Third Interview with Ibu Rahayu 1981: What can you do with a broken heart?

I had left Indonesia in 1977 after Bapak suggested that I return to California. My reentry was not easy. I encountered problems in everything I undertook. I was floundering. First, I went to live in San Diego near my good friend Sulfiati Harris, but as welcoming as her family was that didn’t seem to work out. Getting good work in California for a teacher was a struggle; at that time there were few jobs with hundreds of applicants applying for each open position. Not able to find a teaching position I moved to San Francisco to work for East of Java, an Indonesian clothing boutique in Ghirardelli Square owned by Rachman Cantrell. I may have been a gifted teacher, but retail sales were way to hard for me. Living in San Francisco actually felt frightening having come from the quiet and peace in Indonesia. So a few months after arriving in San Francisco I moved to Marin which was somewhat quieter. Finding the right place to live was a huge struggle. I found myself flitting between San Diego. San Francisco, and Marin County never able to settle for long. Added to this I was having problems fitting in with new Subud groups which was mainly my due to my inability to adapt to California version of Subud life after living in Bapak’s home and probably due to my moving around so much. In the midst of all this my younger brother, Douglas, was killed in a car accident and that threw me even more off kilter.

Finally, I got a teaching position in a small private school on the outskirts of Beverly Hills at a horribly low salary but it was a job. I moved to Los Angeles and lived in a studio apartment where several other Subud members were living and was part of a thriving Subud group in Los Angeles. But I wasn’t happy there either. My job was problematic and Los Angeles was crazy making for me.

In 1979 I attended the International Congress in Toronto and reconnected with some English Subud friends whom I had met while I was living in Indonesia. One of these friends offered me a job in England and I happily went there; I was quite content not particularly with the work but with all the lovely Subud England members that I met in Central London and at Loudwater.

As you can imagine, I was still searching for a suitable husband but nothing seemed to happening for me in England. When I then received a letter proposing to me from a member in Los Angeles, I decided to leave England and return to Los Angeles to “give it a try”. And we did give it a try but it all fell apart after about six months and he married someone else immediately.

So it was In 1981 I returned to Indonesia and to Ibu Rahayu in broken state. All the difficulties that I had returning to the states and what I saw as my failure in the relationship left me sad and despairing. My heart was broken and my faith in myself was at a low point. I had been engaged to a Subud brother and that relationship fell apart and he quickly married another woman. I felt that my hesitancy in accepting his proposal had caused something that had been ordained by God to fall apart. What had I done wrong? Ibu's ’reply to this gnashing of teeth was simply: **If God wills something to happen, it does happen and nothing can stop it**. Then she said something to me which I found life changing:

**Some of us come to God through happiness and some through suffering. Halimah you come to God through suffering.**

I know it must seem strange but these words were to be of great comfort to me then and over the years. During this particular period when there were so many difficulties in my life and there were to be many later on, I had felt that, of course, I had done something wrong and was somehow not worshipping correctly, or sinning in some unknown way. After, it seemed that these difficulties were part of a path, not in a self-immolating way, but just something to be accepted as I grew in my worship.

Another bit of wisdom came in this interview. While this man and I were together, I kept receiving the name Mariam or Mariama. I thought perhaps it was a new name for me so I mentioned this to Ibu in our interview. She was a bit annoyed, “Didn’t you just recently receive the name Halimah? she asked. Yes, I admitted I had but I had kept on receiving this name in latihan. Here she replied with something else I needed to hear. (I am paraphrasing} “We don’t know the meaning of what we say in latihan; we have to refrain from the interpretation and let things unfold.” We can visualize our outer life as a train and our inner life as another train on parallel tracks, but not meeting. As it was, later in 1982 when my first child was conceived and born, I knew right away that her name was… Mariama {which Bapak confirmed.)

Finally, in this interview I took the opportunity to ask Ibu once again about my work. I said I was not happy as a classroom teacher and wanted some guidance about right work. She was quite firm that teaching was still good for me, but she conceded that perhaps I needed something additionally for my feelings. So, I rattled off my interests and talents, one by one.

**How about cooking, Ibu. Oh no**

**How about music, Ibu Oh no**

**How about gardening? No, said Ibu**

**How about writing? No, said Ibu**

Maybe I mentioned some other interests, but nothing seemed to resonate with Ibu Rahayu. Then she said out of the blue. Oh, **CLOTHES,** she said. At that moment my heart fell literally to the floor. When I had lived in Indonesia, I took great delight having dresses and outfits made for myself from beautiful Indonesian fabrics by a highly skilled dressmaker whose shop was in Blok A. Based on this experience when I returned home from Indonesia, I had taken a sewing class so I could continue designing and then making my own clothes. I cannot tell you how much I hated this class. To top it off the very simple straight skirt that I made could never be worn because it had a huge stain on the fabric that I had failed to notice when I cut the fabric. Hello.

Alarmed, I said to Ibu Rahayu, **I really don’t like sewing.** And Ibu laughed and said. **Oh no, not sewing, Halimah, SHOPPING.**

Oh wonders, I loved shopping for clothes and who knew it could be counted as a talent!