



## THE LATIHAN OF SUBUD

The latihan is the reappearance of a primordial Power hidden within human beings and all creatures. This Power manifests itself in spontaneous bodily movements and utterances, a mood of tranquility and joy, clarity of awareness, and love for the Divine. It works progressively to cleanse and harmonize the conflicting elements of our being, to heal and to illuminate. Its essential nature is celebration and praise. It makes possible an increasingly profound realization of the Wisdom from which we ultimately spring and in which all things are embraced.

The term 'latihan' literally means exercise, and the latihan is in fact a spiritual exercise or practice but because it is entirely spontaneous it follows no pre-existing plan, and so cannot be either studied or taught. It cannot be directed or forced in any way, but is simply received, as a life and movement arising from the very centre of our being, in whatever forms are appropriate for the particular nature and condition of each one of us. Since the action of the latihan is cathartic as well as illuminating, its manifestations may occasionally be grotesque or unpleasant; more usually they are enjoyable, and at times they are of an extraordinary beauty but because these manifestations are simply the means by which we are gradually transformed, they are all to be accepted with gratitude and experienced with objectivity and detachment.

The latihan cannot be learned, but it can be transmitted from one person to another. All that is necessary is for the person who wishes to receive it to stand in the presence of someone who is actually receiving it, and to be willing to receive healing and illumination from the highest Source of our being. When a person has been "opened" has begun to receive the action of the latihan, the manifestations of the Power of the latihan will begin to emerge, often subtly and even imperceptibly, but occasionally with striking vividness. The process is in any case different in each person, and proceeds slowly or more rapidly according to the nature and strength of the individual. It is usual to receive the latihan for half an hour twice a week in the company of others (men with men and women with women) and later, when it is well established, for an additional half hour at home.

Like physical exercise, the latihan is most beneficial when practised regularly and in moderation, neither casually nor fanatically. Then its influence can radiate through our life, making itself felt not only in the sense of calm and well-being that we normally enjoy after each latihan, but also as a guiding presence in the midst of our daily activities. And as the years pass, we find more and more that the Power of the latihan within us can bring peace and healing to those around us, as long as we manage not to impede it with our personal preoccupations and reactions.

The natural expression of the latihan is in good will toward others. We experience a deep bond between ourselves and others who also receive the latihan, between ourselves and all human beings, and between ourselves and all the creatures with whom we share this universe. All of us who follow the latihan form an association in which our natural kinship as human beings becomes manifest through the latihan. This is not to suggest that our association is always harmonious; we are all in a process of gradual development and readjustment, and we naturally blunder collectively as well as individually. But beneath the usual mixture of personal affinities and disagreements we are united with each other and with the world by the unfathomable generosity of the latihan.

Our association is known by the name of "Subud", an acronym formed from three Javanese words (originally Sanskrit): 'Susila', 'Budhi' and 'Dharma'. Susila is living in accordance with the highest moral principles (or the highest teachings of our religion); Budhi is the Power of awakening that is within us; and Dharma is complete submission to the divine Source of our being. The term thus sums up the whole of our practice and our eventual goal. As an organization, Subud exists to support the process of the latihan and to provide a vehicle for its expression in the world.

Although spiritual in content, Subud does not constitute a religion. It includes members of every religion from

virtually every part of the globe, as well as many people who are not adherents of any religion. Since the experience of the latihan leads to an intuitive appreciation of the essential truth of all religions, Subud tends toward a spontaneous harmonizing of the various religious traditions without assimilating or subordinating one to another.

The latihan can be transmitted but it cannot be taught. This means that there cannot be very much in the way of teaching in Subud, or anyone who functions as a teacher; the real teacher after all is within. But a very general framework can be helpful in understanding (as far as is necessary) the process of the latihan, and sometimes to hear or read about another person's experiences in living with the latihan can bring one's own experience into focus. There is a role, then, for Subud literature, although its usefulness on any particular occasion will naturally depend on the current needs of the reader.

In the event of a serious spiritual problem, it is possible to seek guidance or clarification directly through the latihan by a procedure which we call "testing". This is simply to receive the latihan in response to a particular question; the form in which the latihan manifests itself (usually quite different from one's ordinary latihan) gives an answer (whether simple or complex) to the question. It is possible to test by oneself, but the response is more likely to be objective and comprehensive if one tests with one or more people qualified to assist in this way. These people are called "helpers". They are not in any sense spiritual authorities; they are simply members who are reasonably experienced in the latihan and who have been given the responsibility of testing with other members, timing the group latihans and opening new members. Testing is not infallible, and should never in any case be allowed to encroach on our autonomy as human beings: we are responsible for our own decisions. But it can be immensely helpful when we are confronted by difficult situations, and to have access to such a resource is in fact an extraordinary privilege.

The latihan itself is something extraordinary in the world and in the life of each person who receives it. Any member of Subud is of course free to stop practising the latihan and to leave the association at any time; but a person once opened remains opened. To receive the contact with the Power of the latihan is to be changed at the very centre of our being, and the change is irrevocable. The decision to be opened should accordingly be made consciously and with as clear an understanding of what is involved as is possible under the circumstances. To allow time for careful consideration of the decision, we require applicants to wait for three months before actually being opened.

The outer organization of Subud naturally needs money for its operation: the provision and maintenance of space for the latihan is obviously essential, but communication and travel are also necessary for the health of our association. But the organization is funded entirely by voluntary donations. Each member has an obligation to make some contribution toward the cost of the facilities we use; but the amount has to be left to the judgement and good will of the individual.

The latihan must in a sense be as old as the universe. But in the form in which we know it in Subud, it began in Indonesia in the early decades of this century with a remarkable man named Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo, to whom we generally refer conveniently (and with affection and respect) as "Bapak", the polite term of reference and address for elderly men in Indonesia. The latihan began in him spontaneously with a powerful experience in which a light like the sun seemed to descend and enter him from above. He followed the latihan by himself for a number of years, until it was made clear to him that it could be transmitted to others, that it was for all human beings, whatever their race, culture or religion, and that he was on no account to proselytize. Since then it has spread, partly through books and other literature, but mainly through personal contact, all over the world. Apart from a short period in the 1950s, its expansion has been very gradual like the growth of a tree. How it will develop in the years to come is of course impossible to predict; by nature, the latihan is something that goes beyond our expectations. In any case, we have a strong sense that we are at the very beginning.

-- Leonard Priestley