

Absurd Subud

By Merin Nielsen

Maybe we should make Subud a formal religion, and stop apologetically pretending it is inter-faith. Bapak could be proclaimed God's prophet for our time, and *Susila Budhi Dharma* our holy book, supplemented by Bapak's talks, and his birthday could be our holy day — on the solstice, no less — officially. The new religion would officially encourage talent testing, name testing, selamatans for the dead, and latihan for the sick and also to move along pesky spirits. We would hope to marry other Subud members, raising the chance of spiritually blessed descendants to help humanity through the tough times ahead. Latihan would remain available to non-believers, providing every applicant were properly introduced to Bapak's talks, as well as enterprises, Susila Dharma, SICA and Subud Youth. We would still open people who don't embrace our religion — they could never be helpers though.

Recognising Subud as a religion would, of course, bring persecution in some countries and mockery in others, but these are small prices when the fate of souls, and even that of the world, is at stake. After all, Bapak was clearly super-human, and it was mainly to protect Subud in its infancy that he was so modestly self-effacing. It's time we were less timid and more upfront about Bapak's role in God's mysterious plan, whereby Islam and Christianity will be united through the latihan, which is our direct, personal worship of the One Almighty God. As such, it's what the mainstream religions lack, but according to God's Will eventually people from all faiths will share in the latihan. In the beginning, naturally, we'd expect them to treat Bapak's talks as just fairy tales, but eventually....

On second thought, maybe not. Perhaps we should all just surrender fully in our latihan, and leave the rest to God. Then we'd start to have more wonderful latihan experiences, making us noticeably and individually more wonderful people. Then other people would more often ask how come, till lots of them give latihan a go and they too have wonderful experiences. Within a few years practically everyone in the world would be regularly doing latihan, and we'd all have lives wonderfully guided by God. Religions would ultimately disappear as their doctrines dissolved away. Instead, everyone would gradually perceive the reality that Bapak spoke of — the relationships of the life forces, the soul, the need for purification, the significance of ancestors, the Great Life Force, the potential perfection of human beings, the seven levels, spiritual progress and the prospect of heaven. This would require no learning, being self-evident to everyone via their inner feeling and those wonderful latihan experiences. Belief systems would be obsolete, and only Subud's would remain.

There's increasingly a third idea floating around that Subud members could try something called Open Subud. At first glance, it's hard to spot a supporter of Open Subud, as they do the latihan with other Subud members and often look much the same, but they're definitely different. They have no clear-cut manifesto, but tend to adopt certain unconventional positions. Broadly speaking, an Open Subud supporter might, for example:

- (1) view all Subud members as equal, giving no priority to the status of helpers, except in pragmatic ways;
- (2) attribute no specially exalted status to Bapak's talks and ideas;
- (3) acknowledge that Bapak said some things that were sensible, some that weren't, and many that were loaded with religious content;
- (4) avoid making claims about Bapak in terms of anyone or anything extraordinary;
- (5) not believe in any special role or destiny for Subud;

- (6) prefer to freely maintain his or her own opinions about the nature of the latihan, rather than accept any particular belief system, ideology or collective view of inner reality;
- (7) have reservations about the value of testing, especially for abstract or vaguely worded questions;
- (8) not readily participate in world latihans, latihans for dead or sick people, selamatans, fasting, cleansing of premises, or other Javanese-Islamic traditions;
- (9) not regard the latihan as generally superior to all the other so-called 'spiritual', meditative, contemplative, inner-directed, life-affirming, psychological or communal practices;
- (10) consider the latihan to be potentially beneficial for many people, but certainly not all;
- (11) wish the latihan would get more advertising, so that lots more people could hear of it, if only to stop it from disappearing in many places; and
- (12) see themselves as latihan practitioners foremost, and only secondarily as members of Subud.

Hmm, this third scenario seems a little pompous, or a bit far-fetched. It's surely absurd, isn't it?