

# Exploring Memories of Meeting Mbah Prapto, the Founder of Jogèd Amerta

by Deny Hermawan



**THIRTEEN YEARS AGO**, on May 31, 2012, I visited Padepokan Lemah Putih in Karanganyar, Central Java, for the first time. It was quite an exhausting journey from Yogyakarta—I took a train to Solo and then continued by motorcycle with a friend.

At the time, I was still a journalist for the Kedauletan Rakyat media group in Yogyakarta. Why did I go there? It wasn't for a news report but to learn from Suprpto Suryodarmo, or Mbah Prpto, the creator of Amerta Movement or Jogèt Amerta. I had already heard that Jogèt Amerta was studied and applied in many countries worldwide by dance and movement artists, musicians, teachers, psychotherapists, art/music/drama therapists, installation artists, and other creative practitioners. It had a prestigious reputation.

Back then, I understood Jogèt Amerta as a form of non-stylized movement practice that focused on free movement, rooted in Buddhist Vipassanā meditation and Javanese Sumarah meditation. This was particularly interesting to me since I had been practicing Vipassanā meditation myself, even though I never considered myself good in dancing.

At Lemah Putih, Mbah Prpto welcomed me warmly. He was a kind, humble, and open-hearted person. I can't recall exactly what we discussed, but I remember asking about the history of the retreat center and the development of the movement arts. Unfortunately, I didn't record or take notes on our conversation, so my recollection is based solely on memory. However, I did manage to take some photographs of Mbah Prpto and the surroundings at Padepokan Lemah Putih.

### About Amerta

The word "Amerta" comes from Javanese (with roots in Sanskrit) and is also found in the Indonesian dictionary. It means "immortal" or "eternal," signifying life. One essential characteristic of life is movement.

This is how I interpret Jogèt Amerta, in accordance with Mbah Prapto's teachings—it emphasizes natural, spontaneous, and unstructured movement. Practitioners are encouraged to break free from rigid movement patterns and allow their bodies to move based on internal impulses. This, in essence, is the core of life itself. The goal of this movement meditation is to cultivate full awareness of the body, space, and surroundings. Through the process, practitioners learn to listen to their bodies, feel the flow of energy, and connect with nature.

During my visit, I observed two female movement artists who were staying there to study. I watched how they trained, processed, and moved intuitively. One of them used a wooden chair as a medium for self-expression. I also witnessed how Mbah Prapto joined them in dancing. It was fascinating, though not entirely new to me, since I had been involved in theater for three years in high school at Kolese De Britto, where I engaged in similar exploratory processes.

"I was once invited by Bhante Pannya [Bhikkhu Śrī Paññāvaro Mahāthera] to Japan," Mbah Prapto told me at the time. Bhante Pannya is well known as a Vipassanā meditation teacher, often referring to it

as mindfulness meditation. I had previously attended a few meditation retreats at his center in Mendut Monastery.

According to Mbah Prapto, awareness is essential in responding to our existence within both the natural and social environments. Through mindful movement, we can reintegrate different aspects of ourselves—both mind and body—to become more in tune with the universe.

I don't remember every detail of what Mbah Prapto explained that day, but his words and experiences provided me with many new insights. It was a truly memorable first encounter with him.

### Studying Sumarah

Although I had studied various forms of meditation, including different types of Vipassanā (yes, there are many—two of the most well-known

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being Mahasi Vipassanā and Goenka Vipassanā), I had never explored Sumarah meditation, which served as a foundation for Jogèt Amerta according to Mbah Prpto.

That changed when I attended the Borobudur Writers & Cultural Festival (BWCF) in November 2018. There, I had the opportunity to join a meditation session led by Laura Romano, an Italian-born Sumarah teacher who had become an Indonesian citizen.

My conclusion? While not identical, there are many similarities between Buddhist mindfulness meditation and Sumarah meditation. After experiencing Sumarah, I gained a deeper understanding of Jogèt Amerta.

### **My Last Encounter with Mbah Prpto**

At the end of 2019, I received the news that Mbah Prpto had passed away. I felt a deep sense of loss. I remembered that a year earlier, in April 2018, I had met him for the last time at an art discussion event at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta. He was one of the

speakers. My memories of this meeting at the “Blue Campus” were much clearer than those from Padepokan Lemah Putih.

During our brief conversation, he mentioned that his study of Buddhist Vipassanā meditation and Javanese Sumarah teachings had greatly influenced his exploration of nature and consciousness.

“From there, I learned about resonance and bodily sensitivity,” he said.

Mbah Prpto also spoke about Jogèt Amerta. I still have notes from his words at the time:

“I call it ‘joget’ because it refers to someone learning to dance from the very basics,” he explained.

Philosophically, he said, Jogèt Amerta is rooted in traditional concepts—the relationship between humans, nature, and The Unknown (God, the Unseen). Human inner transformation, according to him, must always align with these three elements. From a physical standpoint, Jogèt Amerta is an everyday movement practice that disregards conventional bodily training norms. Through this approach, he taught his students to respond to themselves and the atmosphere around them.

"Foreigners who study with me don't always understand it at first. But because of their curiosity, little by little, they begin to grasp it. This curiosity is something we must cultivate," he said with conviction.

One of the most valuable lessons and reminders from Mbah Prapto: "Keep being curious, keep being aware, keep experiencing. Do not settle with the knowledge already planted in your minds. Because if we settle, it's the same as being dead, not amerta (immortal)."

Thank you, Mbah Prapto, for Joged Amerta—your globally influential legacy of emotion and intellect. May more people around the world be inspired to learn and practice this profound knowledge.

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***Deny Hermawan** is a journalist and spiritual practitioner who has studied Vipassana and Sumarah meditation—both of which form part of the spiritual foundation of Amerta Movement. He met and studied with Mbah Prapto several times. He is open for discussion via Instagram at @Real\_Java.*

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