Second Interview with Ibu Rahayu in 1976: Why Am I So Listless?

I had been living in Cilandak for about eighteen months, teaching at what was then the Joint Embassy School –since then renamed the Jakarta International School. I was enjoying my work, my life in Indonesia, and was deeply immersed in the spiritual waters of Cilandak at that time. With no television, I became increasingly devoted to reading literary fiction for my entertainment. The school had an extensive library as did several of the residents on the compound. I was after all an English major at University so it was like falling off a log to become enamored with great literature again. From this preoccupation, the desire to write poetry arose and I began reading and writing poetry as well. Coincidentally, during my latihans around this time, I had been saying the word. WRITE, WRITE. As you can imagine this spurred me to on to more and more writing and I began spending my extra-curricular hours in a “room of my own”, reading and writing poetry, attempting with great sincerity to follow my guidance. It was around this time that I fell ill and was diagnosed with tropical sprue, a serious intestinal virus that depleted my energy enormously—creating within me a state of lethargy and apathy that was almost alarming. I didn’t want to hurt myself, but I had no interesting in living!

So in the midst of this tropical sprue attack, taking a day off from my teaching duties seemed necessary. And on that day I found myself aimlessly wandering around the compound. After a bit, I slipped into the “Big House” where Bapak and the girls lived. Tuti was there and we were shooting the breeze together. She was curious why I wasn’t at work and wanted to know what ailed me. As I talked about, it dawned on me that something was serious was going on and I asked her if I could talk with Ibu Rahayu—who just happened to be there that morning. Five minutes later Tuti hustled me into see Ibu Rahayu.

After Ibu and I exchanged pleasantries, I began to talk to her about my writing, my interest in literature and my powerful receivings to WRITE in latihan, and the efforts I had been making to follow this receiving. I also told her about the state of apathy that had recently come over me. “It’s as if I don’t care whether I live or die, “ I told her. Ibu Rahayu had several very interesting things to say about these phenomena and 30 years later I’m still understanding more and more what she may have meant.

One thing she said about my listlessness and apathy was and I’m going to have to paraphrase here was that my inner was becoming too dominant so that these feelings of apathy and listlessness arose from this imbalance. However, this didn’t seem to concern her. What she focused her attention on was my new found commitment to following the guidance of my latihan to WRITE. She said to me that it wasn’t necessary for me to forcibly follow my latihan receiving. She explained that we often don’t quite understand what our receiving actually means and that the relationship between the inner life of the latihan and our outer life was like two separate trains going down a track in the same direction. So that one’s inner life had its own rhyme and reason and one’s outer life followed its own direction. She said that if my true work was that of a writer, it would simply arise naturally as I followed the course of my work over time. She then went on to say that at this time of my life to isolate myself in my room and write could be harmful since what really was necessary was for me to be natural and sociable so that I could meet someone and marry. She encouraged me to behave more “normally”, join with other young people on the compound in social activities.

I did follow her advice and gave up intensive reading and writing in my room to join in the social life of the compound. Soon the apathy and listlessness disappeared and I was having fun with my friends once again. Thirty years later in my work as an educational consultant writing proposals, grants, and evaluations I am writing all the time. So it’s not as if my receiving of 30 years ago was incorrect, it was my interpretation, my misunderstanding that led to trouble. What I’ve come to see as I have witnessed the path of the latihan is that sometimes I will receive something years in advance of its manifestation in my outer life. I feel more confident in making decisions in my outer life based on common sense and reason so that what arises is a more natural and organic life trajectory.