

Do We Really Need a New Explanation of the Latihan?

by Sjahari Hollands

‘Bapak will now explain the latihan.’ Bapak begins this way over and over again in his talks. In fact, an explanation of the latihan seems to be the primary topic of almost all of the 1,692 talks that Bapak gave between March 1957 and May 1987. It would seem that after so many hours of talking, Bapak still didn’t feel that he had explained the latihan fully, because we still didn’t totally understand. Be that as it may, at this point in time Bapak’s talks are the only source we have for an explanation of what the latihan actually is.

It has been suggested by some Subud members, including several of the contributors to Subud Vision, that Bapak’s explanations are not suitable for the times we live in because they rely too much on his own cultural and religious background. It is suggested that Subud needs to develop alternative explanations of the latihan using language and images from a variety of cultures. I understand there are several projects already underway, including one by the Subud Vision Editors, to develop such explanations. Some have already been proposed.

I have to admit that most of the alternative explanations I have read so far do not satisfy me. The essential core principles underlying the latihan haven’t been addressed there, at least to my own satisfaction.

What should a new explanation of the latihan look like then? What would be its qualities? What features would it have? What would we want to be included? What excluded? How would these decisions be made?

In order to begin to answer these questions, I propose that we first have to list some of the latihan’s essential characteristics. We have to identify the basic core assumptions that we are working from. In my opinion, any new explanation of the latihan must somehow include within it these basic core assumptions.

Assumptions are those things that we accept to be intrinsically true. Assumptions are things that we accept on faith and which cannot be proved. Do we have core assumptions in Subud? Of course we do.... What are they?

I have been in Subud a long time. Over these years I have acquired by a process like osmosis an understanding of what seem to me to be the core assumptions of Subud. Many of these ideas have arisen out of my own experience of the latihan. Most of them can be found in Bapak’s talks, and others are in the guiding principles of the organization.

Perhaps the following list could be improved upon, but it is what I have come up with at this point. Others might disagree with it, or want to word it differently. It may not be complete, or accurate. Some of these points may not be ‘core’. I would welcome suggestions. (Please respond in the comments section.)

Anyway, for what it is worth, here is my list of core assumptions:

1. The latihan is not found only in Subud, nevertheless it is found in Subud.
2. The latihan can be experienced by anyone anywhere and has existed in the world for all time.

3. The latihan is accessible to anyone who desires it, predictably, and on a daily or weekly basis, and in the midst of ordinary life.

4. Although there are many exceptions, in general the Subud Latihan can only begin in a person after it is passed to them during the latihan itself - i.e. at the opening.

5. Something happens in the opening whereby the latihan somehow begins spontaneously within the person who is desiring it.

6. In the Subud latihan, we close our eyes and move spontaneously and follow the impulses that arise in us. However, just because someone closes their eyes and follows the impulses arising in them, they are not necessarily doing the latihan. In other words, there is an additional element at work within the Subud latihan.

7. Whatever is happening in the latihan, its field of activity is towards something we call the soul of a human being. We understand and believe that the soul is being awakened in an action mediated by a higher creative power which somehow results in the movements that are being made.

If we accept a set of fundamental precepts like these and begin to develop an explanation of the latihan based upon them, then there would be further questions that arise and would have to be addressed. Questions like these:

What is this process that is happening? What is the difference between simply following an impulse to do something and following the latihan? Is there a difference in impulses? Is it a qualitative difference? If an impulse is simply an energy of some kind, then is there a difference in energies? Are there different categories of energies? Are some energies of a 'higher' nature than others? Is the latihan energy of a 'higher' nature? If not, then why should I do it? If not then how can it possibly act at the level of the soul of a human? If it is a 'higher' energy, then what is it higher than? What is the next level down? Are there gradations of energies? What is the soul? How is it that the latihan touches the soul?

Any explanation of Subud and the latihan must cover and include our core assumptions as well as the other questions that arise from them. So far there is only one explanation of the latihan which comes anywhere near doing this: Bapak's. It is true that his explanation is given with images and ideas that arise out of his Javanese cultural background, but nevertheless it is all there. The system he presents is a complete one, and adequately includes within it all the core assumptions.

Is there another explanation of the Subud Latihan that goes as deep? Is it possible to find another explanation that does as well as the one Bapak presented to us in his hundreds of talks?

I agree with many of the contributors to Subud Vision who say that Subud needs to integrate more fully into the world. I agree that Subud needs to be able to explain what the latihan is to people, using language and images they can relate to. All of this is true.

At the end of the day however, we only have one complete explanation - Bapak's. In my view, our attention should not be focussed on trying to arrive at a new explanation of what the latihan is. There is no need to do this because the one we have is more than adequate. What we should be doing instead is to take Bapak's explanation and translate it into other cultural frameworks. Apply it within other belief systems. We need to be able to present Bapak's explanation using a variety of mythical and religious images.

In order to do that however we need to come to a much deeper understanding of the core principles of the latihan. Before we can explain Subud and the latihan to other people, we must understand what it is ourselves.

After all, having given more than a thousand talks on that topic, Bapak must have felt that we still didn't really get it. Otherwise, why would he have had to explain it all over again?