true meaning of the rosary was that each bead represented an inner organ which had been touched by the latihan, the Power of God. As we feel the vibration of this Power in one of these organs, we should count one bead. When the vibration is felt in another organ, another bead is counted – and so on. So, prayer is the receiving of God's Power from within, not set patterns of words. The organs are linked together by the Power of God that courses through them, one by one, hence the *mala* or necklace of beads.

Those of us whose education has trained us to think in categories and competitiveness never get the answers we want from Bapak. It seems to me that Bapak being a channel for the Great Life Force which precedes everything in this Universe, is incapable of categorical thinking or feelings which exclude one thing in order to accept the other. Everything is given its due place when Bapak speaks. One thing flows into another.

Once, many years ago, when Bapak was in Colombo, Coombe Springs sent for his approval the proof of the cover page of the *Chronicle* that was due to be published. It featured the seven-circle Subud symbol and in the centre they had printed a monogram of Subud, SBD. Bapak asked me to write to Coombe Springs and suggest that the monogram should be removed. "Subud has no monopoly of God," Bapak said.

I also remember that at that time someone asked Bapak whether the fact that Muhammad came after Jesus meant that he was "higher than Jesus". Bapak smiled at this and replied: "There is no question of higher or lower. It is only earlier and later. It is more like this: the symbol of Abraham was water – white water. This symbolised semen. White water flows and is channelised through Moses, the law giver. Then the infant Jesus is born. Always Jesus is referred to as the lamb, the infant son of Maria. The baby grows into Muhammad. Muhammad means Man. Now man must grow his soul."

I felt I had seen a glimpse of the true possibilities of evolution for Man. I began to sense that the next stage of Man's evolution did not lie in adapting his body to technological changes but in developing his inner possibilities.

Bapak has often spoken of the symbolic significance of the Cross. The Cross has many facets of meaning. Bapak asked me to “receive Christ” in me one evening when he was testing with us. I demurred. “How is that possible?” I asked. The idea of Christ within me was preposterous even to my healthy ego. “Never mind. Relax and receive,” said Bapak. As soon as I closed my eyes and became “open”, I felt a strong sensation in my breast and my hands began to indicate this. “Yah,” said Bapak. “Now receive Muhammad in you.” At once I sensed a strong surge of power in my genitals, so strong that I clutched them in the atavistic attitude of protection.

I heard Bapak laugh and say, “Yah, Yah, finish”. Bapak explained (Icksan interpreting), “Jesus Christ represents female principle among the prophets. That is why Jesus is always referred to as the son of Maria, the ‘meek and gentle’ Jesus. Muhammad represents male principle. The word ‘Muhammad’ means Man. In perfect Man both these principles are balanced.”

At other times Bapak has said that the Cross existed long before Jesus and that it symbolized Man. Recently he told us that Christ or the Cross represented absolute surrender and submission to God.

Wherever Bapak moves the symbols give up their secrets. Driving Bapak through Delhi, I pointed out the cyanose-blue domes on the new Pakistan Embassy and the Moghul tombs of the Safdarjang and Tughlak eras, always featuring the domes and the minarets. Bapak remarked (Usman translating), “Symbols. Domes symbolized breasts. The minarets are phallic symbols. They are fertility images indicating that the inner, the soul, should be fertile and must grow even after death. That is why they used symbols on tombs.”

In Calcutta, seated in the shade of a mango tree, Bapak answered questions about the Hindu pantheon. Krishna, Parvati, Viswakarma, Kali and other deities were not actual beings but symbolic personifications of certain human characteristics and virtues.

One morning during Bapak’s visit to Delhi I drove him to see the famous Qutub Minar, the 80 metre-high medieval tower built by the Moghul kings. It is supposed to commemorate a military victory. But there is an old legend that tells a more interesting story. I related this to Bapak: The Emperor’s daughter was very ill and the physicians could not diagnose her trouble. Her mother advised her to bathe seven times in the River Jumna. She was cured. She vowed that she would in future cast her eyes on the river every morning

in gratitude. But, because the river was too far away for her to visit it daily, the Emperor built a tower from which she could view the river and fulfil her vow.

The symbolic meaning of this legend delighted me. The illness of the Princess was her need for marriage. The river is the symbol of fertility, the water that brings fertility and makes new life grow. When she was married she was “cured”. The tower is the symbol of the phallus which was the instrument of her cure.

In 1960 Carl Jung asked many questions about Subud. He was too ill to see visitors, particularly journalists. So the questions came through an intermediary – one of his pupils in Zurich. He was most interested in the process of opening in Subud and in the explanations given by Bapak about religious myths and symbols. I provided whatever answers I could. After several remote “interviews” of this nature Dr. Jung made this comment: “These people seem to have arrived emotionally at the same place which we have reached intellectually.”

I know nothing about that. But I have often speculated upon what a fiesta of myth and legend and symbols there could have been if Carl Jung had been able to meet Bapak.

Much more recently Bapak made another reference to the world of spirits. During his visit to Paris in July, 1964, Bapak said: “This earth is the domain of the Satanic creatures. This is the *Alam Saitonia*, the Satanic world.”

I remarked that Western people had often asked me about this kind of supernatural or spirit experiences of Subud members in the East. For instance, Mas Sudarto’s story, reported in the *Pewarta*, of a woman in Jakarta who had vomited black snakes during a latihan, had provoked widespread comment, mostly incredulous, in America and Europe. Many people seemed mortified that Subud was getting mixed up with what they felt certain was fantasy and spiritist irrelevancies. One world, the familiar world of streets, buildings, automobiles, airplanes and government regulations, was quite enough for them to handle without burdening their experience with another world where they could cope even less efficiently. But because they respected Subud and the experiences of older helpers like Sudarto they tried to explain away the snakes as being “merely symbolic” or “metaphysical”. It was difficult, if not impossible, to take the story literally, as Sudarto had apparently intended. Bapak’s comment on all this was: “These were indeed real snakes. Real

snakes that could be seen and touched.” He then added: “Real spiritual snakes.” Then, seeing the film of confusion on all our faces, Bapak explained (Usman interpreting): “These snakes were real external manifestations of the lower forces which had dominated this woman’s inner. They took the form of real live snakes in order to give her proof of the nature of the lower forces which had controlled her. They could be seen and touched by other people too. But they soon disappeared by themselves, because they were spiritual.”

Mercifully, there are other supernatural creatures too in this world, creatures of a different and more benignant nature. During Bapak’s last general talk in Paris he suddenly interrupted himself to remark: “You may be surprised to know that there are many angels present in this hall. There are many more of them than there are of you. Bapak can see them. You may not be able to, yet.”

The ghosts go west

WHENEVER Sudarto or Brodjo or Prio referred to “Satanic beings” or “spirits of the lower forces” I used to wince with embarrassment. But because I loved and admired them I would put such statements in my mental “suspense account”. Having been brought up to regard the “scientific attitude” as the only proper stance for the 20th century intelligentsia – of which I had no doubt I was one! – my mind revolted against accepting such notions which seemed to be more proper for the life and times of our grandmothers than for moderns like us. These references to a co-existent netherworld seemed to me irrelevant and even harmful to our understanding of Subud. I was inclined to explain such talk as part of the essential Indonesianness of the Indonesian helpers – like their inexplicable preference for beancurd, Pat Boone and Coca Cola.

But I was never sure. And when Bapak himself said one day: “When a man is opened he immediately receives a means of protection against black magic,” I realized that there might be more to it than the Indonesian concern with hexes and bomos or voodoo merchants.

Two years before we left Ceylon, we moved from the little house we had built ourselves to a much larger place near the Subud House. My wife and I did our latihan in the main bedroom. After a few days, we noticed that a strange smell pervaded the room between five and seven o’clock in the afternoon. It was indescribable – a compound of decomposition, faeces, and much more than we could identify. The children, the servants, and visitors to the house all encountered it. We had the roof and the ceiling cleaned, the floor polished immaculately, the surroundings attended to by the Municipal Health people. But the smell persisted.

One evening when Prio Hartono was in Colombo, he came home with me, Joe Perera and Vadic Siriwardene, late after latihan, to sit around with a coke and listen to some Pat Boone records. Sunetra, who had retired early, did not know that Prio had come home. She came down the stairs and, halfway, she said, “I can’t sleep

in that room. That awful smell has come back.”

Prio immediately stiffened like a pointer.

“Smell?” he asked, pointing to the ceiling below our bedroom. “That room?”

We were surprised at what we thought was an accurate guess.

“Come, Tarzie, Joe, Vadic, Suné, you stay here,” Prio said, and off we went to investigate. The room was thick with the smell – it was almost palpable, like smoke. Prio at once signalled to us to start our latihan. After a minute or two, the smell disappeared. Not a trace of it was left.

Prio said, “There is a spirit in this room. Don’t tell Suné because she is pregnant. But this room is the home of this spirit. Maybe the man who built this house. Because you do the latihan here, he feels insecure. The latihan makes him uncomfortable. So he tries to smell you out of this room. He is a very weak spirit and can do nothing more dangerous than try to stink you out of here. Perhaps it will not return now for a few days but it may reappear. If it does, just do the latihan like tonight and it will vanish.”

I promptly put this in my suspense account. But the speed with which the smell vanished when we did the latihan was not easily accountable. We christened this phenomenon “Stinker” and watched for its return. Sure enough, three days later, when I had returned from work and was hanging up my jacket, I smelt Stinker’s presence in the room. I started my latihan and, within half a minute, Stinker disappeared. It reappeared many times after that, but the knowledge that we now had a force within us which could overpower such a phenomenon without effort, removed all sense of concern and fear. I was even able to tell my wife about it without alarming her. I questioned the previous tenants of the house and those who followed us after we moved again, but none of them had encountered Stinker. He must be snug again in his favourite room without those terrible Vittachis and their unorthodox prayers.

Further confirmation of the existence of certain forces which seemed to be disturbed by the latihan was given to us at the same time. Vadic Siriwardene used to complain that he could never fall asleep on latihan nights. He often told me that the latihan would persist in him and prevent him from sleeping. On other nights he would ensure his sleep by drinking one or two glasses of beer. He told Prio about his problem: on latihan nights, whenever he was about to doze off in bed, a flash of something like an electric

current would course through his mind and he would awake, startled, and until the early hours of the morning, this battle would rage. And Vadic would be tired and miserable the whole of the next day. We labelled this phenomenon “Flash”.

The explanation amazed us. Flash, said Prio, was a very clever Satanic being which had marked Vadic out for his very own. But Vadic’s joining Subud had upset Flash’s plans. Flash was so clever that he had figured out a way to make Vadic leave Subud. On latihan nights when Vadic’s “inner dust” had been thrown away, Flash would disturb his sleep in an unpleasant and painful way. But on other nights when there were some alcohol fumes in Vadic’s head, Flash loved it, this was more like home. Flash too curled up and went to sleep with Vadic. But, over a period of time, Vadic would almost inevitably have been led to believe that it was the latihan that was making him sick and miserable and that he should abandon this dangerous practice and take refuge in the familiar beer haze.

Vadic’s quick understanding of this explanation served to weaken the force of Flash at once and, after a prescribed “course” of daily latihans. Flash left in search of a new habitat.

Another Subud member at the same time, was fighting a running battle with a phenomenon we called “The Strangler”. Young Raman lived alone in a cottage not far from the Subud House. He had been asked by one of Bapak’s visiting assistants to do a latihan every night around midnight before he went to bed in order to help him overcome the terrifying fears he was experiencing since his opening. We used to sit up with Raman at the Subud House to help him stay awake until just before midnight when he could walk home for his latihan and sleep.

He was getting along fine but, half-way through his “course”, he reported one morning that on the previous night when he had been about to enter his house, he had been “forcibly put to sleep on the doorstep,” where he had spent the night without being able to do his latihan. One evening he had gone to bed early, expecting to wake up before midnight and do his prescribed latihan before resuming his sleep. He woke up with a choking sensation, heavy pressure on his chest and a distinct feeling that something was trying to strangle him. He asked for the protection of the latihan and was later able to sleep peacefully. Raman too, by God’s Will, got rid of his familiar, The Strangler. He became engaged to be married, brought his fiancée to Subud, married soon after and now lives

freed from the unseen perils which were trying to put him under their thrall.

I asked Prio why people in the East seemed to be more conscious of spiritual phenomena than people in the West.

Facetiously I wondered whether there were fewer spirits in the West that they were not so evident. Prio's explanation was:

"There was knowledge in the East as well as in the West. People in the East directed this knowledge toward a study of spiritual matters while people in the West directed theirs towards making discoveries in the material world. The study and harnessing of material forces became their special concern. This is called Science and Technology. By spiritual practices, Eastern people were able to make discoveries in the spiritual world and to experience spiritual phenomena. By scientific practices Western people made discoveries such as about the qualities of small particles and the atom. For instance, this table here looks and feels solid to us, but they will tell you that it is not solid. That it is nothing but particles moving rapidly in space. We do not *see* this. And they do not *see* the spiritual phenomena we speak about. The quality of the two is different and the way of experiencing the reality of the two is also very different."

A few months after these episodes I met Bapak during his visit to Bombay. I told him about Stinker, Flash and The Strangler and about the ghost stories Prio had told us. "Prio specialist in these things," Bapak chuckled. I said that I was surprised at the frequency with which we seemed to be encountering the world of "spirits". Bapak's face became grave as he said (Anwar Zakir interpreting): "What we should realize is that there are many more of them than there are of us. Satanic beings far outnumber human beings in this world. This is the world of Satanic forces. The proper world for true human beings is not here. Elsewhere."

A glimmering of understanding of what Purgatory might mean, appeared. Perhaps Purgatory and Hell are right here and now – in this world and not in another dimension, in another life. If this is so, many of the events in this life which seem impossible to understand by a process of reason could be explained. I feel I have begun to see that it is unreason, improbability and the logic of the Satanic forces that really direct the material world of politics and commerce in which we live – the world in which man's inhumanity to man is the familiar experience, where tyranny thrives and crooks succeed, where gentleness, humanism and considerateness are regarded as

weakness and are doomed to failure.

I remember, for instance, my reactions on the day that John F. Kennedy was killed. I was in Manila that morning when the news broke. I was full of horror rather than sadness. It was so irrational, illogical and improbable that the situation of human beings in this world could be altered so easily and swiftly by a single act of paranoia. How could it be God's wish that a man of peace and humanity, a man of courage and cultivation, the most powerful and the most secure man in the world, should be shot down like a dog at the first attempt, while tyrants who had caused misery among millions, and whose power was causing constant threats to the peace of this world, were given the relative immortality of nine lives?

On my way back to Kuala Lumpur that day I saw the same understanding in the faces of people in Vietnam, Singapore and Malaya, even people who had no special love for Kennedy's policies. People were stupefied by the sudden revelation that there was no security for anyone in this world. For Asian people it was the death of the father of a family – a rich family, a religious family, an intelligent family, a good-looking family and, above all, a secure family that was beyond comprehension. Everywhere I heard the word “meaningless”.

That night I re-read Mark van Doren's play on the death of Lincoln. On the first page, the word again appears – “meaningless”.

A day or two later, during the group latihan, Bapak's words came back to me: “This is the world of Satanic forces. The proper world for true human beings is not here. Elsewhere. We have been sent here to get to know God's creatures – from the very lowest category – just as a cadet officer must learn and experience the nature and functions of the lowest rank in the army before he is confirmed. Thus we must know and experience the nature of the lower forces before we can approach the grace and greatness of God.”

What's in a name?

ONE of the features of Subud experience that I once relegated to the suspense account as an essentially Indonesian thing with no direct bearing on our lives was the practice of changing names. The first name change that I had heard of was Eva Bartok to Ilaina Bartok. Oh well, film stars were always doing things like that, so it did not impress me much. The next was Margaret Wichman who informed Icksan of the change of her name by signing a letter to him, "Margaret (formerly Edith)". Icksan, chuckling merrily, wrote back: "Dear formerly Edith".*

When I returned to Coombe for the 1959 World Congress I met Asikin – once Imran – on the landing leading to Bapak's quarters. I greeted him warmly: "Hello, Imran. How are you?" But he said, in his gentle way, "Not Imran. Asikin. Bapak has given me my name. Asikin."

I said, "What on earth does all this mean? Does it have any meaning?"

He started to explain when Bapak suddenly appeared at the door and called, "Imran!" We both burst out laughing. Bapak, interested, inquired what was so amusing. Asikin reported our conversation. Bapak smiled when he had come to the end. I asked Bapak about the significance of this name changing. Bapak laughingly gave me an explanation but I have never decided whether it was serious or not:

"Before we are sent down here," Bapak said, "they register our names up there. We are expected to do our business here and return to where we came from. When we return, they ask, 'What is your name?' We reply John or Peter or Maria. They look through the register and say, 'But your name is not here. Why not try elsewhere?' So, better to find your right name when you are here!"

I never could figure what the form was; whether, assuming there was some significance in name changes, one should ask Bapak for a "Subud name"; whether it was right to wait until one felt that the

*Margaret swears she never received this letter. I wonder what happened to it?

name one bore was wrong or uncomfortable and then ask Bapak for the right name; or whether it was best to wait patiently until Bapak himself gave one the right name. So I have done nothing about it.

Bapak himself always called me Vitarzie. transposing and telescoping the two names I am known by and this seems as right as any. In Calcutta I woke up one morning distinctly remembering a dream in which I was called by another name. I remembered the name very clearly. Part of me was inclined to ask Bapak whether this was my right name but another part has shirked doing this because Bapak might say that it IS the right name and then I would have to adopt it. I think the name sounds dreadful and I shudder at the prospect of having to inform 1500 editors all over the world – trained sceptics – with whom I have professional contacts, that I shall henceforth be known by another name.

But every now and then, my attitude about this receives a sharp sideways jolt. Driving in Bapak's car in Tokyo on his return from America in 1963 I told him about a scientific discovery which a Subud brother had made through definite Inner guidance from his latihan. Bapak's comment was interpreted by Usman: "That is why Bapak gave him his right name which means Pathfinder." *

We have a son, born just before we came to Subud, who was one of the most restless children I have known. We took him with us on one of our gypsy journeys through Italy, Britain, New York, Washington D.C. and Nashville, Tennessee, when he was barely five months old – during which he had a varied succession of baby-sitters and different surroundings. He would do nothing for himself – eat, drink his milk or sleep without intense coaxing. When Prio Hartono was staying with us in 1963, my wife who had a feeling that his name – Nilu – was wrong, suggested that we test this and we got a definite indication that it was the wrong name for him. At the Briarcliff Congress I asked Bapak about this. Bapak asked me where the name Nilu had come from. I replied that it came from out of my head. Bapak's look read, "H'm ... bound to have been." He said that the name was very bad for the child and a day or two later he gave him the name Roosman. I wrote home informing them about the new name. By the time I returned, Roosman had already accepted the name and if anyone called him by his old name

*I forbear to mention the name because the man referred to is inordinately modest about his work, and besides, I feel that this is his story, not mine.

he would firmly point out that he was Roosman, not Nilu. His teachers and school friends too accepted the change without the questioning that I had expected. But what was most remarkable was how he seemed to have changed from a wild creature to a gentle and relatively responsible boy. He has by no means lost his zest for life and he still seems to be powered by some high octane fuel but the inner transformation is unmistakable.

I used to dread that Bapak would give me my true name. But during one of the all-Saturday-night sessions at Tjilandak during a recent visit (March 1964), Bapak began speaking about names. He spoke about Selamat, the one surviving witness to Bapak's revelation. "Selamat knows his name is wrong. But he will NOT ask for his true name, he thinks he is safe," Bapak said. I knew, of course, that he was not talking about Selamat at all but about me. The old will still held out. But Prio who sat beside me and was also aware that Bapak was talking about me, said, "Bapak, Tarzie says the name Bapak gave to his son has already helped the boy. But Tarzie himself has never asked for his name." Bapak turned toward me and said in English: "Yes. Your right name with a V. Like Victory." This explained why Bapak had always called me Vitarzie. The next day Bapak gave me my Subud name – Varindra.

I remember Prio telling us one of Bapak's clarifications which possibly has a bearing on this dilemma of mine: We come to Subud because we are tired of the old house in which we have lived up to that time. The house is crumbling, unsafe, the roof is leaking, the floors are damp, it is badly ventilated and dark. So we want a new house. But we don't want the old house demolished. We would like the new house to be built on top of the old house, although neither the foundations nor the walls will stand the weight of the new structure. We want to hold on to both houses at the same time.

Postscript

THERE are more stories left at the bottom of the barrel. They have been left out of this book deliberately. Some stories are better told than written. Some stories have the peculiar characteristic of turning into their opposites as soon as they are set in print. Some others, I fear, might actually do some harm if they are stretched to suit someone's fancy or regarded as "authority" because they refer to conversations with Bapak or with some of the older helpers. Even the quotation marks I have used are intended more as a dramatic device to convey something of the tone, pace and colour of the conversation, rather than as indications of verbatim accuracy. Of course, I have had to rely on my memory and on scraps of notes made after the event. I am sure that there are as many shortcomings in this writing here as there are in any reporter's copy. Words are a notoriously imperfect means of communication.

I remember once, during the Suez crisis, asking my professional colleague Aubrey Collette what the word "world" connoted for him. He said: "I see long streets, tall buildings and people clad in overcoats. It's in black and white." The March of Time film series had possibly provided him with this picture of the World. I asked Sooty Banda what the word "world" meant to him. He stroked his beard with his right hand and made a "googly" bowler's movement with his left. "Globe," he said, and dismissed the subject. I asked Aubrey Walpola, another colleague who worked on the copy desk, what the word "world" conveyed to him. "Big map with large countries like Egypt marked on it," he said. He was handling Suez copy at the time.

I asked another the same question: What does the word "world" mean to you?

"Getting dressed in a clean white suit and sitting in a waiting room to be interviewed for a job," was his astonishing reply. Where in the world – there we go again – had he got this meaning? Probably he had been admonished at school "to study hard to be equipped to go out into the world and succeed," which meant, very simply, to get a good job.

All these were Subud members and all of them, especially as journalists, must have used the word “world” half a dozen times a day, when talking to one another, writing for the newspaper. Yet, there was a variety of connotations in their response to this common word. How then can we expect to communicate through words except very imperfectly?

Why then do I, or any of the others who have written of their Subud experiences, try to communicate in words at all? Perhaps, because we must. In Icksan’s immortal epigram – It must out. It seems to me that this is the reason for Bapak’s reply to the question when the first Subud books came out: “Why do people write about Subud experience?”

“Purification,” said Bapak and did not stop for any supplementary questions.

I therefore ask for forgiveness for having inflicted my purification on you.