



A
REPORTER
IN SUBUD



A
REPORTER
IN SUBUD

comprising

A Reporter in Subud

Assignment Subud

A Memoir of Subud

Fruitful Droppings

By

Varindra Tarzie Vittachi

SUBUD PUBLICATIONS INTERNATIONAL

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ONE morning in London in 1959 Reynold
Osborne of New York, Richard Lacey of
Johannesburg and I were discussing books about
Subud. We agreed that no-one should write
about Subud as our understanding of experience
changed with time. I said that although writing
was my trade I would never write about Subud.
They laughed. Richard said: "Will you give that
to us in writing?"
Here it is – in writing.

VTV

SUBUD is a spiritual process, not a theory or teaching. Statements about Subud should be considered as reflecting the author's own personal experience and understanding.

They are not to be regarded as authoritative pronouncements nor are they intended to be a Subud doctrine.

CONTENTS

Preface to <i>A Reporter in Subud</i>ix and <i>A Reporter's Assignment in Subud</i>	
--	--

BOOK 1

A REPORTER IN SUBUD	1
---------------------------	---

BOOK 2

ASSIGNMENT SUBUD	67
------------------------	----

BOOK 3

A MEMOIR OF SUBUD	139
-------------------------	-----

BOOK 4

FRUITFUL DROPPINGS	233
--------------------------	-----

APPENDICES

<i>A Life in Brief</i>	274
<i>Subud</i>	279
<i>Glossary</i>	280
<i>Publications and Contacts</i>	281
<i>Bibliography</i>	282

PREFACE

To the second edition of *A Reporter in Subud* (1966)

The response to the first printing of *A Reporter in Subud* taught me many things:

I learned that there is a community of inner experience among people that justifies the term Brotherhood in a manner that politicians and others who use the word so glibly have probably never really understood.

I learned that if one wrote about experience there is much less confusion than if one wrote about theories.

I also learned that it was possible to write critically without giving offence. At least three people have identified themselves in such references – despite my efforts at disguise – and have written to say that they recognized and acknowledged themselves as they had been at that time. I could have avoided many mistakes in my professional career had I known earlier how to write critically but disinterestedly.

Preface to the combined version of *A Reporter in Subud* and *Assignment Subud*, entitled *A Reporter's Assignment in Subud* (1971)

A Traveller's Tale

FOR ten years, between 1960 and 1970, I spent most of my time travelling from country to country, from city to city. I logged so many air-miles that some airlines tagged me as a CIP – a rather low-grade VIP, a Commercially Important Person. I learnt a great deal about the world during that time. But there were two worlds to experience wherever I went – the world of newspapers, foundations, seminars, politics and economics, and the Subud world. At first, these two worlds were distinct and even mutually exclusive. My professional life and my spiritual life were separate, even contradictory, existences. I moved from one to the other, but often with some confusion at the threshold. After a week with Bapak in Tjilandak where I had lived in a world where angels were vibrant presences to some, if not to me, and I flew away to Hong Kong or New York or London where man's work in the shape of Hilton Hotels and rocket engineering was tangibly and abundantly evident, I often wondered what was reality: the invisible world which can only be experienced in the feeling, or the visible world

in which there were rotary presses and prestressed concrete buildings, overpasses and underpasses, the value of which may not be measured in terms of feeling, but in utility.

I used to ask myself when my plane landed in one of those great cities if what I saw around me – skyscrapers sprouting up where there had been only a bungalow or a two-floor store when I had passed by only a year before – was not more real than the sweet beating of butterfly wings in my feeling and on my skin that I experienced in the latihan. At such moments I even wondered whether I had imagined the ecstasy and the sadness, and the irresistible clarity of our way of receiving guidance in testing, of receiving “proof” as Bapak often put it. The Outer World was so solid that it was evidently real to a mind that had been taught to respect and hold to a scientific attitude towards life, that is to say, to value what was consistently logical and to remain constantly sceptical about my experience or knowledge that was not measurable on the evidence of the senses. The Inner World, as I had been taught to think, was inhabited by silly old ladies of both sexes who started life believing in Santa Claus and ended it believing in Sunday newspaper astrologers, in flying saucers and in ESP.

To my journalistic mind one of the “difficulties” of spiritual life was that its most ardent devotees were the kind of people who were ready to believe that (a) John F. Kennedy must have been the victim of a Texan conspiracy; (b) that when the Pope comes to his senses and publishes the Fatima document, the Second Coming will be revealed; and (c) that if Neil Armstrong had not met little moon men wearing goggles and spiral-wire antennae it is because he is one of those who hath no eyes to see nor ears to hear and not because they weren't there. Another difficulty for me was that many of us who had come to Subud because we had been repelled by the bigotry and dogma of priestcraft had ourselves become bigots and dogmatists.

But, as the years passed and Bapak's words, repeated over and over again with new weight and fresh nuances, began to reach us, we began to understand that Subud was not Sunday morning piety, not just a Monday and Thursday evening romp. It was a total experience, enveloping, interpenetrating and pervasive to the extent that we were willing to let it, and we were able to take it. Bapak had spoken of Inner and Outer. To me this was a very useful mental split which enabled one to begin to know about the nature of things and

people. Everything and every being had an Inner and an Outer. Every man had an Inner self and an Outer self. Even a word had its Inner and Outer. It had a shape, a sound, a size and it had a meaning. And there were Inner meanings to words and Outer meanings. The Spiritual world was the Inner and the Material world, the Outer. My world of journalism and politics was the ambience in which my Outer self lived and the latihan was helping me to find my way about my Inner world of feeling. In my travels I recognised this distinction. I had known London for years as a city of clever, exciting people and places marvellously absorbing until I came to know Subud London which captivated me almost completely because there I met people who related to me through the feelings and not with the cleverness and the mannered outer personalities of Fleet Street and the West End.

This increasing appreciation of the essence of life made many of us retreat from the Outer world of what most people knew as “Real Life”. And increasing numbers of us became lay hermits – we dressed “normally”, we rode in cars and airplanes as “normal” people did, we married and raised families “normally” (perhaps not so normally) but we accepted the world in which all this activity went on only as an outer shell in which our Inner lives were to be lived. We imagined that we were different from “normal” people – and a bit superior because, even if we knew our Innings to be stinkers, we were “better” than “nice” people who lived only in their Outers. But we were behaving very much like these “normal” people who divided their world into We and They – In groups and Out groups, U and Non-U, the Beautiful and the Damned. We were rejecting the Material world – or claiming to – in our journeying through the spiritual world.

This was why so many of us found it hard to understand why Bapak watched television, why Bapak was such a natty dresser, why he preferred a Mercedes Benz to a horse and buggy, why the Subud Brotherhood needed buildings for its International Spiritual Centre when the Buddha was reported to have attained the highest state of enlightenment among men under the shade of a Bo tree. Having been city gents we were now becoming city saints – or, at any rate, sounding off as such. We were ignoring the marvellous polarity of everything in this universe. We forgot that one couldn’t lift a broom by its “clean” end without also lifting its dirty, working end.

It took many years for most of us to begin to open ourselves to

another insight Bapak had been giving us whenever he had spoken of Inner and Outer. He told us that Subud did not reject the material world which was also God's work, that through Subud the material world would take its due place in our lives, be under man's feet rather than on his head, that through the practice of the latihan we would be able to send material forces out to work for us. And he had told us, so often, that Inner and Outer "must come together". Our Inner and Outer lives needed to be brought together. Our Outer lives needed to be increasingly Inner-directed. He once told us that even a bank teller could worship God while doing his job and Bapak rifled through an imaginary bundle of dollar bills counting – one, two, three, four, Allah, Allah . . . I roared with laughter because my first real job was that of a junior accountant in the Bank of Ceylon and one of my duties, once a week, was to check-count the currency notes in the vault. The rupee notes were in bundles of 50 and I counted one, two, three, four . . . and always ended in 51 or 49, never 50. If I'd been an inner-directed banker I would not have been under the constant threat of dismissal as I was in that job.

Bapak is the embodiment of this principle of the essential oneness of the Inner and Outer. Bapak the farmer, Bapak the company director, Bapak the constitutional lawyer, Bapak the boxing fan, Bapak at the football stadium, Bapak at our latihan, Bapak testing us, Bapak explaining the nature of man and man's relationship with God – was always the same Bapak. For the first time in the spiritual history of man Subud asserts this principle clearly and without equivocation. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God what is God's is not a plea for a schizoid existence in two worlds in which we may substitute Harvard Business School ethics for the Commandments, but an assertion that Caesar is also God's creature and would be doing His work if he would only let himself be guided from within.

Recently Bapak gave us the most poignant reminder of this principle: We can do nothing without God, he said. We need God's help to live human lives in a material environment. And God is willing to come to our help if we would only let Him. The guideposts to worship that Bapak has given us – Patience, Sincerity and Submission – stand on this single requirement: Let Him.

Ay, there's the rub.

Varindra Tarzie Vittachi

BOOK 1

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	3
1 MEETING IN LONDON	5
2 WAITING FOR SUBUD	12
3 SUBUD COMES TO CEYLON	15
4 ACROSS THE RIVER	20
5 IT MUST OUT	23
6 THE LAST DAYS	26
7 QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS	32
8 NEW VALUATIONS	36
9 A CLEAN ASH TRAY	40
10 SUBUD AS REPAIR SHOP	44
11 SUBUD AND POLITICS	48
12 VIRTUES AND VICES	54
13 THE DARK TIMES	58
14 PERSONAL EPILOGUE	61

PROLOGUE

Bombay, January 1960. The sitting-room of Bomon-Behram's apartment on Nepeansea Road overlooking the ocean. Bapak, clad for the tropics in slacks and shirtsleeves, was sitting knees crossed as usual, on a long sofa reading a letter from London.

"Another book on Subud," he remarked smiling. "This letter suggests that Bapak should intercede and stop its publication on the grounds that it contains material which could be damaging to Subud. But why should Bapak interfere? Subud is not Bapak's work. It is not Man's work. How can any man damage it? If it can be endangered by man, then it is not from God. And if it is not from God why should Bapak worry?"

"I cannot understand," I said, "how anyone in Subud can write about Subud. I am a professional writer but I feel I cannot even begin to write about Subud. My understanding of explanations and experience changes every year. How can I possibly pin them down on paper?"

"You writer, you better write," said Bapak, bypassing Anwar Zakir's services as translator.

"Write, Bapak?" I asked, "About Subud?"

"Yes, Subud," said Bapak.

"But Bapak, it will be nonsense!" I pleaded.

"Yes," agreed Bapak, "but better write."

Meeting in London

THE tension in my country was palpable. It was May 1957 and the two major races in Ceylon, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, were preparing for internecine brutality. As a Sinhalese and Buddhist – by far the numerically dominant community in the island – I found I was expected to go along with “my people” and condone the suppression of the minority Tamils, Hindus and Christians – by sheer force of numbers. But I was incapable of feeling racial or religious superiority – and most certainly not on numerical grounds.

When the conflict began to grow I discovered that many of my closest friends were Tamils, Hindus and Christians and that, like my parents and my wife, I had never been conscious of these distinctions in our relationship with them. The question had never arisen at all. It was quite obvious to people who thought like I did that the rift was the work of a few unscrupulous politicians who had not hesitated at the prospect of wading to power through the blood of the minority peoples.

I had been trying through my newspaper to waken the conscience of the leaders of both sides to a realization of the disaster that would surely befall our country if they continued in their efforts to fan the highly dangerous and unquenchable flames of racialism and religious fanaticism. The more conscientious of my fellow editors on the other newspapers, too, were working very hard to stop the holocaust that was coming. But we were preaching to the converted. Our newspapers never reached the kind of people who are easily moved by this sort of madness, and the power maniacs who were creating the trouble thought we were blind or “anti-national” – a new Asian phrase which connotes refusal to swim with the rising tide.

The Tamils in the North were planning a satyagraha – in the form of a “non-violent” march on Trincomalee where they were to demonstrate the unity of the Tamil people behind their cause. The All-Sinhalese Government was preparing counter-measures in the South.

A few friends and I had been following a system of self study which had helped us very much to keep a watch on our own motivations and actions in our daily lives. These studies had enabled me to see very clearly the motivations of the politicians who were doing the damage and also many of my own weaknesses and prejudices. But I had reached an impasse. Professionally, my efforts to change people's hearts were ineffectual and, spiritually, my efforts to change myself were not much more successful.

In our small study group some of us had developed a technique of being spectators of our own actions. For instance this Spectator would sometimes break in on my conversation with someone like the managing director of my newspaper and remark, "Vittachi ... so this is the editor who always stands up to the Boss, hmm? Just listen to that ingratiating tone of your voice as you speak with him."

Or it would remark wryly, "Vittachi, did you notice how your attitude changed when you realized that the person at the other end of the telephone was a woman?"

But this Spectator, sharp as he was, always seemed to appear a fraction of a moment too late to do anything about it. It observed, but had no power to make any substantial difference to the way Vittachi thought and acted. We worked very hard at this self study: three nights a week and all our Sundays were devoted to this exercise. But we had all come to feel a sense of despair and futility. We had always been told by our teachers that help would come, but there were no signs of it for five years. We were going on like a man standing on a plank and trying to lift it. The only way in which this feat could be achieved was if a hand was offered from above. Then we could lift the plank, ourselves and all. But what hand? Who would give us this helping hand? How long, how long to wait?

One morning I was hard at it, trying to write a telling editorial appealing directly to the Tamil leaders to stop their march on Trincomalee and agree to a round-table conference at which an effort could be made to resolve their differences with the government. Suddenly, halfway through, I felt all my strength and purpose drain out of me. It was replaced by a single thought – I must get away from Ceylon for a few weeks. I felt I could not stand the tension around me any longer.

I pushed my typewriter away and walked to the managing director's room and heard myself announcing loud and rather desperately: "I'm getting the hell out of here."

By the tone of my voice he thought I was resigning my job. But when he realized that all I wanted was a temporary break, he very considerately made all the arrangements needed – leave, money, everything. As I was packing to go away to London (where do ex-colonials like myself go in such situations except London?) I had second thoughts. I told my wife that I was being theatrical – that all I needed was a few days rest in the hills, that I should cancel my trip to London and stay in Ceylon. But she, wise in my contrary ways, insisted that I go. “If you go to the hills instead and then return to work you will feel frustrated that you did not go away to England when you had the opportunity to do so,” she said.



I reached London on a warm summer day in June and went directly to Coombe Springs to meet John Bennett whom I had known for about seven years. As I entered the house I noticed a distinct change in the atmosphere and the people around. Everything seemed to be more relaxed than I’d ever known them. The virtuous churchfaces I had encountered there so often were not in evidence. People were laughing and talking much louder than those crumbling walls had ever heard before. Most of the women had changed their sackcloth and ashes for light summer prints and some of them had even worn a little make-up. I walked through the house and across the lawn towards the old oak tree where I had been told I would find John Bennett. Two Englishmen actually spoke to me. This fairly staggered me, but not as much as when John Bennett appeared and, seeing me, threw back his head and roared with laughter.

I was astonished. Here, indeed, was cause for wonderment. John Bennett – Mr. B. to thousands of students in many parts of the world, their model of serious, one-pointed purpose – had never laughed before in my hearing. He may have smiled and even chortled in a rather indulgent way, but laughter from the belly up was quite alien to my experience of him. I asked: “What’s going on, Mr. B? There’s some change at Coombe this time. People, you, everybody’s behaving a bit oddly. What’s the form? And what’s so funny that amuses you so much?”

John Bennett replied: “Come, come upstairs to my study and I’ll tell you what’s different.” We sat in his book-panelled room as we

had on my many visits to Coombe and I told him about the impulse which had made me come to England. I told him of our study group in Ceylon and its sense of despair. I asked about the promise that help would come. When? From where?

“Help has come,” replied Bennett, in that apocalyptic tone of voice which had always enthralled and terrified me. I feared now that one of those loud and intense silences would follow. Instead, John Bennett went on: “Let me tell you a story ...” and then followed the now familiar account of his having been told many years previously of the arrival of a man from “Dutch East India” to help and guide us with our spiritual efforts. “He is now in the next room. His name is Muhammad Subuh. You must now make up your mind whether you want to go along as you have been doing or whether you want to receive the Subud contact. For many it has been a difficult decision,” he said.

“There is not the slightest difficulty for me, Mr. B,” I said. “In the state in which I find myself, I am prepared to rob any temple if it will serve my purpose. But tell me why you laughed when you saw me,” I insisted.

“I’ll tell you why. When Pak Subuh arrived here, one of the first questions he asked me was whether there were any people in Ceylon who would be interested in these matters. I told him that there was a small group in Colombo. I suggested that it would be difficult to communicate the news to them by correspondence. But Pak Subuh only smiled and said: ‘Don’t worry. Something will turn up within two or three weeks.’”

“And I was the *thing* turned up?” I asked.

I joined in the laughter this time and it all seemed right now. I was taken to a mezzanine room which was later to be Bapak’s sitting room. There were three others including Mr. Kibble of Cyprus, a South African and an American. John Bennett remarked on this – the internationalism in evidence – as some proof of the rightness of this new way we were about to enter. Then an Indonesian entered. He was dressed like an Indonesian business man. He was smoking a Dutch cheroot. I told myself, “No. It can’t be. How can a Holy Man look like this?” He stubbed his cigar and smiled at us and spoke. John Bennett translated, advising us to close our eyes and relax.

Forty-five minutes later we were led into the study and Bennett asked if we had felt anything. Kibble said he had felt a deep sense of relaxation. I said I had only felt bored, but that I’d like to continue.

For seven more days I went up to Coombe from London. I felt nothing at all. I heard and sensed other people in the exercise moving about, dancing, weeping, laughing hysterically, gibbering, spinning around like dervishes, falling like dead logs and Icksan Ahmad chanting Aw-wah, Aw-wah, Aw-wah. One man who used to arrive at Coombe clad in bowler and striped trousers, always stood close to me stiff and proper to start with, and five minutes after the exercise started, I would hear him hiss Tchooh, Tchooh, Tchooh, slow at first, then fast, and then he stomped round the room like a train, going Tchooh, Tchooh, Tchooh ... whoo whoooooo! I laughed, suppressing the noise inside me until my sides ached.

But every night I felt terrible that the days were passing fast and I was not receiving the contact which I was now convinced that many others had definitely received, to judge by the way they sounded at the exercise and the way they spoke about their experience. I was convinced that the movements they were making were involuntary because, had it been make-believe, they would surely have preferred to adopt more graceful postures and make more spiritually appropriate noises. I asked myself how I could possibly be expected to carry this force within me to Ceylon and transmit it to others when I had not received it myself.

In acute inner agony I went one morning to meet Pak Subuh. I had a few preliminary questions and ten subsidiary philosophical questions typed out. I wanted to get the whole thing well and truly whacked. Icksan translated. I told Pak Subuh that I had now attended seven latihan and had felt nothing.

“How can I be expected to transmit this contact to the group in Ceylon when I have not received it myself?”

Bapak: “What made you think it was your business to take this to Ceylon?”

I said: “Mr. Bennett said that he felt that my coming here at this time had a purpose ...”

Bapak: “That may be. But this is not your work. Or Bapak’s. It is God’s work. If God intends that you should be the one to open the people in Ceylon, He will see that you are equipped for the purpose. If not – then it is not your responsibility.”

I felt immediate relief that this self-imposed burden had been removed from my shoulders and said so.

Bapak: “All you are required to do is to attend latihan for half

an hour a day as long as you are here. Is that too much?" I agreed it was not difficult at all.

"That is another thing that troubles me," I said. "I have always been told and have believed that in spiritual matters as in worldly matters – nothing for nothing is the rule. What we receive is in proportion to what we pay in effort or devoutness."

Bapak: "All right then, what do you want to pay with?"

From the tone of Icksan's translation and the irony of his smile, I realized the absurdity of my posture in demanding that I be allowed to pay for what I received in the same counterfeit currency of spiritual effort that I had been using before.

Bapak: "Worship of God is not bargaining. You cannot buy spiritual grace. You can prepare yourself to receive it ..."

I asked: "How? Is the layer of dirt that covers me so thick that even this force cannot penetrate it? Should I go away, try to cleanse myself and then return to receive the contact?"

Bapak: "Can you?"

I said I did not understand.

Bapak: "Can you go away and cleanse yourself?"

At this moment I felt I had my first glimpse into the meaning of the mercy of God and the concept of absolution. There was no sense in a sinner staying away from worship on the plea that he was too unclean to worship. His only hope was to worship. There was no other way.

"Any other question?" said Icksan.

I reeled off my ten-point questionnaire, filed away the answers and left*.

That evening I began the exercise, relieved of the burden of pioneering that I had been lugging around all those days. A few

*A year later when I got to know Icksan better the following conversation took place in Colombo:

Icksan: "You remember you bring ten written questions about the relationship of Subud to certain teachings and so on?"

V: "Yes."

Icksan: "You remember I interpret your questions and Bapak's answers?"

V: "Yes."

Icksan: "You were satisfied with the answers?"

V: "Oh yes. Many things were made clear."

Icksan (laughing): "You think I even hear your questions? Much too heffy. But the answers were nice, h'm? Funny!"

minutes after the exercise started I felt a peculiar sensation. My knees seemed to be buckling under me. I told myself, “Funny. Now don’t you get caught, old man. You have never knelt before. Don’t cut a figure. How ridiculous it would look ...” And so, I resisted this impulse to kneel, right through the forty-five minutes. Afterwards I remarked about this to Baron von Bissing and two others who had been at the exercise. I said I did not like the idea of cutting a figure, as everything in me revolted at the idea of how ridiculous it would look.

One of them said cuttingly: “Have you thought that nobody there would have cared whether you knelt or stood on your head? We were busy with our own exercise.” I saw then that what was really absurd was my egoistical reluctance to let go of the picture of myself that I had been carrying about with me – the cynical, hard-boiled modern newspaperman who did not want to be caught doing something old-fashioned like reading the Bible or kneeling in worship.

At the next latihan my inner world changed for me. I found myself kneeling, and singing at the top of my voice words that had never been in my vocabulary before: “God have mercy on me”. I was completely conscious of what I was saying, of the fact that I was kneeling, that I was smiling and that the tears were rolling down my face and that, for the first time in my life, I had a taste of real happiness. This wonderful sense of euphory persisted for several days. This, I knew, was what happiness was like. All my life I had known two other emotions. Unhappiness or absence of unhappiness. Now there was a taste of positive happiness.

I was now convinced that there was a force in the latihan and that I had made contact with it. My responses in the exercises changed. They turned into physical movements such as involuntary movements of the hands and head. The force was there, subtle and strong, but now my mind began its doubting again: Was this a good force or a bad force? The answer to this was only possible through experience of the way it had worked for me. Through the succeeding five years, I have had more than the meed of proof of beneficence than any man has a right to expect.

Waiting for Subud

AT the end of my month at Coombe, Bapak sent for me and informed me that I was not yet able to transmit the contact to others. He advised me not to speak about my experience – except what I felt I really understood – when I returned home. Since I understood nothing and could describe nothing except the exterior activity at Coombe, I realized I could say nothing at all to my friends at home, or even to my wife – only that the help we had long expected had arrived and that we would not have to wait long now. Bapak said that we should try to build up our study group to fifty in the next two or three months and he would send a competent helper to start Subud in Ceylon. I replied that this would be impossible since we had tried, vainly, for five years to increase our group but that we had not been able to grow beyond a dozen regulars. Bapak laughingly remarked that I should not be so sure about this and that the real difficulty might be how to “accommodate all who will come”. I thought that this was a manner of speaking and agreed we would do our best.

I returned home armed only with a taped recording of John Bennett’s account of how Pak Subud had come to England. My colleagues were waiting for me at the airport, for the first time in all my travels, brimmingly expectant through hints in my letters to my wife that I was bringing back “valuable merchandise” as one of them characteristically put it. The only merchandise I carried was the tape which I handed over with little explanation. This was run at a meeting to which the group had invited a few friends. I immediately sensed that something new was happening. People who had for years resisted our attempts to persuade them to join our study group became plainly excited by the new possibilities opened up by the news. They brought many others to listen to a replay of the tape so that by September there were fifty-four people waiting for Subud to be started in Ceylon.

One morning Aubrey Collette, a colleague in the newspaper I edited – he was a member of our study group – came in for the daily briefing session in my office and suggested that he and I do

the relaxing exercises we used to practise. After three minutes of the exercise, he remarked that it had been much deeper than he had ever experienced before and that he would practise it at home every morning before he came to work. On the next day he came into my room, flushed and excited. "The most incredible thing happened this morning," he said. "I was doing the relaxing exercise and suddenly my arms began to move upward and I began to cry in prayer and I couldn't stop it even when the servant brought in my tea. I still feel this wonderful sensation inside me."

I said to myself, "Good heavens, what have I gone and done!"

I hurriedly explained what I knew about the Subud opening and about my own experience when the response to the contact became manifest in me. We wrote to Bapak asking him for his advice.

Bapak's reply was: "Yes, you have opened Collette 'accidentally'. (I understood this to mean 'Unintentionally'.) Don't open anyone deliberately yet. Do latihan with Collette in your home twice a week and say no more about it."

It was a strange secret to keep, but we did so for several months until the Ceylon Group was started. Collette and I, always close to each other professionally and intellectually, came to know each other like blood brothers. I felt nearer to him than I had ever felt towards my own brothers and sisters.

The other event was connected with my wife, Sunetra. She said to me one day: "I want to go to London."

I replied that I could not possibly go to London again as I had just returned from leave.

She said, "I didn't say anything about you going to London. I want to go to London."

To appreciate the full flavour of this incident it is necessary to know that my wife, like most middle-class women in Ceylon, had been brought up in a very conservative family tradition, had never travelled even in a public bus before her marriage and was not used to going about alone even in Colombo. And now she wanted to go alone to London.

I said, "All right, but what's all this about? Why this sudden desire to go to London?"

She replied, thoughtfully and determinedly, "Something happened to you in England which has changed you. I also want this for myself."

I was very happy that she felt this way. I felt I was able to repay her in some measure for having been instrumental in bringing me in contact with the spiritual ideas and with John Bennett and Coombe Springs and so – eventually – with Subud. I scraped together some money and sent her on her great adventure.

Two nights after her receiving the contact from Ibu she cabled: “Thank you for giving me the opportunity of knowing what prayer is.”

The study group continued, meeting three nights a week as before at Isaac Gerson’s home and every Sunday, working like un-unionized navvies on our farm at Kadawatta, ten miles from Colombo. There was a much more purposive and hopeful atmosphere already among us all. For Collette, Sunetra and me the talks we listened to and the self-observation tests we were given already seemed too much like techniques groping towards something much simpler and easier than we had ever imagined it would be. Sooty Banda, the bearded Socrates of our group who had helped us all enormously by his ability to simplify everything through uncannily apt and illuminating analogies,* had obviously understood our situation with his intuitive wisdom. He said: “As long as you tug at the bow nothing happens. The arrow flies only when you let go.”

*When Subud had finally been established in Colombo an Indian who had previously practised yoga asked the helpers whether it was better to begin the latihan in the padmasan or lotus posture. Sooty’s reply was: “Brother, it is raining outside. If you want to get wet all you have to do is to go out in the rain. Sit down, lie on the ground or stand on your head – it’s all the same. You get wet.”

Subud comes to Ceylon

IN December Bapak sent Icksan Ahmad with Rachmad Pane to start the group in Ceylon. For the women he sent Bulbul (now Mariani) Arnold from Calcutta. Almost all the members of the study group were present at Colombo airport to greet the Indonesians. We were all charged with expectancy. Icksan came down the gangway, clad in a striped sports jersey with black snowboots on his feet looking like a prizefighter in training or a lumberjack on a spree. Sooty Banda's eyebrows rose quizzically. I grinned sheepishly back. Then Rachmad Pane appeared with a guitar slung on his back. The group looked at me as though I'd perpetrated a large hoax on them. I heard Sooty mutter in his beard, "I say, Tarzie, I think I want my money back!"

I could see quite well that Sooty's facetious remark had found a ready sale in the minds of the others who had the same response as I when I first saw Bapak enter the little room when I received my opening. Is this the way help comes? Are these the men who can help us to save our immortal souls? Prize fighters and guitar players?

Later, when we had sensed the Subud latihan and recognized the wonderful quality of Icksan's understanding and inner nature, we saw the difference between appearing virtuous and being virtuous. When I described my initial reaction towards Bapak – how ordinary he had looked – Sooty Banda once again explained it with memorable pithiness: "We have seen paintings of Jesus Christ – what he looked like, the clothes he wore. Long white robes and beard. So all Holy Men must look like Jesus Christ. We forget that this is the 20th century and people dress differently. Jesus Christ dressed like every other Jew in Jerusalem. In fact, my guess is that he must have been the Best Dressed Man in Palestine and regarded as a model of propriety by the Jerusalem Tailor and Cutter."

That evening there were fifty-four people waiting to receive the Subud contact. (And I had been so sure that there would not be more than a dozen). From all over the country people who had heard a whisper about Subud converged on Lesly Jayatilleke's house which was used as Icksan's headquarters. They belonged to all kinds

of faiths and races – Buddhists, Muslims, Christians of all denominations, Hindus, Americans, Indians, and even an Austrian and a White Russian. Their occupations were as varied as their races and creeds – lawyers, bankers, clerks, civil servants, taxi drivers, journalists, politicians, doctors, including three Freudian psychiatrists, merchants, mechanics, nurses, stenographers and teachers.

Their motives for coming were also diverse. Some came because they were genuinely interested in trying a new way of understanding the purpose of life; some because they wanted to see Icksan perform conjuring tricks with a couple of miracles thrown in for good measure; some because they wanted cures for “incurable” illnesses; some came to rub shoulders with well-known people; some came to keep watch on their wives (or husbands); some came out of a desire to imitate; some because something new was going on and they would not be left out. But those who stayed on did so because something in them was touched and they found that it was good. I know one man who came there because he wanted to get to know Collette – the famous cartoonist on my paper. But he stayed on because he found that through Subud his relationship with his wife improved.

One night a small group of people stayed on for six hours hoping to see Icksan practising hypnotism. They had heard that the smoke from Icksan’s Dunhill pipe put everyone present into a deep trance. One of them stayed on in Subud because that night he had “felt something like a bird moving within me” and he liked the feeling of this “bird”.

Another young man walked boldly up the drive-way to where I was seated and asked very politely: “Is there a Mr. Latihan living here?” He is still practising latihan in Hong Kong.

Lesly’s house was becoming known by a variety of names – including Miracle House, Magic Hall, Subuddhist Mansion and Vibration Centre.

At that time the three month probation principle had not been introduced and people were being opened as easily as filleting fish. Latihan went on from dusk to midnight and Icksan took the brunt of it since Rachmad Pane was ill from an overdose of opening people in London.

Bulbul, with only three months’ experience in Subud, opened streams of women, many of whom spoke no English and therefore

had no possibility of communicating verbally with her. Three hundred and forty-five men and women were opened in three weeks.

One evening Icksan gave irrefutable proof of the faculty he had received from Subud to judge the inner state of others. People, mostly strangers to us, were going in and out of the latihan. Icksan, who had been opening people and supervising the latihan for two hours, turned to Lesly and me and said: "You take over. I go dinner, come back in twenty minutes."

When he re-entered the room after dinner he interrupted my latihan and pointed to a man who was moving his hands about and gyrating his head in great abandon. Icksan whispered: "Who open him?" I said I did not know. "He not open," said Icksan, tapping the man on the shoulder and beckoning to him to follow us out. Icksan asked the man: "Who open you?" The man looked blank.

Icksan: "When you opened?"

"Open? What's open?" asked the man.

Icksan: "When you come?"

"A few minutes ago."

Icksan: "Who bring you?"

"No one. I was passing by and saw something going on. So I walked in."

Icksan told me to explain Subud to the man and open him if he wished. Later I asked Icksan how he had spotted this man from at least twenty strangers, especially since he was moving about as though the Subud force was impelling him. Icksan looked puzzled at my question.

"Why? Not difficult. All others' inner open. He like plank."

"What do you mean plank?" I persisted.

"Like plank. Like dead thing," he said, thumping the wooden table to illustrate the inner state of the man before his opening.

I observed with great wonder how these two young people, Icksan and Bulbul, sent to us by Bapak, had the inner strength, the mental stature and physical stamina to go on night after night, day after day, taking on so much and establishing a gloriously warm relationship with so many hundreds of strangers without ever assuming an attitude of superiority or resorting to verbal mysticism to capture people by confusion.

I also began to see the difference between teaching and helping people to understand. Many times Icksan said: "I don't know" when people asked him complicated questions. If a question did not fall

within his own experience he would say he did not know the answer. He would say “Subud is not teaching. If Bapak were Teacher and he know ten truths he will teach only nine because if he teach all ten then he will have no more pupils.”

Whenever the question asked was within the orbit of his personal experience the answer would come with a great deal of humility, but absolute certainty and clarity.

Bob Holmes (this was not his real name) was a middle-aged bachelor, an employee of the British Admiralty in Colombo. He was a lonely man, living a very quiet life in a run-down boarding house. He had come to Subud with a great personal problem. He spoke about it to Icksan:

“Icksan, I have a problem. I drink too much. Much too much. Everyday I drink half a bottle of whisky before coming to latihan. Like today. And when I go back home tonight – I shall probably finish the other half. Is this bad for my latihan?”

Icksan replied: “Bob, if I say stop, will you stop?”

Bob: “I suppose not.”

Icksan: “Then why you ask me? You say you know you drink too much. As long as you like drink, you will drink. But when inner say stop, it stop.”

I don’t know whether Bob still drinks because he left Ceylon soon after, but he did tell me that this explanation helped him enormously by removing the sense of guilt which had accentuated the compulsiveness of the habit.

The simple clarity of Icksan’s explanations was a recurrent source of joy to us. Everything he said gave proof to the most sceptical and analytical among us of the cleansing of the faculty of understanding that could come through Subud. One morning as we sat round Icksan on the verandah talking with him, two strangers walked in. They listened to our conversation for a while and one of them – the intellectual looking one – asked: “What is all this talk about God? Who knows anything about God? All this talk is just nonsense. We don’t believe in God.” The other man retaliated: “Speak for yourself. I believe in God.”

An incomprehensible argument developed between the two. Icksan sat patiently looking at them with the indulgence of ancient wisdom. They stopped suddenly, rather embarrassedly when they realized that everyone else was listening to their wordy quarrel.

Icksan said: “Why you fight about God? You say you don’t

believe in God. And your friend he say he believe in God. All right. Both same. Both not from experience.”

The man who did not believe in God is still in Subud and the man who believed in God stopped coming to latihan after three or four times.

Across the River

ICKSAN paid three visits to Ceylon within a year – twice alone and once with Bapak. He seemed to have a special place in his being for the Ceylon group, but this may be the feeling of every group which became acquainted with him. His robust attitude to life, his constant good humour and his readiness to break into laughter were highly prized by us. But these were outward attributes. None of us was able to assess his inner quality but when it was manifested in his judgements, advice or actions which had an external effect, we recognized the marvellous maturity of his soul which, although he had been in Subud for only four years, seemed as old as life itself.

When the Subud group went through the inevitable period of painful purification Icksan watched and steered it through the familiar squalls of jealousy, factionalism, cliquiness, spiritual competitiveness and office-seeking. Icksan was younger than many of the helpers in the Colombo group but he displayed one of the highest attributes of wisdom – he never once took sides in all our quarrels and never said a harsh word to anyone. But he was firm and direct in his decisions. We came to recognize that he was impartial in his attitude towards us because, *as a Subud Helper, he was incapable of partiality or favouritism*. He would often remind us:

“In Subud, in front of God, no father, no mother, no brother, no sister, no teachers, no pupils, no higher, no lower, no enemies and also no friends. Only God.”

In those early days – perhaps even now – there was a great preoccupation among the more intellectually inclined members of many groups with the question of preparation for Subud. Many, with genuine concern no doubt, felt and said that in order to come to Subud and progress in the latihan it was necessary or at any rate preferable to have gone through the discipline of some spiritual training, whatever it was. This led to needless niggling jealousies in many groups where people could lay claim to the advantage of having been in this or that spiritual order or discipline or system before entering Subud. Often these loaded problems would be

taken to Icksan for opinion or arbitration. It was easy to see on his face that he marvelled – in some disgust – that people who had tasted the latihan could still ask such “heffy” questions. But he never evaded an answer if the questioner seemed to find it important.

Someone who shall be nameless here remarked that he felt that his preparation for Subud through his study of a certain system of knowledge had helped him in Subud. Icksan: “Helped you to come to Subud or to progress in the latihan?”

Icksan’s question gave me a clue to evaluating the function of “preparation” for Subud. Some, like me, possibly had needed some discipline, some system of preparation to make them even feel the need to worship and to keep them interested in spiritual matters. But there was no question of one kind of preparation for Subud being superior to another as long as it brought a man to ask for the contact.

Many others needed no preparation except their raw experience of life as it came to them.

The trouble arose, it seemed increasingly clear to me, when people constantly referred to the fresh experience they received through Subud in terms and language belonging to the doctrines and truths they had been taught in their pre-Subud spiritual discipline. Thus every fresh experience was reduced to an affirmation or modification of an old experience, preventing or holding back the growth of new understanding.

The members of our old study group reacted against their former teaching in two distinct ways. Some of us began to scoff at the ideas we had once valued so highly and even reviled our teachers whom we had respected so deeply before we came to Subud.

A kind of spiritual de-Stalinization process took place. Others among us found it difficult to cut loose from the old familiar ideas and described our Subud experience in the same familiar terms as we had used before. It was Icksan who helped us to see that both these attitudes were immature and unhelpful to our possibilities of growth through Subud. The picture became clearer:

One man crosses a river in a canoe and gets to the other side where there is a fine open road to walk on. Seeing this, he spits in disgust at the canoe, turns it over, curses the owner of the boat and strides off angrily down the road. Another man also crosses over and, picking the canoe up on his back, he carries it down the open

road, burdened by its weight, but refusing to let go of it. A third man crosses over, gets out gratefully, moors it safely for someone else in need to use and strides off lightly down the road.

Icksan brought us to this point of understanding without lecturing or talking down to anyone. He also helped us to appreciate the fact that those who come to Subud through some previous discipline should realize that the need for it had come from their own selves and helplessness and that preparation or a practice of discipline before Subud was by no means essential for everyone. In fact, the word latihan means “training” – in this case, training to worship God.

Walking home late one night after having seen a war movie, Icksan remarked to me: “You know, Tarzie, you look for God for five years. Mr. B. he look for forty years. Icksan – he never look. All Icksan like before is fighting. Icksan fight in guerilla army. Not interested in spiritual life.”

On my next visit to Indonesia I learned from my newspaper colleagues that Icksan – they knew him as “Captain” Muhammad Ahmad – was well-known as the youngest and one of the most resourceful leaders of the guerillas who fought for the liberation of Indonesia. One story is that Icksan had led a raid on a Japanese sub-headquarters and captured a huge sum of money which added substantially to the funds on which the Indonesian Army was founded.

Preparation for Subud apparently had many facets and possibilities.

It must out

“IT must out,” was Icksan’s constant advice to us. There was no point in suppressing or prohibiting the feelings, imagination or actions of people going through their initial period of purification. When he was leaving for Jakarta after completing his first visit to Ceylon, Icksan told some of us at the airport: “You will see many strange things in next few months. Horrible. I feel so sorry for you,” and he laughed as though he couldn’t imagine anything funnier.

The meaning of this cryptic remark became plainly evident before long when people, including those of us who had heard his warning, began showing ugly sides of their inner natures. The socially acceptable veneer which had previously covered over these qualities was ripped apart and the tenuous bonds of cordiality which had governed our former relationship was swiftly broken. To jumble the metaphor even further, Icksan had flipped open the lid of Pandora’s box on the principle that “it must out”.

And out it did with a vengeance. We went through a storm of pain and anguish, some suffering more than the others, but all suggestions to Icksan on his next visit to put an end to our troubles by issuing a peace fiat, were received with loud and prolonged laughter and the stock comment: “Yes, horrible. It must out.”

The psychiatrists in the group marvelled at how deep into their own and other peoples’ subconscious minds the latihan seemed to probe. A highly competent Freudian analyst in Ceylon who had moved from frank scepticism about God and worship to deep regard for the latihan within a year of entering Subud, once remarked: “As part of our training as psychiatrists we go through an intensive course of deep analysis. But until I had experience of the process of purification in the latihan I never realized how deep our strongest motivating influences lie.” Icksan’s response: “Yes, possible. It must out.”

Willi Grillmayr, a Viennese neuro-psychiatrist working in Ceylon, came to Subud because it amused and intrigued him to see his friends like Vittachi and Collette – hard-boiled journalists – interested in such “unrational matters” as he called it. He tried his

best to account for the post-opening manifestations he saw in himself and others by slapping on them the familiar labels of psychiatry – “autosuggestion”, “auto-hypnosis”, “auto-irritation of the motor-function” and so on, but he was never quite satisfied. He was very doubtful of the healing properties of the latihan and, in great good humour but undisguised disbelief, he chuckled Austrianly whenever he heard stories of Subud “cures”.

But when he found that many people whose opinion he respected seemed to take a different attitude, he decided that he would test the curative power of Subud. He had a patient in an advanced state of paralytic insanity, bedridden for nine years. He had tried every known remedy including a long course of Cobra-toxin and merion – the treatment advocated by Dr. Rottmann of Vienna. He asked Icksan whether he would test this patient. Icksan agreed to do the latihan with Willi at the patient’s bedside. A minute or two after the latihan started the patient who had been immobile for so many years began to move and suddenly snatched an amulet which had been strung round his neck and flung it at Willi’s feet. Willi described to the group his amazement at this phenomenon. Icksan had promptly rushed to the toilet to be violently sick. Then he had picked up the amulet and told Willi that the patient should improve from then on. We opened up the amulet and discovered a small clump of hair, a piece of bone and one or two other unrecognisable objects. “Lower forces,” said Icksan. “Sick because influence of satanic forces. Now come out.”

Willi was dumb with surprise, he tried his best to find a “scientific” explanation but it wasn’t in the book.

A few weeks later, when Icksan and I were walking up the drive to the car which was taking him to the airport, we saw a stranger walk in. It was Willi’s patient wanting to know how much Icksan’s “fee” was. Icksan laughed in his magnificently unrestrained manner and said: “Practise latihan. Amulets, charms, not necessary. It must out.”

With definite patience and kindness Icksan enabled us to see the kind of problem we would face as helpers and how we should deal with people who came to us. One of the ladies came to Icksan once in an acute state of excitement and reported: “Icksan, I had an experience last night which I must tell you about right now.” I rose to leave them alone. Icksan said: “No, you stay. In Subud no secrets.” I stayed and listened to a technicolour dream in which satanic forces

chased her down dark corridors and, when all seemed lost, an angel in the form of Icksan Ahmad came down to save her in the nick of time. Icksan heard it all through and said, “Nice dream. Nice experience.”

Then when the lady had left, purring, he said to me: “You knew all imagination?” “Yes,” I said. “It was obviously imagination.” “Of course,” agreed Icksan, “But would she have believe if I tell her so? It must out. By itself. That’s it – by itself it must out.”

And he advised me that as helpers we should never look caustic or frankly supercilious and disbelieving as I had, or tell anyone that the experiences they related were just imagination or plain lies – *even if we were sure they were*. People indulged in this kind of fantasy because they were at a stage of development in which they needed such supports to their spiritual worship. Eventually, he said, it would all come out as long as they did their latihan diligently. If they did not keep on with the latihan then it would be no longer our problem. This advice has been given to me over and over again by elder brothers in Subud, Sjafrudin, Prio Hartono, Anwar Zakir and Mas Sudarto but, I am afraid, to little avail. In my case it still must out.

The last days

BAPAK visited Ceylon in November 1958, and stayed nearly forty days. He brought with him Hardijati, Rahaju, his grand-daughter Indra and Icksan. As could have been expected, Bapak's visit caused great excitement in Ceylon – some of it pleasant, some inevitably unpleasant. I say inevitably because it was explained to us that when Bapak arrives in a new place the lower forces rally themselves to defend their domain and make things difficult for people to worship in the right way. After a day or two we found that Icksan was strangely subdued and different in his manner and even in his relationship with us. Nalini Jayatilaka and Sunetra often asked him why he seemed sad, and the only answer he gave was: "Not sad. Subud very hard," adding in a sardonic tone, "Tell your friends not to join if they think Subud easy."

He was referring, I think specifically, to the difficulties and burdens of Bapak's assistants in Subud. But every one of us learnt that Subud was not easy, whatever stage we were at. Sometimes understanding came so suddenly that it was difficult to bear with equanimity.

I had such an experience one day when Bapak was in Colombo. Icksan called me into his room and said: "Tarzie, Bapak want to do some personal shopping and has no money at all."

Instantly I reached for my cheque book in my hip pocket asking: "How much does he want, Icksan?"

Icksan looked at me very strangely and shook his head. "Never mind, not necessary now," he said.

I could not understand the note in his voice. "But Icksan, I have the money. How much does Bapak want?"

My pen was poised over the cheque book.

Icksan repeated: "No. Not necessary now."

I implored him to tell me why he spoke this way when I, as I thought, was willing to be generous.

Icksan said: "All right: I tell you ... Did Bapak ever ask you how much you want of what he give you?"

Tears of mortification squirted into my eyes. I felt I had under-

stood in a flash but it took me days to overcome the taste of my pettiness.

I was and am deeply grateful to Icksan for showing me this side of my nature so clearly and effectively.

Icksan and a few of us went late at night to sip a glass of beer and talk under the trees at my club. I told him that I had observed that his entire attitude was different from his previous visits and that even his explanations had not the force and clarity they'd had before.

"That is quite true," Icksan said, "Good reason." He was evidently bent on changing the subject but we pressed him to continue. After "receiving" for a minute he said he would try to explain:

"When Bapak give special assignment to helper – like transmitting contact to new group and giving necessary explanations – he also give him power to enable him to do the job. Like when King send Ambassador he give him credential – pleni, pleni, pleni – What? Yes, plenipotentiary authority. So he is different, stronger, though he may not realize it until he find himself able to do more than ordinarily. For instance, he find he suddenly give explanation he not know before or become more sensitive to state of Inner of other people. Then, when job is over, this power is taken away. So this period very dangerous. Place of power can fill with pride, self-love and he think his own power has grown. Must be very careful. This is time of great Test ... This time Icksan come with Bapak. So special power not necessary. Maybe this difference you see."

As we all know now there was something else besides this which caused the change in Icksan during this visit. The first clue was given by Icksan himself.

"Bapak order me today to make ready to go to America with him. How can Icksan go? Funny. Why does Bapak tell Icksan to go? Very funny."

We asked why Icksan thought it was so funny that he should be asked to accompany Bapak to America. He looked at us for a long half-minute and replied: "He already asked Dr. Zakir to prepare to go."

But that was Icksan's sense of diplomacy.

A day or two later Icksan came to my house and looked around rather curiously. Eventually, he asked Sunetra: "Can Ismana (his wife) stay here if necessary?"

Sunetra said: "That would be wonderful. We'll have that room ready for both of you."

But Icksan replied: "Not, not Icksan. Icksan not come. For Ismana may be necessary."

Still the penny did not drop.

That afternoon I was in Icksan's room at Subud House when Bapak came in and sat down. I asked Bapak:

"Bapak, the Ceylon Group has been very lucky so far. We have had a great deal of help this year. Icksan came in December and March, Mr. Bennett came in June. Now Bapak himself has come. Icksan is also here. Can we expect more visits like this?"

Bapak did not reply immediately. He closed his eyes momentarily, then looked quizzically at Icksan. Icksan could not return the gaze and looked down at his feet, his face flushing with something like sadness. After a while Bapak turned to me and spoke in English, clear and deliberate: "Yes. But not Icksan."

After latihan that night the group gathered round Bapak in the sitting-room. There was a long silence. Bapak told me to repeat the question I had asked him in Icksan's room. I repeated my question in much the same words: Bapak repeated his answer: "Yes. But not Icksan." adding, "Another will come, but don't ask him so many questions as you asked Icksan." Hardijati interpreted this to the group.

Someone asked why Bapak had said this: the only answer: "Too heavy."

Not long after Bapak, his daughter and Icksan had left for Singapore en route to Jakarta, Sunetra telephoned me at the office one morning: "Are you standing up?" she asked. "If you are, sit down. I have something to read out to you."

I sat down and heard her read a telegram from Singapore.

ICKSAN DEAD FOLLOWING HEART ATTACK.
CARMICHAEL.

Falil Caffoor, Lesly Jayatilake and I took the plane that afternoon to Jakarta. We arrived two days before Icksan's body, which was being shipped, arrived.

The first thing we noticed was that our inner confusion and reluctance to accept the enormity of what had happened, was not shared by the Subud members in Jakarta. They went about their business, courteous, hospitable and anxious to put us at our ease. They tried their best to console us although their sense of loss of a brother they had known much longer than we had must have been far deeper than ours.

We called at the house of Icksan's parents to pay our respects to them and to Ismana. We could hardly contain our sorrow and Lesly was overflowing with a sense of deprivation. Ismana, we were told, was in latihan and would see us soon. When she came out, young, translucently beautiful and completely self-composed, she said:

"Falil, Lesly, Tarzie, thank you very much for coming to Icksan's funeral. I know how much you love Icksan and how much he loves you. Will you excuse me?" and she returned to her latihan.

It was magnificent. But I could not understand how these people seemed to have so much detachment about the death of a young man, with a young wife and months old baby, who had died in the full prime of his life.

"Bapak, don't you feel ANYTHING? Is there no unhappiness in anyone here about the death of Icksan? Does no one feel the sense of loss we feel?"

Bapak smiled in great indulgence and replied (Prio Hartono interpreting): "Yes, of course, Bapak and your brothers and sisters here feel Icksan's death very much. See how Bapak has already lost several pounds in weight since Icksan died. But that is *this* Bapak, the Bapak you see. But the real Bapak is not sad. That Bapak is HAPPY for Icksan because Icksan has attained the peak of his spiritual possibilities in this world, so soon. His soul is now elsewhere, very high." And, in consolation to us he said to the Indonesians around:

"Icksan very close to Colombo Group. Icksan always walking about with these friends. Even drinking beer together! You will see Icksan again. He will visit you."*

Still, unappeased, I asked: "How? How does Bapak mean – 'see Icksan'? Like I see Bapak? Or in a dream?" Bapak said: "May be like

* *This forecast came true within a few weeks.*

I "met" Icksan at my home in Colombo so surely and clearly that the thought of doubting it never entered my mind. A week later I had "external" proof of this when Ismana wrote to me to say that she had "received" one night that Icksan was with me. The date she gave was identical.

On another occasion, during the group latihan, I felt Icksan's presence once more and felt also that another member at the other end of the room was experiencing it. After latihan I dropped my wife home, and telling her that I had to go to the home of this other member, I drove up there. He opened the door at my knock and greeted me with these words: "You mean Icksan?"

Later Bapak tested these experiences and confirmed that they were the meetings with Icksan that he had foretold.

a dream, but not a dream. You will know when you have the experience.”

Riding in Suparto’s Volkswagen minibus to the funeral a day later, we heard another strange conversation. Suparto, driving along cavalierly, said laughingly – but quite seriously – “Oh last night Icksan speak to me ...”

I interjected: “How do you mean? Last night? Icksan spoke to you last night?”

As though it was a commonplace happening Suparto replied, “Yes, we had big conversation.”

I asked: “What did you talk about?”

Suparto: “I ask Icksan why not come back to stay here.”

I asked: “And what did he say?”

Suparto: “Oh, he say: ‘Too hot’. Much pleasanter where he is.”

The night before I left Jakarta I sat in the garage of Bapak’s house – used later as the Secretariat – and asked him more questions, mine, as well as those I was bearing from friends in Colombo.

Q. Did Bapak know in Colombo that Icksan was going to die so soon?

A. You should know. Bapak warned you about this.

Q. When?

A. When you asked Bapak about Icksan returning to help the group in Ceylon.

Suddenly I realized how opaque we had been.

Q. Bapak, Icksan was not an ordinary man. He was so helpful to thousands of people in Subud. His quality was extraordinary. Why did he have to die an ordinary death – from a heart attack, like an ordinary man?

A. How else would you have had him die? Every man must die either by ordinary means – by ill health – or by an accident. Icksan died of a heart attack because his heart was the weakest point in him. His body was too “thick”, so this was the way through which he passed from this existence. Bapak will say one thing more about this. Had Icksan not died at that time by this means he would have died near that time by some other means. Icksan was a worker for Subud. He completed the work he could do on this earth and has gone elsewhere.

Q. The ladies in Colombo wanted me to ask Bapak whether

Icksan knew he was going to die. If so, why did he not return to die near Ismana?

A. That would not have been surrendering, would it?

Questions, questions

FOR some time I was known among Subud members in Jakarta as the man who had once taken ten written questions to Bapak. This reference provoked great merriment and Subud friends in Colombo and India frequently told me that I must not ask so many questions, that I should rather “accept”. I am sure they were right in their advice but I found that I could begin to “accept” only when my questions had been answered. I found – and still find – it impossible to “accept” something that is confused or unresolved. If Bapak or any of the helpers could help sort out my problems for me I felt that I should go ahead and ask all the real questions I had. It must out, I told myself.

Besides, I also found that all those who protested at my asking questions from Bapak, or from Icksan or Prio Hartono, were very anxious to hear the answers. Sometimes they’d recoil with genteel horror when a question was put, but they always came forward eagerly when the answer was provided. I felt therefore that if I was to play the role of the caddie who tees the ball up for people to enjoy watching Bapak drive it off masterfully, I was gratefully prepared to accept my part. I too could share in the fun. After some experience as caddie I also came to a very rewarding conclusion: I did not have to judge whether my question was foolish or wise, juvenile or adult as long as it was real – that is, I really wanted to know the answer. So I asked all the foolish questions I had in the confident knowledge that I would not get a foolish answer.

There were others too – thank God – who were not afraid to ask questions that might sound too rudimentary or naive. Mohammed Sideek of Colombo was one of these and the answers given to some of the questions he asked have helped me enormously to understand more. We were waiting to hear Bapak speak one evening, when Sideek who was seated on the carpet near Bapak’s chair, turned his face up to Bapak and asked one of his supremely innocent questions:

“Bapak,” he said, “Where IS God?”

As the court reporters say, a titter ran round the room. When

this subsided, we heard Bapak call out in a loud voice, “Siddeeeeeeeek!” Sideek replied anxiously, “Yes, Bapak?” Bapak ignored this response and, turning his head to the ceiling called out – louder – “Siddeeeeeeeeeek!” All eyes in the room widened in amazement. Poor Sideek responded again. “Yes, Bapak?” Bapak ignored him once more and turning to the window, called out really loud, “SIDDEEEEEEEEEEEK!” Now, excitedly rising to his haunches and looking badly rattled Sideek replied, “Yes, Bapak?”

Bapak smiled this time and after a pause, said: “You see. We look for God in the clouds, in the mountain tops, in caves, in temples, churches and mosques. We do not realize that God may be nearer to us than ourselves. So even when God responds to our call we do not hear him because our attention is preoccupied with looking for him elsewhere.”

The light that flashed in my mind – and I am sure, in the minds of everyone present – was reflected in the obvious relief of instantaneous comprehension that glowed on Sideek’s face.

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I asked: “Are there highly developed people living in the world today who have reached spiritual eminence without the help of Subud? Is Krishnamurti, for instance, such a man?”

Many Subud members who had listened to Krishnaji’s talks and held him in high regard, were very anxious to know Bapak’s assessment of his power.

Bapak said he would test this question himself. Standing up and closing his eyes, Bapak asked:

“Krishnamurti, where is his power from? It is from his heart?”

No.

“Is it from his mind?”

No.

“It is from God?”

No.

“Where is it from, then?”

Bapak explained the response he received: “It is his own human power. He was born with true human power.”

This clarification helped us to understand the reason for the tremendous strength we had all felt in the presence of Krishnamurti – a strength and confidence which trickled away soon after we had

left him. Krishnaji's spiritual stature was evident to us who had sat at his feet but I had found it impossible to use what he had imparted and to recreate its power for practical guidance in my life. He was like a man on the river bank who warns you that you are drowning and you realize that indeed you are. You splash about, trying to swim unavailingly against the current, but he does not give you a hand or throw you a rope. But he is already there. He was *born* on the banks of the river.

Another illuminating "test" was given by Bapak in India in response to my question about a man who had been many years in Subud and was still practising the latihan regularly, but whose actions showed that he was consumed by a feeling of being ill-used by people in Subud, a raw and ugly hostility which sometimes extended even to Bapak. Let us call him Hamsa for anonymity.

My question was: "Hamsa has been in Subud for many many years. He has great knowledge and intelligence. He has been very useful and active in Subud and still practises the latihan regularly. Yet he is capable of contempt and anger. What hope can people like me, who have not got so many of his talents and advantages, have of ridding ourselves of the influences of lower forces if he acts like this after so much experience?"

Bapak asked Anwar Zakir, Bomon-Behram and me to participate in testing this question:

"How much material force in Hamsa?"

The response was that it was very strong.

"How much vegetable force in Hamsa?"

Very strong.

"How much animal force in Hamsa?"

Very strong – but not as much as the other categories. "How much true human force in Hamsa?"

The response was a blank. None.

Then Bapak said: "Test Vittachi." The test started from the other end of the scale.

"How much human force?"

None.

"How much animal force?"

None.

"How much vegetable force?"

None – perhaps a slight, hardly noticeable amount.

"How much material force?"

The response was fairly strong.

“Already some progress,” commented Bapak, smiling, “But very little yet.”

Bapak explained: “In Hamsa’s case the various forces necessary for a human being to live and work in this world have increased considerably but the true force which should be present to master and use these relatively lower forces has not yet been developed. Therefore, his mistakes could be greater than those which we, at the bottom of the ladder, are making.”

When one has progressed much, the greater the possibility of error. Errors made by such people could be very dangerous to themselves and to others. They should, therefore, be more careful than those whose actions have less influence on other people.

New valuations

THE idea that material, vegetable and animal forces were necessary for a human being's existence and spiritual progress was very revealing. I began to understand what Icksan must have meant when he asked us at the very beginning, "Are you sitting on that chair or is that chair sitting on you?"

Bapak explained this idea further from a different viewpoint. I had asked him a question about Buddhism, the religion into which I had been born: "Why did the Buddha advise us not to kill animals even for our food? Does this mean that people such as the Eskimos and others whose existence depends on hunting are excluded from the possibility of spiritual evolution?"

Bapak's reply was: "When did the Buddha instruct people not to kill animals? His words on this should be understood correctly. He said that animals should not be killed *wantonly* – for pleasure, for sport, from wickedness as people in his time did and even now do. This is one meaning. The other and deeper meaning is this: At that time many people were practising self-immolation, the mortification of the flesh – the animal side of a human being – in order to attain spiritual enlightenment. The Buddha himself experimented with this method for several weeks, fasting until his flesh shrivelled to practically nothing. Then the Buddha realized that killing the animal forces in oneself is not the true way to salvation. He realized that these animal forces also are necessary for man to live in this world even while seeking spiritual progress. It was then that enlightenment came to him – and, with it, his understanding of the way of moderation."

Since entering Subud I had become interested in reading the teachings in other faiths – Christianity, Islam (particularly Sufism) and Vedanta. I had never been able to become interested in the Gospels before I came to Subud. I was one of those unfortunate people who had been advised in school to read the Bible for its "good English", with the result that the spiritual meaning of the magnificently charged language of the Old Testament and the Authorized Version had never occurred to me. After Subud I found

I was able to read the Gospels with a new understanding which I had been denied before.

Sooty Banda first opened my mind to the scintillating inner possibilities in the Gospels by his talent for fresh and significant analogy.

“Matthew,” he used to say, “was a crack short-hand man. Mark was the pedestrian reporter. Luke was an interpretative reporter, and John was the poet.”

We would read Matthew and John frequently together and discover new vistas of meaning at every reading.

The parables of Christ were a source of great delight and illumination when Sooty Banda cracked open a word or phrase big with meaning. But there were many stories which we found difficult to break through.

At the first opportunity, I asked Bapak to explain one or two of these difficulties, and ever since I have wished that Bapak had time to tell us more about his interpretations of some of these old teachings.

I requested Bapak to explain the meaning of the parable of loaves and fishes. I said: “Bapak, this story defeats me. It tells nothing except that Christ could work magic stunts when he felt like it. I cannot believe that this parable just wants to advertise Christ as a magician. Is there another meaning?”

Bapak (in English): “You not understand?”

I said no, I could not see any purpose in this parable.

Bapak (Icksan interpreting): “You remember you receive something when you come to Subud?”

Yes, I remembered.

Bapak: “And when you had received you were able to give something to others who asked for it?”

Yes, I remembered.

Bapak: “And what these others received was not different from what you receive in quality or quantity?”

Yes, it was like that.

Bapak: “And they, in turn, were able to give this to others who asked for it without diminution of quality or quantity?”

Yes, it was so.

Bapak: “Ah, now you know meaning of loaves and fishes. People who ask receive as much of loaves and fishes as they need and always one more loaf, one more fish remaining where it came from

originally. Now you understand?”

Understand? I was delirious with joy and could hardly restrain my tears. No other meaning was even remotely possible.

On another occasion, Bapak explained the story of Abraham’s sacrifice:

“Ibrahim,” said Bapak, “received his son from God – a symbol of true receiving of force or grace – when he was already past sixty. He was very grateful to God and worshipped sincerely. But Ibrahim was still dominated by animal passions. So it was necessary for him to sacrifice these lower forces. He was ordered to bring his growing son to the temple. But the son was not killed. It was a wether that was killed – symbol of his dominant animal passions. When these passions were subdued, Ibrahim’s son – his true self – was able to master the lower forces and grow to its full possibilities of development.”

Whenever I recall this clarification of the story of Abraham’s ordeal, I am conscious of a feeling of deep sympathy for sincere Christian people who have not had the opportunity of listening to Bapak speak of Christ’s teachings. When Bapak explains these matters, it is not another of those “interpretations” of the Bible produced by the thinking of so many commentators and theologians. You receive a glimpse of the irreducible clarity of what the ancients meant when they spoke of Objective Knowledge.

Perhaps the best example in my experience of this way of direct knowledge was provided by Bapak when I requested an explanation of why so many of us whose religious tradition for generations had been Buddhism or Christianity had begun to say “Al-lah” instead of the names of God which were more familiar to us.

Bapak said: “You also make the mistake of imagining that Allah is a Muslim. He is God. The word Allah is older than language. Have you not noticed that the first sound a new born baby utters – whether it is American, Japanese, Indian or European is Al-lah. It comes out of the new-born infant as Aw-wah, aw-wah, aw-wah. The tongue discovers the palate – Al, Al, Al, and then from its raised position it must fall to rest – lah, lah, lah ... So the first sound a child utters is the name of God. Do you see?”

I began to see that other names of God like Yahweh and Jehovah also had come from a source “before language.”

Sometimes, this direct knowledge from Bapak’s clarifications is so unexpected and even diametrically contrary to what is familiar

to us, that I put it away in a part of my mind reserved for stacking material for future reference. For instance in March 1960, during a meeting in Singapore, I asked Bapak to comment on Darwinism and its later developments.

Bapak said: "This theory is both right and wrong. For example it may explain physiological evolution but it does not explain the vital difference between man and animals – however highly evolved. That is, man has been given a soul with which he can make a choice between two alternatives. Even the most advanced ape does not have this choice. So the scientists interpolate a Missing Link. This link will always be missing."

Bapak went on to refer to "not one, but five different human races." He enumerated them on his fingers: "Black, Brown, White, Yellow and Red."

Were there five separate evolutions, then? Were there five Adams then and not just one? These were the questions I put by for future enquiry.*

*In Harper's Magazine (December 1962) the lead article entitled "New Findings in the Origin of Races" by Carleton S Coon, the noted archaeologist, indicates that science is now beginning to believe that there were five distinct races – Caucasoids, Mongoloids, Australoids, Congoloids and Capoids (after the Cape of Good Hope) which evolved from a sub-human ancestor to man at five different times in human history in widely separated parts of the world.

A clean ash tray

A FRIEND in the Colombo group (let us call him Herbert) had a serious problem: drink. He had been in our old study group and was one of the first to join Subud. He was the manager of a growing company, had a fine family and considerable sensitiveness and intelligence. But he could not subdue his hankering for drink. Having heard Icksan say, "When inner say stop, it stop," Herbert was waiting for the word but it did not come. He observed changes in others and wondered about himself.

There was a young bachelor, rich, intelligent and personable who spent a small fortune on drink because he liked the taste of liquor and the feeling of boozy euphoria it gave him. Within a year of receiving the contact, he found that his body would not retain anything more than one or two small drinks. I once saw him defiantly drink down a bottle of beer and run to the verandah to spew it up immediately. One side of him wanted to stop drinking, but his mind could not obey his will, and he continued to drink. When I saw him disgorge the pint of beer I asked him what the matter was. His reply was memorable. Choking back the nausea he said laughingly: "This damn Subud!"

Herbert knew about his case and that of several others who had either stopped drinking or whose intake had been drastically reduced. When Bapak came to Ceylon, Herbert sought an interview to ask about his drinking.

"I know that I drink too much, and have been hoping the latihan would help me to stop drinking, but it is as bad as ever. Why is this so?" he asked.

"Because you do not want to stop it," was Bapak's answer.

I could not understand this. Bapak's answer seemed to contradict what we had been told at first. A year later, when I met Bapak in India I understood the beauty and simplicity of this explanation.

Bomon-Behram asked a question: "Should we not make an effort of will to stop certain practices and habits which we know are bad for our spiritual progress?"

Bapak agreed.

I intervened: “But, Bapak, when we came to Subud we were told that it is not necessary to try to use effort or will. In fact, Bapak said that we had NO will of our own or that it was too weak to be of much value ...”

Bapak: “Yes, this was so.”

I went on: “But now Bapak says that we should use effort and will ...”

Bapak: “So you see a contradiction in Bapak’s two statements?”

I: “Yes, it seems contradictory.”

Bapak: “Why did you come to Subud? You came because you had tried various ways to help your spiritual life – Buddhism, Krishnamurti, Gurdjieff – all of which had required an effort of will. This will was not forthcoming or, if it was there at all, it had proved to be so feeble that it could not stand up against any opposition. Your life was blown this way and that according to the direction of the wind of circumstance. So you came to Subud. You were told that it was not necessary to use your will or make an effort except to practise the latihan as diligently as you could. This attracted you and you remained in Subud. Now, three years later, Bapak says: ‘Use your will.’ And you say that there is a contradiction. But do you not see that your experience between these two statements has resolved this contradiction?”

I replied that I could not see this.

Bapak: “It is like this. When you came to Subud there was nothing in you which could really be called Will. But as you practised your latihan, this Will became alive in you and has become stronger. You now have something that you can begin to recognize as Will. So now Bapak says: ‘Use this Will, to the degree that it has grown in you, to stop these practices or habits which you say you *know* are holding up your spiritual progress.’ To the extent that you do this, your latihan will improve, and to the extent that you do the latihan, your Will becomes stronger. In this way your Will and your latihan will react on one another and strengthen each other. If you leave it entirely to the latihan and deliberately continue bad habits, progress will naturally take a longer time. What you used to call your will before Subud was *wilfulness*. Now it is *willingness*.” (Anwar Zakir interpreting).

Exultantly, I thanked Bapak for giving us this superbly illuminating explanation.

He continued: “Consider this ashtray. Bapak puts his ash in it. Servant comes in and cleans the tray. Bapak puts more ash in it. Servant cleans it out again. Bapak puts ash in it again. Servant cleans it out again. And so it goes on. Sometimes the ash will finish when the cigarette comes to an end. But if Bapak wants a clean ashtray *now*, he must stop putting ash into it.”

Bomon-Behram had a supplementary question: “Why then should people in Subud not be given a code of conduct to guide them?”

Bapak: “Surely, the code of conduct has already been given?”

Bomon-Behram: “I have never seen it.”

Bapak: “Why not? The code of conduct has already been given by the Buddha, Christ, Muhammad ...”

BB and I laughed delightedly at the finished grace of Bapak as a dialectician. This is precisely what Bapak told us all from the very beginning: “Subud is not a new religion. Subud is not a teaching. All the teaching that we need has already been given by the founders of the Great Religions. Subud will provide the force which will help us to understand and follow our own religions better.”

But we, with our canny talent for remembering what was convenient and relegating to limbo what was more difficult, had paid attention only to the first part of this explanation: “Subud is not a teaching ...”

This clarification from Bapak put an end to my confusion about Subud and discipline. I heard some Subud members – usually those who had previously followed systems which impose a stern regimen of discipline – question the rightness of waiting for “inner” to say “stop”. I myself had wondered on occasions about the absence of any rules in Subud and about the lack of any discipline imposed on us by Bapak to guide us through at least the stormy days of initial purification. I now realized that the only discipline that would be useful and effective was not one that came from outside, from a set of external rules to which we paid spurious lip service, but one that came from within us, as a deeply felt need of an *inner* self.

Someone present remarked that, all the same, it might be helpful if Bapak were to issue a code of rules for Subud.

Bapak (smiling broadly): “Bapak suggested only one rule and got into serious trouble on that occasion.”

I: “What was that rule, Bapak?”

Bapak: “That ladies should not attend the latihan in slacks!”

Subud as repair shop

ONE of the most attractive features of the explanations and advice given by Bapak is its practical quality. Because the advice comes from inner experience and understanding there is no pulpit “moralizing” about good and evil or punishment and reward. I saw this very clearly when I asked him why he – through Ibu – had advised ladies in Subud not to wear slacks to latihan.

Bapak explained that the reason was very simple: “The latihan helps people to cast away the falseness they have acquired through social imitation and to develop their true selves to their full potential. A woman’s true self is essentially feminine. The very fact that she chooses to wear slacks to worship indicates that there is something in her nature which wishes to be mannish. When she argues that slacks give her more freedom of movement than feminine clothes, what she means is that she wants to make masculine movements.”

“If you have seen ladies in trousers doing latihan you will see what I mean,” said Bapak and he proceeded to give us a demonstration in mime of this spectacle. The total impression was one of ridiculous *gaucherie* and unnatural falsity.

“Wearing trousers to latihan,” said Bapak, “may help a woman to become a man but it would not help her to become a woman.” It took only a quick imitation by me of Bapak’s imitation of a woman in slacks at latihan to persuade Sunetra (an inveterate addict of slacks) to wear saris to latihan – despite the complications it involved.

We tended to obscure this marvellously practical aspect of what we learn in Subud experience by wrapping it up in mystical pseudo-religious explanations. At any rate, I did. This tendency appeared often in our attitude to illness. Here is an example from the experience of my own family. Our daughter “Cooch” used to suffer quite seriously from infected tonsils. At one time she had to absent herself from school two or three times a week because her tonsils troubled her. Her physical growth was retarded but ever since we had heard of Eva Bartok’s experience and read all the varied

(even contradictory) versions of her recovery we thought that there was something inherently wrong about surgery. Our impression that Bapak was “against” surgery justified our fear of submitting our child to anaesthesia and the surgeon’s knife – although she was frequently ill.

When Bapak visited Ceylon I took Cooch (then ten) to the Subud House because she wanted to pay her respects to Bapak. As soon as we entered Bapak’s sitting room, he staggered us by pointing to Cooch and saying:

“Tarzie, better operate.”

“Operate, Bapak?” I asked, feeling a little bit caught out.

“Yes, operate,” said Bapak, pointing to his own throat.

“But I thought Bapak does not like operations?” I said.

“Bapak does not like *unnecessary* operations. This operation necessary. Soon.”

Jati interpreted: “Doctor’s skill also given by God. But some surgeons want to operate when it is not necessary as in Eva’s case. Remember that Bapak’s son also was a medical student.”

What more evidence of the *practical* nature of Bapak’s advice do we need? The only “mystic” element in this episode was how Bapak diagnosed Cooch’s illness without hearing about it from us. But this sensitiveness to people’s states we had already experienced with Icksan and other Indonesian helpers and it served only to reaffirm our conviction of the great practical power of the Subud force.

An experienced Indonesian helper once said: “Subud is as practical as a motor garage.” This was said in answer to a member’s question about how we should describe Subud when people asked whether Subud was a new religion. He said: “Imagine a beautiful park in the middle of a city. There are several excellent roads leading to the park from the city boundaries. One road is signposted “Buddhism”, another “Islam”, another “Christianity”, another “Judaism” and so on. We are each given a vehicle to carry us to the park. But we find that this vehicle is defective: its tyres are flat, its body is dented, its transmission is choked and, above all, there is no fuel. So we take it to a motor garage to have it attended to. When this is done we can take any of the roads – they all take us to the park. Subud is a motor garage.”

This same helper once interpreted Bapak’s view of the relationship between latihan and sickness. He said that, broadly speaking, there were five kinds of sickness:

1. Ordinary or minor ailments.
2. Hereditary defects and weaknesses.
3. Sickness which comes as warning that one's life is not being lived in the right way.
4. Sickness given as punishment for a wrong way of living (too much thinking, worrying, is one of the causes of this category of illness).
5. Sickness given to summon one to death ("As in Icksan's case," he said.)

Latihan done for the sick, if it is God's will, can relieve categories one and two. Latihan for three and four is to ask sincerely for forgiveness and receiving strength to change one's pattern of life. Latihan done in the case of number five helps in accepting God's will. The experienced helper would recognize this category when he encounters it.

He explained the way that the latihan acted on the first two categories:

"Disease-carrying organisms live in and around us all the time. Many of them exist on our flesh and blood. But they do not get the upper hand over us until a condition such as what we call 'being run down' occurs. This condition of weakness may occur due to a variety of reasons and when it comes about, the disease-carrying organisms become dominant. We then become ill. What the latihan does, by God's will, is to remove this condition of weakness and strengthen the body to overcome the disease."

This explanation provided a highly practical clue for the understanding of what is usually labelled as "nerves", "general debility" or "psychosomatic illness". It also removed any basis for the widespread belief that Subud is a means of "faith healing".

People who came to Bapak in the express hope of being cured of their illnesses were advised to go to the hospital or to their doctor. When Bapak was in Colombo a woman telephoned me to ask whether it was true that we had "brought a famous faith healer to Ceylon".

I replied that we had done no such thing, but sensing the agitation in her voice, I asked what the trouble was.

Her husband was ill, she said. She was prepared "to try even faith healing".

I asked: "But who has the faith?"

She evidently wanted a cure from a "faith healer" but expected

the faith also to come from the healer. She would provide only the patient. But on her plea to be allowed to meet Pak Subuh, an interview was arranged.

Bapak advised her to take her husband to the hospital.

All the same, it is difficult not to sympathise with those who look to Subud primarily as a means of receiving miraculous cures. There has been so much remarkable evidence of the therapeutic power of the latihan that people are bound to regard Subud as a clinic of last resort.

Of the many instances of this in my own experience one is worth recording here: A psychiatrist in Subud asked me one evening to help him solve a professional problem. He spoke of a patient who was highly educated and held a position of responsibility and authority, but had come to him a year before for analysis. This doctor, who was outstanding in his field of work, said that he had done what he could for his patient but he was now convinced that the only thing that would help any more was the latihan. But, as a doctor, he felt that it would be improper to advise his patient to come to Subud and, as a helper he knew that people should not be brought to Subud for cures. As he was talking to me, his voice suddenly tailed off and I saw his eyes fixed, surprised, at some point over my shoulder. The look of surprise turned to a smile of great relief and gratitude as he said:

“There he is!”

His patient, call it coincidence if you will, had come to receive the contact at that very moment. (Bapak being present, the rule about the probationary period had been suspended.) It was also extremely interesting to me that the man who was accompanying him and on whose advice he had decided to come to Subud was a Communist. The opening was spectacular – particularly in the case of the Communist. But, as it happened, the Communist stopped coming to latihan after a while but his friend continued. The improvement in him – not only in his mental state but his entire relationship with people – was remarkable to those of us who had known him before as a very intense and rather arrogant person. We have become close friends since then and the sincerity of his willing gratitude to God is truly astonishing from a man who had previously interpreted his role as a scientist in such a harsh manner that the very mentioning of the name of God had been sufficient to evoke his bitter scorn.

Subud and politics

I ONCE asked Bapak about Subud in its relationship with current political events.

Q. “Bapak, it seems to me that never before in human history has there been so much organized hatred between people – religion against religion, race against race, nation against nation and ideology against ideology. What can put an end to this conflict?”

Bapak: “Maybe Subud...”

Q. “You mean people in Subud? People like us?”

Bapak: “May not be you. Maybe your children and their children.”

Q. “But, Bapak, these forces are heavily organized. They have huge armies and armaments. And Subud has no organization to deal with this kind of force.”

Bapak: “You are a Buddhist. You were born into the Buddhist organization. You are also born as a Ceylonese. But you came to Subud and you are still a Buddhist and a Ceylonese. Your understanding of what Buddhism is and what it is to be a Ceylonese has already changed. So with most of you. Your children – even without being formally opened are already different because you are different. Their children will also be different, and they also will be born into these ready made organizations. They will be more numerous than you are now. These organizations will therefore change in character because there will be many who are changed ... now do you see?”

What I did see was that the responsibility some of us had been assuming since we joined Subud had to be viewed in a fresh perspective. Some of us had fastened on to the possibilities of Subud as a mystic force which would change the world in the way we would like to see it within our lifetime, if not by 1960 or 1962. This eagerness, perhaps natural in those of us with an apocalyptic vision of our role in human history, had led us to expect revolutionary inner changes in large masses of humanity within a short time of Subud’s spread round the world. We were exultantly preoccupied with counting heads in Subud and marvelling at how Subud had

gained a hold in forty, fifty, sixty countries within two or three years of its emergence from Indonesia.

In this enthusiasm, some of us claimed ever increasing numbers for Subud in the world, choosing to ignore the glaring fact that, on an average, only fifteen per cent of the people who were opened continued regularly with the latihan. About 1,500 people were opened in Ceylon but only about one hundred and fifty (at best) practise the latihan. It is the same with Great Britain, Australia, America and even Indonesia, where one would ordinarily expect a higher proportion of stayers.

The psychological trick of recognising only facts which supported our premeditated thesis and pushing into a limbo of irrelevancy those which were inconvenient for our view of things to come, led to some of us even using the authority of Bapak's name to shore up our wishful thinking.

One such instance was the story that Bapak had predicted that by 1960, millions would be opened in India. This possibility excited me very much and I took the first opportunity, soon after I heard of it, to ask Bapak about it. But what Bapak said was: "In India very difficult."

And, together with the answer to my question about how Subud would affect the world, this altered my time-picture completely. Bapak said that we should "not try to go faster than God" in our own efforts at spiritual development or in our expectations for the world at large.

These expectations and highly charged hopes caused some of us great disappointment, particularly when we found that, like the British, we had "lost India".



The truly practical quality of what we learn in Subud about the various forces which influence man is evident in what Bapak says about politics.

I once asked one of Bapak's oldest helpers in Indonesia for an explanation of a peculiar phenomenon I had noticed in the growth of Subud in the past few years.

Q. "In every group that I have visited I find that most of the members are middle class, relatively more educated and belonging to what is called the 'intelligentsia'. Why is it that Subud has not yet

attracted larger numbers of working people and peasants?”

A. “Is this question important to you or is it only theory?”

Q. “No. Not theory. Most of our countries in the so-called democratic world are ruled by governments elected by people who are mostly workers and peasants. It stands to reason, does it not, that if these voters came to Subud, they would be able to bring a better judgement to bear on their choice of rulers and policies?”

A. “What you mean is that it would be better to start from the bottom, rather than the top – from this elite of educated people?”

Q. “It seems so.”

A. “Is your view of the democratic process that power is passed on in a pyramidal order, the people at the bottom giving power to those immediately above them and they, in turn, passing it on upward and inward toward the centre, so that the centre finally derives its sovereign power from the people?”

Q. “That is as good a description of democracy as I’ve heard. Is that not the way it works?”

A. “Answer that yourself. Is not the reality different from this? Bapak says that what really happens is that an elite which calls itself professional politicians or party candidates goes out from the centre to the periphery, acquires power from the people and returns to the centre armed with this power. It is a movement from the top to the bottom rather than the other way about. People at the top decide what the people should want – this is called policy or planning or leadership – and the people have not much power to effect their decisions. When it becomes intolerable there are revolutions which are also engineered and captured by people belonging to this elite. Is that not how it goes?”

Q. “Yes, I agree that it is more like this in practice. But then, did not Christ walk among the poor?”

A. “He did. But when did Christianity spread among the people? Only after Emperor Constantine was converted. Then the teaching of Christ spread rapidly. It is always like that. Even Communism as a religion spread from above.”

Q. “I see the point. But my observation, however, is that people in humbler circumstances are more inclined to be religious minded.”

A. “True. But is it also not a fact that most people who are regarded as being ‘religious minded’ are interested in religion primarily as a protection against black magic, evil spells cast on

them and their families, possible misfortunes in the future or to ask the gods for special favours?”

Q. “This explains why even in Buddhist temples the main attraction is the devalas where vows are made and the various gods of the Hindu pantheon are constantly being propitiated and invoked to intercede in one misfortune or another.”

A. “Bapak says that Subud is for discriminating or critical people who will be able to judge the truth of what they receive, without blindly accepting anything merely because Bapak or any of the helpers say it. When such people receive and progress spiritually then they will be able to help others who are not as fortunate as they are. Until they are able to help, their interest in the welfare of the ‘poorer people’ you refer to, is mostly sentimentality. Is it not?”

I accepted the justice of the rebuke without hesitation because although harsh, it was clear and administered without a trace of malice, clinically and disinterestedly as Bapak’s judgements about people always are.

On another occasion, at the Subud Centre in Singapore, we were talking with Bapak who was in a very communicative mood about politics. He showed us the close connection that should exist between what we had learnt about the different forces which exist and the proper government of a country.

“A government need consist of only five ministers,” Bapak said, “A Minister of Power, Industry and Commerce (Material), a Minister of Food and Agriculture (Vegetable), a Minister of Police and the Armed Forces (Animal), a Minister of Justice and Education (Human) and the Prime Minister.” He concluded with a broad smile, “Not fifteen or thirty as many countries in the East now have.”

In the course of the same conversation Bapak told us that there were, broadly speaking, four different types of people. He checked them off one by one: at the bottom, people who are Incurable (those who habitually prefer to do the wrong thing even if they know what is right); people who are Acquisitive (those who always want to acquire everything they encounter; even spiritual progress); people who want to DO good and, the rarest, people who want to BE good.

Bapak must have known that I, within myself, was rapidly estimating whether I belonged to category three or four or both because he smiled broadly at me and said: “All of us have all four levels in us, one or two more dominant than the others.”

The best example in my knowledge of how Bapak, in his own life, practises the principles of Subud – in this case the basic principles of surrender, submission, sincerity and patience – took place in November 1958 in Colombo.

The Prime Minister of Ceylon at that time imagined that Subud was a subversive political organization in league with “American Imperialism”, a secret society practising strange forms of magic and voodoo and intent on destroying his power by mystic means. Just before latihan one evening, the Chief of Police, who was a member of Subud, rushed in to report that he had just returned from the Prime Minister’s office where he had been informed that his association with “a subversive group” was unforgivable and that Pak Subuh would be forcibly deported as an “undesirable alien” on the following day. He asked me to convey this information to Bapak and returned to his duties.

Heavy of heart, my mind buzzing with alarm and amorphous fears, I charged up the stairs to Bapak’s quarters. Up the other flight of stairs panted Dr. Musa Djoemena, the Indonesian Ambassador to Ceylon, who had joined Subud in Ceylon, intent on the same doleful mission. He had also been summoned by the Prime Minister and told that this dangerous man, Pak Subuh, would be sent away from the country “at dawn”. Bapak came out to his dining table and asked us to sit before we spoke our pieces.

“Receive,” he said, and we closed our eyes and became quieter.

“Now you may tell Bapak what has happened,” Icksan interpreted.

The story tumbled out from me and Dr. Djoemena gave his first hand description of his interview.

“What should we do now?” I asked, aching for action.

Bapak looked at us for a while and smiled as though at a private joke.

“Surrender,” he replied in English.

“But Bapak,” I appealed, “this man really believes that Subud is a dangerous organization and is determined to do what he says.”

“Surrender,” repeated Bapak.

“Is there nothing for us to do?” I asked.

“Yes. Surrender,” Bapak repeated.

“How? What does it mean to surrender at a time like this?”

“If you oppose, his hostility becomes stronger. So surrender,” Icksan interpreted.

“What will Bapak do now if the Prime Minister carries out his threat?” Dr. Djoemena asked.

“Bapak? Surrender. If Bapak has to go tomorrow, it is God’s will. If not God’s will, Bapak will stay. Best, after Bapak leaves, to meet for a while, in smaller groups – three or four groups at various houses, at different times, not to attract attention. That is one way to surrender. But now, best to do latihan.”

As it happened, nothing was done about Bapak. He actually stayed with us two weeks longer than he had originally intended.

Virtues and vices

ONE of the women in the Colombo group asked how we could know when we had progressed in our latihan.

Bapak replied that when we had progressed enough to make a difference we would not need to ask such a question. We would know. He added: “When a seed is planted and the plant starts growing, it has no knowledge of its growth. One day it is at one point, the next day at another point – but the process is gradual and the change is small. But later, when it begins to bear fruit, there is a distinct change. It now knows that it has fruit. One day it has one fruit, another day two and so on. The progress is now measurable. It is like this in Subud.”

Another member said, rather dejectedly, that she felt she was not progressing at all because she had no unusual experiences to relate. This was a very common attitude, especially among those who read about other people’s extraordinary experiences published in the *Chronicle* and other publications. Many of us never realize that only a tiny minority of people in Subud have unusual experiences and that only a very few of them ever write about them. It was inevitable therefore, that they should feel “left out” as this woman did.

Bapak’s reply was: “When a stream is flowing peacefully to its destination it has no experience of movement. It is flowing as it should. But if some boulders are put in its path then the water swirls around them, and its flow is disturbed. Now it will have experience of something unusual. It is the same with the flow of the Subud force through us.”

This explained why the oldest members in Subud made relatively few overt movements in latihan and spoke very little, if at all, about their experiences because their experience was already assimilated as an integral part of the flow of their lives. But, at our level, we are disappointed if we don’t see spiritual fireworks.

I shall never forget the very proper looking gentleman in Ceylon who complained to Sooty Banda that he had experienced nothing since coming to Subud. Whipping out his closely annotated

diary, he said, “Look here, one hundred twenty-eight latihans up to date and nothing to show for it!”

Sooty asked sympathetically: “Nothing? Nothing has changed?”

“No, nothing at all,” the man answered, adding confidentially, “unless you count the fact that I was constipated for twenty years and I now have two motions a day.”

The advice given in Bapak’s explanation to helpers when opening people: “Do not try to calm the mind yourself, the mind will become calm by itself,” produced a plethora of questions. People who had practised – or at any rate heard of – Buddhist or Yogic meditation could hardly believe their ears when they heard that no effort was needed for the calming of the mind. Others who used their minds a great deal and found their thoughts careering along as usual during the latihan could not see how the mind would become calm “by itself” when its traffic of thought was incessant.

A helper sent by Bapak gave us a memorable explanation of this which helped me very much:

“Bapak asks you,” he said, “to consider that you are sitting beside a pond, the surface of which is disturbed. If you try to press the water down to calm it with your hands you will disturb it more. If you blow on it intending to calm it – you will disturb it more. If you press it down with a board, you will disturb it still more. All you *can* do is to sit as quietly as possible and wait. Then the force of gravity, which is another manifestation of the force of God, will calm the pond. By itself!”

Another question which keeps constantly popping up is about Bapak’s smoking. Everywhere there are well-meaning people who shake their heads sadly and wisely at this evident aberration of a “Holy Man”. Regarding smoking as one of the more prominent of the deadly sins, they cannot understand how Bapak indulges in smoking.

One of them could not contain herself once when she saw Bapak smoking cigarette after cigarette at a meeting in England.

“What does Bapak get out of smoking so much?” she asked, rather caustically.

Bapak smiled when the question was interpreted to him. His smile stretched wider as he replied, almost confidentially:

“Nothing.”

Soon after Bapak visited Coombe Springs for the first time they asked him what more they could do for his comfort. Was there

anything he needed, perhaps, in his apartment?

“Yes,” said Bapak, “a television set.”

One of the ladies hastened to explain that television wasn’t quite the thing; that, culturally speaking, it was a bit low-brow and that she herself had a set at home but had placed it in the kitchen – for the maid and the children. Bapak said: “But Bapak *likes* television.”

One might say – ah, but that is Bapak. What about the influence of such things on others?

An experience with Icksan in Colombo helped to resolve that kind of doubt for me. Icksan and I had gone swimming one afternoon when we hoped that the hotel pool would be deserted and we could have a quiet talk. We were sitting sipping a drink, when the hotel cabaret star, a brassy, blonde bomb-shell for whom I had written some topical lyrics, came over to join us. As she spoke, gesticulating theatrically, her body bursting out of her bikini, I felt very bad that I had brought Icksan there and exposed him to this “impurity”. I sat silent while she entertained us with story after story of her connubial disasters and casual conquests in the hot spots of the world. I was becoming more and more angry that she wouldn’t leave us, but I noticed that Icksan seemed not to be troubled at all. In fact, he seemed to be having a whale of a time. He was nodding his head, saying: “Yah? Yah? Yah?” and wagging his head alternately saying: “Really? No! Really? Funny! Funny!” and so on.

When she had left eventually, I hastened to apologise to Icksan for having brought him there and subjected him to all that “heaviness”.

Icksan said: “I do not feel heffy. You feel heffy. You make yourself feel heffy.”

I asked him what he meant.

“You think all the time how heffy for Icksan and *you* feel headache. But Icksan say, Yah! Yah! Yah! and Funny! Funny! You remember? Ah! Latihan. Icksan ask protection. So no headache!”

This incident also gave point and clarity to what another helper had told us once: “We now practise the latihan twice or three times a week. As we progress we will be oftener in a state of latihan. We will be in conscious touch with our soul more constantly. Much later we can hope to reach a stage when, without latihan, we will not be able to live at all, like a fish gasping for breath out of the water. The state of latihan is the proper medium for a human being

to exist in – as he progresses toward the true human level.”

It also showed me that because we were in Subud there was no reason to run away from the things that make up our ordinary life. At the beginning, I, like some of my friends, thought that I should not blunt the edge of my new-found spiritual interest by exposing it to the world I lived and worked in. It was something precious to be burnished and made finer in solitude. I spoke about this to one of the helpers from Indonesia who said: “It is easy to imagine you are strong when there is no opposition. It is easy to imagine you are virtuous when there is no temptation.” This rang a true bell but not for me. I became increasingly convinced that I could not continue in my profession of journalism – with its minute by minute pre-occupation with the ugliness of human relationships.

My wife’s family owned a small island in a large, rather isolated lake. It had a house and the minimum necessary comforts. It provided all the vegetables, rice and coconuts that a family needed.

I told Bapak that I had decided to resign my job and take my family with me and seclude ourselves in that island. I said that I was fed up with journalism and the “power of the press”, and all that went with it.

Bapak listened, smiling, and remarked:

“In six months’ time you will be king of the island!”

Bapak’s answer reminded me of another glorious moment of brilliant clarity which occurred during a session with Krishnamurti. A German industrialist who had “renounced” the material life had come out East and was living in the jungles of Ceylon as a “swami”. In his white robes and beard he came to one of Krishnamurti’s meetings. At the end of the talk he offered a comment: “I do not think that it is possible to reach the point of ‘choiceless awareness’ you speak of as long as one remains in the material world. It is essential to renounce the material world. It is essential to renounce everything in life if we wish to attain enlightenment.”

Krishnamurti: “What have you renounced, sir?”

Swami: “I was an industrial magnate in Germany. I had great wealth and power. I renounced my wealth and the power it gave me. I had many women. I used to drink. I had many vices. I renounced my vices.”

Krishnamurti: “Ah – but sir, have you renounced your virtues?”

The dark times

IN my fourth year in Subud I went through an extremely unpleasant experience. Suddenly I ceased to feel any movement, outer or inner, during the latihan. I attended latihans as regularly as I could but there was no experiencing of the state of latihan as I had known it before. There was no difference between the ordinary state in which I lived my life and my state during the half hour in latihan. The same thoughts and feelings which dominated me in my ordinary existence persisted in the latihan.

I also felt I might have lost something that had been very precious to me. Icksan had shown me how to “feel inner” frequently during my working day. Whenever I felt tense or had a moment’s break from the day’s chores I would collect my attention and sense the existence of the force which had been lodging within me. As soon as I became aware that it was still there, alive and moving, there was a spontaneous and pleasurable response, an inner acknowledgement of its presence: “Ahhh, yes!” That was all. When this happened, the tensions vanished and my inner state became calmer.

This faculty, too, had become dimmer.

Week after week, month after month I sought to regain my familiar sense of the force of the latihan. But it eluded me. At one stage I even concluded that I was the unique case of a man who had to be “re-opened”. However, even the distinction of being unique did not lift my spirits.

Finding myself in Zurich during this period, I flew to London to consult an experienced helper. He was very sympathetic and suggested that I was passing through a period which the Christian mystics referred to as “the dark night of the soul.” I returned home still dejected. I felt that this explanation was inapplicable to me. Ideas like “dark night of the soul” were much too rich for me. In my state I felt that my soul did not deserve even a dark night because it must be minuscule, if it existed at all.

The worst aspect of the spell was that gradually I was sheering away from latihan. I had begun travelling a great deal and I found

that, unlike during my previous journeys, I was not so anxious to seek out Subud groups on the chance of joining them at latihan. And when this happened, the misery would pile up within me so intensely that after a while I would feel I needed a latihan desperately. On one occasion I arrived in Calcutta in this state to discover, to my acute disappointment, that the Subud group had scattered for the vacation and that my closest friends in India, Ian and Mariani Arnold, had left for a beach resort named Puri. I asked my professional colleagues in Calcutta to get me a return rail ticket to Puri that very night. Until I arrived there I did not realize that Puri was two hundred and fifty miles away. We had time for one latihan that night and I took the next train back. I had travelled five hundred miles for a latihan but I still felt empty and deserted by the inner force that had sustained my state for four years.

This inner depression inevitably spoiled my personal relationships as I went about like a bear with ten sore teeth in his head. But when I reached the point of feeling that I was irredeemable, I got another opportunity of visiting Bapak in Indonesia and asking him to help me out of my despondency.

Bapak heard me through and said (Prio Hartono interpreting): “In school there is class for physical exercise and class for mathematics. You like physical exercise. So you like always to be in class for physical exercise. But sometimes necessary to go to mathematics class also.”

One of the oldest helpers in Indonesia explained further how this process occurs. “The latihan acts on various parts of the being of man as it is deemed necessary by the will of God. Sometimes it is the physical body, at other times it is the feelings, at still other times it is the mind and so on. People who receive the first manifestation of the working of the Subud force in their bodies are, therefore, lucky. At the very start they have overt *proof* of something new taking place. They can see and sense it in external movements. Those in whom the force first starts working in the brain, are not so lucky. They cannot see any external manifestation of a force at work. The purification of the brain, however, may be going on while the man himself may declare that he has not felt anything at all. The real difficulty in such a case is that the purification of the brain means the cleansing of the psychological content of the brain – which are a man’s thoughts. What are these thoughts except the ordinary things that he thinks about? So, in the latihan he finds that

he continues to think the same ordinary thoughts as he does out of latihan. He sees no difference between the state of being in latihan and his ordinary state. So he is disappointed. *What he does not realize is that in the state of latihan he actually is sufficiently conscious of these thoughts to discover that they are commonplace thoughts.* In his ordinary state he is not usually conscious of his thoughts. He *is* his thoughts. This is the difference between the two states in such a man. But he himself may not realize this.”

These explanations brought me instantaneous mental relief from the sense of despair I had endured for many months. But they did not bring back the taste of the latihan. I now knew I should not worry about it, but I still wished to experience distinctly once again the working of the latihan in me.

One evening at a latihan in Karachi, to my enormous gratitude, it returned. The small group there asked me to participate in the opening of a new member. Before the latihan began we sat awhile and talked. The probationer told us he was a member of various other spiritual systems and described his experiences. I was thinking: “Heavens! I am in a low enough state as it is. Why should I be afflicted with this man’s heaviness also?” I had not helped in opening anyone for nearly a year. I was unhappy that this should be the first experience after this long break.

Twenty minutes after the latihan started he broke into a loud spell of sobbing and, suddenly, Bill Smith, the other helper in the room and I began to sing. I felt the latihan strongly within me for the first time in almost a year. As soon as the latihan was over the new member came up to express his thanks. But I told him that I should thank him instead for helping me to feel the latihan so clearly after a long time. I felt I had learnt what Bapak meant when he told us that a newly opened man may really help someone who had been in Subud longer because the new man might have a much older soul. I also believe that there was another lesson for me in this experience: a helper must help if he is to receive help.

Personal epilogue

I HAVE one more story to tell. It is a very personal story which I feel I must write as a record of my profound gratitude to Subud, and to Bapak in person, for granting me incontrovertible proof of the mercy of God. Some of the events I am about to describe are still beyond the comprehension of my mind but my inner feelings understand them very well and have no questions. No logic can possibly explain to me, for instance, how I – by no stretch of imagination a model of spiritual or moral rectitude – should have been the beneficiary of such attention, but I know that my being is suffused by a warm sense of thankfulness whenever I recall it.

My wife was being delivered of our youngest son, Adil, on January 21, 1960. I was on the hospital verandah, not pacing as an expectant father is supposed to do, but writing an editorial for the evening newspaper of which I was the Editor. I remember the heading of this piece: DANGER. This was a part of my editorial efforts to warn the country that the new Prime Minister who had succeeded the man who had been assassinated a few months previously, was planning to subvert the democratic process and establish a police state in Ceylon. After my wife was taken to the operating theatre I went home to see about the children. Ed Kerner, who was staying with us on his home leave from his job in New York, showed me a telegram which had just arrived. It said: “Bapak wishes to see you here immediately,” and it was signed by Bomon-Behram around whom the Subud group in Bombay had grown. I requested Ed to make the necessary arrangements for me with the airlines, the Indian consulate, the exchange control, health and immigration departments and all the other authorities involved. I packed my bag and went back to the hospital to take my leave of my wife. The baby had been born and she was just coming out of the ether. I read the telegram to her and she nodded agreement that I should go.

At the airport I remembered that I had not taken leave from my employers and telephoned the managing director to say that I would be away in Bombay for a few days. All he asked was “Subud?”

I replied: "Yes, Subud," and off I went.

I arrived in Bombay at midnight, spent the early morning hours at the airport and went along to BB's apartment where Bapak was living, soon after daybreak. Bapak came out in his dressing gown and greeted me as though there was nothing at all unusual in my presence there that morning. He inquired about Sunetra, whether the baby was a boy or girl – named the boy ADIL – but said nothing about his summons. After a few minutes of this, he returned to his room saying: "Better wait here."

After an hour Rochanawati came out to greet me but, suddenly she stopped, covered her face, turned about, and fled as though she had seen an apparition.

Now I was really rattled, as you can imagine.

I sat and waited. I really learned for the first time how to wait. There were no newspapers, radio or cigarettes about – the customary supports of people like me who had never really experienced quietness. The only comfort I had was to try to "receive" whenever my thoughts built up into a dam of apprehensive tension.

After several hours Bapak came out again with Anwar Zakir. He said:

"Better not go back to Ceylon now." I raised an enquiring eyebrow.

"When Sunetra is well, better bring her and the children also and stay with Bapak."

I said nothing, waiting for an explanation. None was forthcoming. Bapak asked me to return again the next day and I left him.

On the following morning Bapak said: "Maybe not necessary to bring Sunetra and the family. You can go back, but not for ten days more."

I was about to burst into a flurry of questions when Bapak said: "Danger now past. But better wait for about ten days."

I could restrain myself no longer.

"What danger, Bapak?" I asked.

Bapak paused for a while and said almost casually but in a tone of great kindness toward me:

"Politics. If you had been in Ceylon yesterday you would have been killed."

"By whom Bapak? How?" I asked.

He then proceeded to describe this man in such acute detail that I was able to identify him immediately. Bapak said that this man

had been watching my house for two weeks for a suitable opportunity and had decided on the previous day as the right time.

At this point Rochanawati appeared, asked me to stay to lunch and explained her strange behaviour the previous morning. She said that she felt that she had actually seen an apparition – hence her hasty flight.

Later Bapak said: “Better leave your job.”

I asked how I should earn my living.

“You have been good journalist, but this journalism now finished. Now better write books,” he advised.

I said that writing books for an Eastern market would not bring enough to live on, that I had already written a book which my publishers had said was a best seller in Asia, but it had brought in very little money.

“Also better take job that takes you from place to place. You courier,” Bapak said. “Take job so you can visit many Subud centres.”

I asked who would give me such a job. There had been some talk about the possibility of a job with the International Press Institute but my company had refused to release me and I had not even sent in an application for the post. I could not see how I could get a job which would require me to travel.

“If job offered, better accept,” Bapak advised, adding with a smile: “If terms unsatisfactory, ask what you need.”

My mind refused to see any sense in all this but my inner feeling was convinced that it was right. I wrote out my resignation and mailed it to my directors, giving no explanations.

In the course of the next few days Bapak again referred to my immediate future.

“Your home, Malaya,” he said, “Ceylon now not good for you and family.”

This seemed even more unlikely.



I returned home shortly after and went directly to my friends in the Criminal Investigation Department to ask whether they were aware of the recent activities of the man that Bapak had described. They smiled very knowingly and asked what my special interest in this man was. I too smiled knowingly but said nothing further. They then said that they had been on this man’s trail for several weeks and

had observed his activities near my home for a period of thirteen days. He had then “lost interest”.

When I returned to my office, the Managing Director, who was an old friend of mine said: “What is all this about resigning your job?”

I said I had no explanation to give, but that I was through working in Ceylon. He was a little upset at my failure to provide even a meagre explanation of my decision to leave a job in which I had been treated extremely decently.

“This Subud business seems to have gone to your head,” he remarked rather sharply.

He had no idea how close he was to the truth.

“What are you going to do? You have no job offers from elsewhere, have you?” he asked.

I said that I had no notion of what I was going to do. Just then, the peon brought in an urgent telegram for me. It said: “Executive Board International Press Institute have decided offer you post Asian Representative stop. Please cable response in principle.”

The terms they were offering were stated further down. They were unacceptable as the salary was a little less than I was earning in Ceylon and would have been insufficient for a post of this nature.

I cabled back to Zurich stating my terms which they accepted the same day by international telephone. And so, within a few weeks, I was doing a new job which has been taking me from place to place all over the world during the past three years.

The International Press Institute had decided that my base should be Colombo. But very soon Colombo became impossible as headquarters because of the new Ceylon Government’s attitude to such concepts as the freedom of the press. The Institute thought I should move to India – but the Pakistan Press protested and threatened to quit the Institute if its Asian Representative was based in India. India did not like the idea of my being based in Pakistan. Burma was out of the question as the Press was muzzled. Singapore was impracticable since the Singapore Prime Minister and the press were hardly on speaking terms. The Indonesian Press was coerced by President Sukarno to surrender all its liberties just at this time and all the Indonesian members of the International Press Institute had their newspapers confiscated. Farther East was impractical as an Asian base because the bulk of my work was in South Asia. My range stretched from Karachi to Tokyo so it was decided that

Malaya, which was a half-way point and still enjoyed a great measure of democratic freedom, should be the Institute's Asian Headquarters. We moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1961 and have been supremely free of the sense of political oppression that had burdened us in Colombo. So, the last part of Bapak's advice to me was obeyed under the ineluctable compulsion of circumstances.

In March 1962, I went to Jakarta to pay my respects to Bapak. I asked him a question which had been nibbling at my thoughts for two years. I said: "I have seen Bapak's attitude to death – even the death of people very close to Bapak like Icksan. It is not what I am used to. Bapak does not regard death in the way we do. Yet Bapak interceded with events to save my life. Why did Bapak do this?"

Bapak's reply was very terse: "There is right time to die and wrong time to die. That was wrong time for you to die."

And he spoke about other things.

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I still do not understand, but perhaps I will one day before it is the right time for me to die.