



WHAT IS THE "SUBUD EXPERIENCE"?

By Aliman Sears

"Do not believe anything unless you experience it for yourself." These are wise words. Many people today, influenced heavily by scientific materialism, claim that the largest or greatest forces in the universe are human beings and the laws of natural science. These forces are certainly great, but it is possible to determine for oneself if there are forces greater than humanity and science. People with a sincere wish and an open mind can experience the "Subud latihan" and judge for themselves whether or not there is a greater power in the universe. This "latihan" or "spiritual exercise" is a way to experience the power of the universe directly. Some choose to call this power "God" while others call it "Allah" or "Atman" or "Spirit" or simply a "Force" or "Power" that pervades all things. The label is less important than the experience. Sceptics and non-believers alike have changed their worldview because they finally stopped letting others tell them there were no forces "above" humanity, and opted to discover for themselves whether or not something more exists.

This "experiential" aspect is why Subud is not a religion. Subud is not a belief but an "experience." A religion has beliefs and dogmas, a set of rules and rituals that are imposed from outside the self. These rules are dictated and controlled by priests or ministers or councils, and written down in official documents such as the Holy Bible and other books that may exist. In Subud there are no dogmas, rules, priests, gurus, holy books or philosophies. Again, there is only the experience of the latihan that anyone can have, and they can judge for themselves. Once someone has been "opened" or had the experience of the latihan, they may either interact with others in Subud in a social

manner, or they may choose not to be socially involved. In Subud there are no rituals, no rules and no obligations. If a person happens to be following a religion, they can continue to practice their religion after they are "opened" because Subud has no rules or beliefs, thus Subud cannot conflict with any religion. In the same manner, those who do not agree with organized religion also may be in Subud because, in fact, Subud is not a religion.

But if there is no religion in Subud, no beliefs or dogmas, no books or philosophies to follow, no priests or gurus to follow, and no social meetings or sermons to attend, then what IS Subud? The essence of Subud is so simple it usually slips right past the awareness of someone who is not familiar with Subud. Subud is simply this: a group of people, from all walks of life, from all over the globe, from different backgrounds and different religions, as well as open-minded atheists and agnostics with no religion, who all have one thing in common: At some point in their lives they undertook to discover for themselves if there are forces greater than humanity and science. And they did this by being "opened." This "opening" is standing in a room with other Subud members and simply surrendering their wishes and desires, renouncing for a few moments the belief that there is no God or higher force or power, and remaining open to see what they feel. That's it. In a sense, it sounds too simple. Anyone with any kind of background or from any walk of life with little or no preparation can participate in this experience. It is open to all who ask. During this "opening" most people feel (some slowly at first, some more quickly) a spontaneous experience that begins to take shape in their feelings and in their body. This is the experience of the latihan, and is different for every person.

If the latihan is simply a spontaneous and generic experience and not connected with a particular religion, then why do things written about Subud describe it as a "spiritual" group and use words like "worship" and "God"? Because over the years, some people receiving this latihan experience have discovered it has the effect of cleansing their being, their mind and body. Some people experience physical and emotional healing. Some feel a new confidence and balance in their life that comes from a higher source. Some people claim to feel and know it comes from God or from something higher than the human level. Others simply surmise it must come from something higher because they receive

this new knowledge and confidence in their life without reading books or being preached to; they receive it as a result of doing the latihan for about 20 minutes two times a week. The latihan somehow increases a person's awareness and spontaneously opens them up to new dimensions of themselves and others. These dimensions are ones that they did not know existed, or vaguely felt at times, but were not fully conscious of. All these effects of healing, cleansing, increase of awareness and mental balance are the same kinds of benefits that traditional religion claims to provide. Meditate in Zen Buddhism, give your life to Christ, or participate in the Muslim prayers and study the holy books, and you may obtain these benefits. This is why the words "spiritual" and "worship" and "God" are used in Subud, because Subud claims to promote the same benefits as religion, and the benefits come from some higher source. The difference is that religion is something you are immersed in; you study about, conform to, and work AT, while Subud is something that works spontaneously from within your own Self, and works ON you. In Subud we "worship God" but "worship" does not necessarily mean using your will and kneeling down before an alter and repeating some previously learned words, and "God" does not mean a Super Being with a white beard sitting up in a heaven on a throne. "Do not believe anything unless you experience it for yourself."