

# BALINESE BELIEFS, RITUALS & TRADITIONS

*A Deep Dive*

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*The Island of the Gods. Hindu-Balinese cosmology.  
Daily offerings, temple festivals, sacred dance, cremation, and the  
living spiritual practice of an island where every moment is ceremony.*

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# Introduction

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There is a reason that travelers who visit Bali often describe it as unlike anywhere else on earth. It is not the beaches or the terraced rice fields, as spectacular as these are. It is the atmosphere: the sense of moving through a world in which every location, every moment, every action is embedded in a web of sacred meaning — in which the invisible world is not a theological proposition but a practical reality that every member of the community actively maintains through daily practice.

Bali is the last surviving Hindu island in the Indonesian archipelago — an island of approximately four million people who have maintained a distinctive form of Hinduism (known as Agama Hindu Dharma or Agama Tirtha — the Religion of Holy Water) through five centuries of Islamic expansion throughout the rest of Indonesia, three centuries of Dutch colonial rule, and the pressures of modern tourism and globalization. This survival is not passive. Balinese Hinduism is maintained through a density of daily, weekly, monthly, and annual ritual practice that is without parallel in the world — an entire society organized around the continuous performance of sacred ceremony.

This guide explores the full depth of Balinese belief and practice: their theology, their cosmology, their intricate calendar system, their temple festivals, their understanding of the invisible world, their healing traditions, their sacred arts, and the specific ways their tradition speaks to the synthesized spiritual path of Haligrlicity.

# History: How Bali Became the Island of the Gods

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## **Indianization — The Hindu-Buddhist Wave**

Bali's distinctive religious culture is the product of several millennia of Indian cultural and religious influence on Southeast Asia, combined with a pre-existing Austronesian indigenous culture of ancestor veneration, agricultural ritual, and animist spirituality. Beginning around the 1st century CE, Indian traders, priests, and missionaries began traveling to the Indonesian archipelago, bringing with them Sanskrit, Brahminic Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Indian artistic and architectural traditions that would profoundly reshape the cultures they encountered.

Bali emerged as a distinct political and cultural entity in the 8th-9th centuries CE, when the island's rulers began adopting the Hindu-Buddhist synthesis that characterized the great kingdoms of Java. The Majapahit Empire (1293-1527 CE) — the last great Hindu-Buddhist empire of Indonesia, based in East Java — had enormous cultural influence on Bali, and when the Majapahit fell to the advancing Islamic sultanates of northern Java, large numbers of Majapahit nobles, priests, artists, and craftspeople migrated to Bali, bringing with them the courtly Hindu-Buddhist culture they had maintained.

This migration in the 15th-16th centuries CE is the defining event in Balinese cultural history. It is what transformed Bali from an Indianized island kingdom into the specific, intensely developed Hindu-Balinese culture that survives today — a culture that received and preserved the courtly traditions of the Majapahit while simultaneously developing them in a distinctly Balinese direction, shaped by the island's own indigenous traditions.

## **Colonial Period and the Puputan**

Dutch colonial presence in Bali was established gradually from the early 17th century, with full military conquest completed only in the early 20th century. The most dramatic moment of Balinese resistance to Dutch conquest was the puputan (from the Balinese word for 'ending' or 'finish') — the ritual mass suicide performed by Balinese royal courts rather than submit to Dutch domination. In September 1906, the Dutch military marched on the royal court of Badung. The king and hundreds of his court — dressed in white cremation clothes, carrying their keris (ceremonial daggers) and family heirlooms — processed out to meet the Dutch forces and walked into their gunfire. Similar events occurred at Klungkung in 1908. The puputan was not mere suicidal despair but a specific Balinese

ritual response to the impossible situation: to die with honor, in full ceremonial dignity, rather than to live in defeat.

## **Bali Under Indonesia and Tourism**

Bali became part of independent Indonesia in 1949 and has navigated the challenges of being a Hindu minority island within the world's largest Muslim-majority nation with remarkable sophistication. The Indonesian state's Pancasila (Five Principles) philosophy — which recognizes six official religions including Hinduism — has provided constitutional protection for Balinese religious practice. Tourism, which began in the colonial period and has grown into the island's primary industry, has created new pressures on Balinese culture: the commodification of sacred arts, the transformation of ceremonies into performances for foreign audiences, and the influx of outside values and practices. Bali has responded with characteristic creativity — adapting, incorporating, and maintaining the essential structure of their sacred world even as its surface forms evolve.

# Agama Hindu Dharma

## Balinese Hinduism

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Balinese Hinduism — officially called Agama Hindu Dharma (the Religion of the Hindu Dharma) or Agama Tirtha (the Religion of Holy Water) — is recognizably Hindu in its scriptures, its pantheon, its cosmology, and its ritual vocabulary, but distinctively Balinese in almost every aspect of its practice, its aesthetic, and its social organization. To an Indian Hindu, Balinese Hinduism looks both familiar and profoundly different — which is precisely what it is: a 1,500-year creative adaptation of Indian religious materials to an island culture with its own indigenous traditions.

### **What Distinguishes Balinese Hinduism**

Several features distinguish Agama Hindu Dharma from Indian Hinduism. The ancestor cult is far more prominent — the deified ancestors of each community are worshipped alongside the great Hindu deities, and the temple system exists primarily to house and honor these ancestors. The integration with Balinese indigenous animist and agricultural religion is complete — there is no meaningful distinction between 'high Hindu' and 'folk' religious practice, because all of it is woven together into a single fabric. The arts — dance, music, sculpture, weaving, woodcarving — are understood as sacred practice rather than entertainment or decoration. And the ritual density is extraordinary — Balinese Hinduism requires of its practitioners an investment of time, material resources, and creative energy in religious ceremony that would be inconceivable in most modern religious contexts.

### **The Role of Priests**

Balinese ritual life is served by two primary categories of priest. The Pedanda is the high Brahmin priest — a Sanskrit-educated ritual specialist from the Brahmin caste who performs the most elaborate ceremonies, creates holy water (tirtha), and conducts the most sacred rites. The Pedanda's ritual power derives from his mastery of Sanskrit mantra, his ability to invoke the divine through precisely executed ritual sequences, and the accumulated spiritual potency (taksu) of his lineage and practice. The Pemangku is the temple priest — drawn from all castes, often hereditary to a specific temple, serving as the primary ritual servant of that temple's deity and the first point of contact for ordinary worshippers. The Pemangku leads the daily and weekly offerings, conducts the regular ceremonies of the temple's calendar, and provides advice and assistance to community members seeking divine guidance.

## CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The Balinese priest tradition — with its understanding that ritual power derives from mastery of specific sacred knowledge, sustained practice, and accumulated spiritual potency — parallels the Haligric understanding of the practitioner who develops genuine expertise in the tools and practices of their tradition. The Pedanda's investment of years in Sanskrit mantra mastery and the Haligric practitioner's sustained engagement with the Tetralty across all four dimensions are both expressions of the recognition that spiritual effectiveness is not casually acquired. The Pemangku's role as daily temple servant — present every day, maintaining the sacred relationship between community and divine — parallels the Haligric daily practice as the foundation of a genuine spiritual life.

# The Balinese Cosmos

## Sekala and Niskala

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The most fundamental cosmological distinction in Balinese Hinduism is the division of reality into sekala (the visible, tangible, measurable world) and niskala (the invisible, intangible, spiritual world). These are not separate realms that occasionally interact — they are two aspects of a single reality that are always and everywhere interpenetrating.

### **Sekala — The Visible World**

Sekala encompasses everything that can be perceived with the ordinary senses: physical matter, measurable time and space, the social world of human relationships and institutions, the biological world of birth and death and hunger and pleasure. Sekala is not considered inferior or unspiritual — it is the proper domain of human life, the field in which the spiritual work of a human incarnation is carried out. Balinese Hinduism is emphatically world-affirming: the material world is not an illusion to be escaped but a sacred opportunity to be lived well.

### **Niskala — The Invisible World**

Niskala encompasses the gods, the ancestors, the spirits, the forces of cosmic order and disorder that are constantly present and active in the world but not visible to ordinary perception. In Balinese understanding, the niskala world is not remote or inaccessible — it is everywhere, always, fully present, and constantly in relationship with the sekala world. The goal of Balinese ritual practice is not to access the niskala from a separate sekala existence but to maintain the balance and harmony of the sekala-niskala relationship — to ensure that the invisible forces present in every location are honored, that the ancestors are fed and tended, that the demons and disturbing forces are appeased and given their proper place, and that the divine blessings that sustain life continue to flow.

### **Bhuta Kala — The Disturbing Forces**

The niskala world is inhabited by a vast range of beings — from the highest divine manifestations to the bhuta kala: spirits of disturbance, entities that inhabit crossroads, cemeteries, waste ground, and the lower levels of the cosmic order, and that can cause illness, misfortune, and social disorder if not properly acknowledged. Balinese ritual practice includes extensive provisions for the bhuta kala — low offerings placed on the ground (as opposed to high offerings elevated toward the divine) that appease these lower forces and invite them to leave the community in peace. This is not fearful propitiation but

practical management of the full spectrum of invisible presences that inhabit the world.

## **The Mountain-Sea Axis**

Balinese sacred geography is organized around the mountain-sea axis. Mount Agung (Gunung Agung — the Great Mountain) is the supreme sacred site of Bali — the home of the gods, the axis connecting the highest divine realm with the earth, the direction of purity and the divine. Toward the sea (kelod) is the direction of impurity, of the bhuta kala, of the lower forces. Every Balinese home, temple, and village is oriented in relation to this axis — the most sacred spaces closest to the mountain side, the waste disposal and impure activities toward the sea side. This is not a judgment that the sea is evil but a recognition that the cosmos is structured with its own hierarchy of sacred intensity, and that living well means orienting oneself correctly within it.

### **CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY**

The Balinese sekala/niskala distinction — the recognition that the visible and invisible worlds are two aspects of one reality that are always interpenetrating — is one of the most clearly articulated ancient expressions of what Haligrity holds about the nature of existence. The Haligrity understanding that the energy body (niskala) and the physical body (sekala) are not separate entities but two aspects of one being, that the ancestor altar creates a point of intentional sekala-niskala interface, and that all conscious practice works simultaneously in both dimensions — all of this is a direct parallel to the Balinese cosmological understanding. The Balinese do not try to access the invisible world — they recognize that it is always already here, and that the work is to maintain the quality of relationship with it.

# The Gods

## Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa and the Divine Manifestations

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Balinese Hinduism has a sophisticated and carefully worked out theology of the relationship between the supreme divine reality and its multiple manifestations. This theology is more philosophically nuanced than simple polytheism and more practically engaged than abstract monotheism.

### **Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa — The Supreme Divine**

At the apex of the Balinese divine order is Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa — the supreme divine being, the one God who encompasses and transcends all other divine manifestations. Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (meaning approximately 'the divine supreme order' or 'the all-pervading lord') is understood as formless, infinite, and beyond all conceptual definition — the Absolute that cannot be directly grasped by the human mind. This is the Balinese expression of the same recognition that appears in Advaita Vedanta (Brahman as the absolute, beyond all name and form), in the Heliopolitan theology of Atum as the All and the Nothing, and in the Tao as the nameless source that precedes all named things.

### **The Tri Murti — The Three Great Divine Manifestations**

Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa manifests in creation through three primary aspects — the Tri Murti — which together accomplish the full cycle of cosmic existence. Brahma is the Creator — the divine force of origination, the source from which all new existence emerges. He is associated with the south direction and the color red. Wisnu (Vishnu) is the Preserver — the divine force that sustains what has been created, that maintains the conditions necessary for life to continue, that periodically incarnates (in the ten avatars) to restore dharma when it has been disrupted. He is associated with the north direction and the color black. Siwa (Shiva) is the Transformer — the divine force that dissolves what has completed its cycle, clearing the way for new creation. He is the most important of the three in Balinese Hindu practice — the supreme deity to whom most Balinese ritual is ultimately directed. He is associated with the center direction and the color white.

### **The Dewata Nawa Sanga — Nine Directional Deities**

The Balinese cosmic geography recognizes nine sacred directions (the four cardinal directions, the four intermediate directions, and the center) each associated with a specific deity, color, and quality.

Together these nine deities (the Dewata Nawa Sanga) form the divine framework within which all earthly existence takes place. The most important of these is Siwa at the center, flanked by Wisnu (north), Iswara (east), Brahma (south), Mahadewa (west), and four intermediate directional deities. The sacred nine-directional mandala appears throughout Balinese ritual and artistic life — in temple layouts, in cremation towers, in offerings, and in the alignment of sacred spaces.

## **The Ancestor Gods**

Alongside the great Hindu deities, the Balinese honor a specifically Balinese category of divine being: the deified ancestors (Dewa Hyang or Pitara) of each family and community. The most powerful of a community's ancestors have, through their accumulated spiritual merit and continued engagement with the world of the living, achieved a divine status — they are not simply honored dead but active divine beings who protect, guide, and sustain their descendants. The temple system (explored in Part Eight) exists primarily to provide proper homes for these ancestral deities, and the majority of Balinese ceremonies are directed as much toward the ancestral deities as toward the great Hindu divine manifestations.

## The Tri Hita Karana

### The Three Causes of Well-Being

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The most important philosophical concept in contemporary Balinese religious and social life is the Tri Hita Karana — the Three Causes of Well-Being. This principle organizes all Balinese thought about the good life, the healthy community, and the right relationship between human beings and their world.

#### **Parahyangan — Harmony with the Divine**

The first cause of well-being is right relationship with the divine — the gods, the ancestors, and the sacred forces that pervade the world. This is maintained through the temple system, the ceremonial calendar, the daily offerings, the priest traditions, and all the specific practices that constitute Balinese ritual life. A community or individual whose parahyangan is in order — whose relationship with the divine is being properly maintained — will experience the divine's protection and blessing. One whose parahyangan is neglected or disrupted will experience the consequences.

#### **Pawongan — Harmony with Fellow Human Beings**

The second cause of well-being is right relationship with the human community — the family, the village (banjar), the caste group, and the broader Balinese society. Balinese social life is organized through a dense network of communal obligations, mutual aid systems, and collective ritual responsibilities that bind each individual into a web of relationships that both support and constrain them. The banjar system — in which every household is a member of a neighborhood association responsible for collective ritual, infrastructure, and social welfare — is the primary institution of Balinese community life and the main vehicle through which pawongan is maintained.

### **Palemahan — Harmony with the Natural World**

The third cause of well-being is right relationship with the natural world — the land, the waters, the plants, the animals, and the physical environment that sustains all life. This includes the subak system (the ancient cooperative rice irrigation system that has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the ritual relationship with specific trees, springs, and mountain sites, the agricultural ceremonies that honor the rice goddess Dewi Sri at each stage of the rice cycle, and the broader orientation toward the natural world as a sacred, inhabited, and responsive presence rather than an inert resource.

### **CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY**

The Tri Hita Karana — the three causes of well-being organized around right relationship with the divine, the human community, and the natural world — is one of the most complete ancient articulations of what Haligrity holds about the three domains of a genuinely integrated spiritual life. The Haligrity practitioner who cultivates their inner divine connection (Parahyangan), maintains authentic community relationships and service (Pawongan), and lives in conscious sacred relationship with the natural world through earthing, seasonal ceremony, and ecological awareness (Palemahan) is living the Tri Hita Karana in Haligrity form. The Balinese teach that all three must be in balance — neglect any one and the well-being of the whole is compromised.

## The Caste System

# Warna and Balinese Social Order

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The Balinese caste system (warna, also called wangsa) is derived from the Indian Hindu varna system but has developed in distinctly Balinese ways over centuries. It organizes Balinese society into four primary groups with their own ritual roles, linguistic registers, and social expectations.

The four warna are Brahmin (the priest caste, whose primary role is religious knowledge and ritual), Ksatria (the warrior/noble caste, from whom political leadership traditionally came), Wesya (the merchant/administrative caste), and Sudra (the commoner caste, comprising approximately 90% of the Balinese population). The Sudra are further distinguished by their specific clan or origin group (called dadia or soroh).

### **Caste in Contemporary Bali**

The Balinese caste system is both less rigid and more complex than its Indian counterpart. Most Balinese people (the approximately 90% Sudra) have full participation in ritual life — they serve as temple priests, lead community ceremonies, and access the divine directly through their own prayers and offerings. The three upper castes (Triwangsa) have specific ritual privileges and responsibilities (only Brahmin can become Pedanda priests, for example) but do not have exclusive access to the sacred. Marriages across caste lines occur and are accepted in most contemporary Balinese communities. The caste system's primary surviving function is as a marker of family lineage and ancestral identity, not a determinant of social worth or spiritual access.

# Daily Offerings

## Canang Sari and the Practice of Constant Devotion

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The most immediate and visible expression of Balinese Hinduism is the daily offering — the canang sari — placed throughout the day at shrines, doorways, roads, and any other location where the divine or potentially disturbing forces are present. The canang sari is the heartbeat of Balinese religious life: the daily, hourly reminder that the practitioner exists in a world of invisible presences that require acknowledgment and care.

### What a Canang Sari Is

A canang sari (from 'canang' — palm leaf offering container, and 'sari' — essence or best part) is a small palm-leaf tray, folded and pinned into a specific shape by hand, and filled with flowers arranged by color according to directional symbolism (white for the east/Iswara, red for the south/Brahma, yellow for the west/Mahadewa, blue or green for the north/Wisnu), along with incense, sometimes a small biscuit or cracker, and a coin or small amount of currency. The flower arrangement is the visual heart of the offering — fresh, specific, deliberate, beautiful.

### The Daily Rhythm of Offering

The average Balinese woman (offering-making is traditionally women's work, though this is changing in some communities) makes between 20 and 80 canang sari per day. They are placed at the household shrine, at the kitchen shrine, at the bedroom shrine, at the main gate of the compound, at the small ground-level platform for the bhuta kala, and at any other location that requires acknowledgment. The making of offerings is not experienced as a burden — it is understood as one of the primary activities through which a Balinese woman exercises her spiritual power, her creativity, and her relationship with the divine. The daily offering practice is simultaneously prayer, meditation, artistic expression, and relationship maintenance.

### The Role of Incense

Every offering is activated by the burning of incense — specifically dupa, the thin stick incense that fills Bali's air with its distinctive fragrance. The incense smoke is the vehicle that carries the offering's intention and essence to the divine presences for whom it is intended. Without incense, an offering is

inert — a beautiful arrangement of physical objects. With incense, it becomes a living communication, an activation of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of the offering. Incense is waved over the offering in a specific motion while the offering-maker silently or quietly says the appropriate prayer (mantra).

### **CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY**

The Balinese daily offering practice — the canang sari placed multiple times per day at every threshold, every shrine, every location where the invisible world meets the visible — is the most sustained and most completely integrated daily sacred practice of any tradition in the world. The Haligric morning practice (the rise practice, the three-chamber breath, the meal blessing) is a daily sacred structure in the same spirit. Both rest on the recognition that sacred practice is not reserved for special occasions but is the ongoing quality of a fully conscious life. The Balinese offering practice teaches that beauty, intention, and consistency are the three pillars of effective daily sacred practice — and that the act of making something beautiful as an offering changes the one who makes it as much as it honors the one for whom it is made.

# The Temple System

## Pura and Sacred Architecture

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Bali has an estimated 20,000 temples (pura) — approximately one temple for every 200 people. This extraordinary density of sacred architecture is a direct expression of the Balinese understanding that every location, every social group, and every aspect of life requires its own dedicated sacred space.

### The Three Village Temples

Every traditional Balinese village (desa) has three primary temples that together serve the full range of the community's spiritual needs. The Pura Desa (or Pura Bale Agung) is the village temple proper — the place of community ceremony and the home of the village's protective deities. The Pura Puseh is the 'navel' temple — oriented toward Mount Agung, the most sacred direction, and associated with the origin and ancestry of the village community. The Pura Dalem is the temple of the dead — associated with Siwa in his transformative aspect and with the deified ancestors. Located at the village's kelod (sea-ward) end, it serves as the ritual home of the dead and the site of cremation ceremonies.

### Temple Architecture

A traditional Balinese temple is an open-air compound rather than an enclosed building. It consists of a series of courtyards, separated by gates (candi bentar — split gates, symbolizing the separation between the sekala and niskala worlds) and shrines of varying sizes and sacred significance. The shrines — including the meru (multi-tiered towers whose tiers represent the layers of the sacred mountain and the levels of the cosmos), the gedong (enclosed shrine houses), and the padmasana (lotus throne, the highest seat reserved for Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa) — are not housing for idols but thrones prepared to receive divine presences when those presences are invoked by ceremony.

### Odalan — The Temple Birthday

Every temple has its own birthday (odalan) — the anniversary of its consecration, celebrated according to the Balinese Pawukon calendar (see Part Nine) and therefore recurring every 210 days. An odalan is the most important ceremony in that temple's calendar: the day when the divine presences who are invited to inhabit the temple are most fully present, when the community gathers to honor them, when the most elaborate offerings are prepared, when the sacred dances are performed, and when the prayers are most powerful. On an odalan day, the temple is decorated with elaborate arrangements of woven palm leaves (penjor) and flowers, filled with incense smoke and the music of the gamelan orchestra,

and crowded with worshippers in their finest ceremonial dress.

# The Balinese Calendar System

## Saka and Pawukon

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The Balinese use two interlocking calendar systems simultaneously — the Saka calendar (a Hindu lunar-solar calendar) and the Pawukon (a Balinese cycle calendar of 210 days) — creating one of the most complex sacred timekeeping systems in the world.

### The Saka Calendar

The Saka calendar is a lunar-solar calendar derived from the Indian Saka calendar, adjusted for Balinese use. It determines the dates of major ceremonies including Nyepi (the Day of Silence — Balinese New Year) and Galungan and Kuningan (the two most important Balinese festivals, celebrated every 210 days according to the Pawukon calendar but with their placement in the year determined partly by the Saka calendar). The Saka calendar also tracks the lunar phases that are significant in Balinese ritual: the full moon (Purnama) and new moon (Tilem) are both monthly occasions for intensified prayer and offering.

### The Pawukon — The 210-Day Cycle

The Pawukon is the distinctively Balinese sacred calendar — a 210-day cycle (called wuku, divided into 30 weeks of 7 days each) that determines the timing of most village and temple ceremonies. The Pawukon is derived from multiple simultaneously running week-cycles of different lengths: there are 'weeks' of 1 day, 2 days, 3 days, 4 days, 5 days, 6 days, 7 days, 8 days, 9 days, and 10 days, all running simultaneously, and the specific combination of day-positions in each of these concurrent cycles determines the quality and ritual associations of any given day.

The most important of the Pawukon cycles is the 5-day market week (Panca Wara) combined with the 7-day week (Sapta Wara). The intersection of specific days in these two cycles creates the most auspicious or inauspicious days for specific activities. For example, Kliwon (the fifth day of the 5-day week) in combination with specific days of the 7-day week creates Kajeng Kliwon — a particularly charged day that occurs every 15 days and is considered a time of intensified spiritual activity, when offerings must be increased and spiritual vigilance is especially important.

### Galungan and Kuningan

The most important Balinese festivals occur according to the Pawukon calendar and therefore every 210 days. Galungan celebrates the victory of dharma (righteousness) over adharma (evil) — it is the day when the ancestral spirits return to earth to visit their descendants, when the streets are lined with tall bamboo penjor decorated with fruits and flowers, and when every household prepares elaborate offerings to welcome the returning ancestors. Kuningan, ten days later, is the day the ancestors return to the spirit world — honored with yellow rice (nasi kuning) and the final offerings of the period.

### **CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY**

The Balinese calendar system — with its multiple simultaneously running cycles creating a continuous, complex field of sacred timing — is the most elaborate ancient expression of the principle that Haligrity honors in the Wheel of the Year: that time is not neutral, that different moments carry different qualities of sacred energy, and that living in conscious relationship with the rhythm of sacred time is a genuine spiritual practice. The Balinese recognition that Galungan and Kuningan mark the times when ancestors return to visit — and the elaborate preparation and ceremony with which these visits are honored — directly parallels the Haligrity ancestor altar practice and the Zapotec Dia de los Muertos: at specific moments, the boundary between the living and the dead becomes thin, and the relationship can be most fully expressed and nourished.

## Major Ceremonies and Ritual Life

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Balinese ritual life encompasses ceremonies for every stage of human life from conception to cremation, every stage of the rice cycle, every threshold and junction of the sacred calendar, and every significant event in the life of the community. The investment of time and material resources in ceremony that Balinese people make is extraordinary by any comparison — estimates suggest that the average Balinese household devotes 30-40% of its income to ceremony.

### **The Life-Cycle Ceremonies (Manusa Yadnya)**

From the moment of conception, a Balinese person's life is accompanied by ceremony. Pregnancy ceremonies honor the divine presence entering the womb. Birth ceremonies welcome the new soul and establish its relationship with its family's ancestral protectors. The tooth filing ceremony (mepandes or mesangih) — in which the upper six teeth are symbolically filed flat — is the most important coming-of-age rite: it removes the 'animalistic' points from the teeth and symbolically completes the person's transition from animal to human, from nature to culture, from instinct to dharma. Marriage ceremonies create a new household and new ancestral lineage. And death ceremonies — elaborated in Part Twelve — complete the person's journey and release their soul for its continued journey.

### **The Agricultural Ceremonies (Bhuta Yadnya and Dewa Yadnya)**

The rice cycle in Bali is embedded in ceremony from beginning to end. Before planting, ceremonies are held to prepare the fields and invite the blessing of Dewi Sri — the rice goddess, the most beloved of the nature deities, whose image appears in woven rice stalks hung at the entrance of every Balinese home during harvest time. At each stage of the rice's growth — planting, first sprouting, flowering, first appearance of the grain head, and harvest — specific ceremonies are held in the subak (irrigation cooperative) temples. Even the storage of rice after harvest is accompanied by ceremony: the rice is welcomed into the granary with the honors due to a divine guest.

### **Community Ceremonies**

Balinese village life is organized around a dense schedule of communal ceremonies that range from the intimate and local (a single household's family ceremony) to the vast and regional (the great purification ceremony Ekadasa Rudra, held at Pura Besakih every hundred years, involving the entire island). Between these extremes: the monthly full moon and new moon ceremonies at every temple, the 210-day odalan of every village temple, the Galungan and Kuningan celebrations, and dozens of other

fixed-calendar and occasion-based ceremonies that keep the community in continuous active relationship with the divine.

# Nyepi

## The Day of Silence

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Nyepi — the Balinese New Year according to the Saka calendar — is one of the most extraordinary religious observances in the world. It is the Day of Silence: a 24-hour period during which the entire island of Bali shuts down completely. No vehicles move on the roads. No electric lights are turned on. No work is done. No one leaves their home compound. Even the international airport at Denpasar is closed for the day. The island, with its four million residents and significant tourist population, enters a state of complete external stillness.

### **The Night Before — Ogoh-Ogoh Processions**

The evening before Nyepi is the opposite of the day itself: the community comes together in the most exuberant public ceremony of the Balinese year. Young men from each banjar have spent weeks constructing ogoh-ogoh — enormous papier-mache sculptures of demonic beings, terrifying and magnificent in equal measure, lit with torches and carried through the streets on bamboo platforms by teams of young men. The procession (ngrupuk or pengrupukan) moves through the village with as much noise, light, and energy as possible — clanging metal, shouting, firelight. The purpose: to rouse all the disturbing spirits of the area, to make them visible by attracting them with the commotion, and then to confuse and drive them away. At the end of the procession, the ogoh-ogoh are burned — the disturbing forces symbolically destroyed in the fire before the year begins.

### **Nyepi Itself — The Four Prohibitions**

Nyepi is governed by four prohibitions (Catur Brata Penyepeian): no fire or light (Amati Geni), no work or activity (Amati Karya), no travel (Amati Lelungan), and no entertainment or pleasure (Amati Lelangan). These four prohibitions create a day of total outer stillness that is intended to generate a corresponding inner stillness — a day of meditation, reflection, and spiritual renewal. The silence is enforced by community patrol members (pecalang) who walk the streets ensuring compliance, and the entire island literally goes dark at night — from the air, Bali is invisible on Nyepi, a dark island in a dark sea.

### **The Theological Purpose of Nyepi**

The purpose of Nyepi is simultaneously practical and mystical. Practically: by making the island appear uninhabited, the community fools any remaining disturbing spirits into believing Bali has been

abandoned — they will have no reason to stay and will move on. Mystically: the day of outer silence creates conditions for inner silence — for the kind of genuine self-examination, spiritual renewal, and reconnection with the divine that is impossible in the noise and busyness of ordinary life. Nyepi is the Balinese recognition that genuine spiritual renewal requires a complete pause — a return to stillness from which a new cycle can begin.

### CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

Nyepi — the Day of Silence in which an entire island voluntarily stills its external activity to create conditions for inner renewal — is one of the world's most powerful collective expressions of the Hesychast teaching, the Taoist teaching of wu wei (non-action as the most powerful form of action), and the Haligric understanding that Feeling precedes Thinking, and both precede Speaking and Doing. The day of outer silence is the day of maximum inner activity — the day when, freed from the noise of the world, the practitioner can actually hear what is present. Haligrity honors a version of this in the daily practice of stillness before action: the rise of the day met with breath and intention before the day's activity begins. Nyepi is the same principle scaled to an entire island for an entire day.

## **Cremation: Ngaben and the Journey of the Soul**

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The Balinese cremation ceremony — Ngaben (from the Balinese word for fire) or Pitra Yadnya (offering to the ancestors) — is one of the most extraordinary funerary practices in the world. For the Balinese, cremation is not a mournful event but a joyful one: the ceremony that frees the soul from its attachment to the physical body and its earthly circumstances, allowing it to continue its journey toward reunion with the divine.

### **Death and the Interim Period**

When a Balinese person dies, the soul is understood as remaining in the vicinity of the body, partially confused by its new condition and still attached to the things and people it knew. The body is ritually purified and temporarily buried — sometimes for days, sometimes for years, depending on the family's financial circumstances — while the family prepares the cremation ceremony. During this interim period, the soul requires regular prayers and offerings to keep it oriented and comfortable. The family communicates with the soul through specific offerings and through the guidance of a *balian* (Balinese healer/medium) who can facilitate communication with the dead.

### **The Cremation Tower and Bull**

A major Balinese cremation involves the construction of two central ritual objects: the *bade* (cremation tower) and the *lembu* (bull sarcophagus). The *bade* is an elaborate multi-tiered tower of wood, bamboo, paper, and fabric that serves as the soul's temporary palace and vehicle for its journey. The number of tiers corresponds to the deceased's caste and status — from three tiers for ordinary people to eleven for the highest Brahmin. The body is placed in the *bade* and carried in a ceremonial procession to the cremation ground. The *lembu* — a wooden bull, painted and decorated — serves as the sarcophagus into which the body is placed for burning. The bull is the vehicle that carries the soul forward; the fire that burns the bull and the body simultaneously releases the soul from its earthly attachment.

### **The Fire and the Twelve Days**

The cremation fire — lit by the family's Brahmin priest with holy fire — is understood as Siwa's transformative force: not destruction but purification and liberation. As the fire consumes the body and the elaborate structures that have been built around it, the family and community celebrate rather than mourn — singing, sometimes laughing, expressing the gratitude and relief appropriate to the completion of a good life and the successful release of a soul. The ashes are collected and carried to the

sea, where they are scattered — the released soul returns to the cosmic ocean of potential from which all life comes.

The twelve days following cremation are marked by daily ceremonies that accompany the soul on its journey — through specific divine realms, past specific divine gatekeepers, until it reaches its proper destination. Eventually the soul undergoes melukat — a purification ceremony — and nyeneng, in which it is formally elevated to the status of ancestral deity, able to receive worship and offer protection to its descendants from the niskala world.

### CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The Balinese Ngaben — the cremation ceremony understood as joyful liberation rather than mournful ending, as the soul's continued journey rather than final disappearance — is one of the world's most complete ritual expressions of the recognition that death is transformation rather than ending. The Haligric ancestor altar practice and the Haligric understanding of the beloved dead as present in a different mode, not gone — parallel the Balinese understanding that the cremated soul becomes a deified ancestor who continues to engage with the living community from the niskala world. The DNA Phantom Effect (US Army/Cleve Backster 1993, Poponin Russian Academy of Sciences) confirms what the Balinese have always practiced: the energetic pattern of the self persists beyond the physical body's dissolution.

## **Sacred Arts**

# **Dance, Music, and Shadow Puppetry**

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In Bali, the distinction between art and religion does not exist. The traditional arts — dance, music (gamelan), sculpture, painting, weaving, shadow puppet theater (wayang kulit) — are not cultural products produced for aesthetic enjoyment or commercial exchange. They are sacred practices: ways of honoring the divine, creating beauty as an offering, and maintaining the living connection between the sekala and niskala worlds.

### **The Gamelan — Sacred Sound**

The gamelan is the orchestra at the heart of Balinese ceremonial life — a percussion ensemble of gongs, metallophones, drums, and other instruments that provides the musical landscape for every temple ceremony, every sacred dance, every communal celebration. The tuning of a Balinese gamelan is unique to each set of instruments — no two gamelans are identically tuned, and the specific sound of a village's gamelan is understood as carrying that village's spiritual character. Balinese gamelan music operates through complex interlocking patterns (called *kotekan*) in which two players together execute a single, rapid melodic line — neither player can produce the complete pattern alone. This musical philosophy encodes the social philosophy: no individual is complete without the community; the most beautiful things emerge from genuine collaboration.

### **Sacred Dance — The Body as Offering**

Balinese sacred dance is among the most technically demanding and spiritually profound dance traditions in the world. Dancers begin training as young children — some forms of sacred temple dance (like the *Rejang* and *Sanghyang*) are performed only by pre-pubescent girls, whose ritual purity qualifies them as appropriate vessels for divine presence. The *Legong* — the most refined secular form of Balinese court dance — requires years of training to execute correctly: the precise finger positions (*mudra*), eye movements (*seledet*), and body orientation that communicate specific narrative and emotional content. In the most sacred forms of Balinese dance, the dancer is understood as entering a state of divine possession (*kerawuhan*) — the god or ancestor whose story they are enacting actually enters and animates their body.

### **Wayang Kulit — The Shadow Theater**

The wayang kulit (shadow puppet theater) is simultaneously an art form, a teaching vehicle, a healing ceremony, and a form of prayer. The dalang (puppet master) is a sacred figure — he must undergo years of training, ritual purification, and ongoing spiritual discipline to qualify as a master of the form. A wayang performance typically lasts all night, presenting episodes from the great Hindu epics (the Mahabharata and Ramayana) through the voices of dozens of leather puppet characters, accompanied by a small gamelan ensemble. The lamp behind the puppet screen is the divine presence — the dalang holds the puppets between the lamp and the screen, and the shadows that appear are understood as the shadows of divine reality made visible in the world of appearances.

## **Balinese Healers**

### **Balian and the Unseen World**

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The balian is the Balinese traditional healer — a figure whose role combines what Western culture would separate into doctor, priest, psychologist, spiritual counselor, and medium. Balian work with the interface between the sekala and niskala worlds — diagnosing and treating illnesses that have spiritual components, communicating with the ancestors and divine presences on behalf of their clients, and facilitating the resolution of spiritual disturbances that are affecting physical or social wellbeing.

#### **Types of Balian**

There are several recognized categories of balian in Balinese society, each with their own specialty and methodology. The balian usada works with ancient palm-leaf medical manuscripts (lontar usada) containing extensive knowledge of herbal medicine, massage, and the treatment of physical conditions. The balian taksu is a medium — a practitioner who enters trance states to allow ancestral or divine presences to speak through them, delivering diagnoses, advice, and healing directly from the niskala world. The balian apun specializes in setting broken bones and treating physical injuries. The balian tenung is a diviner who reads signs — including coins, rice, and other divinatory materials — to diagnose the spiritual roots of problems and prescribe appropriate ritual solutions.

#### **The Concept of Taksu**

Central to Balinese healing and sacred arts practice is the concept of taksu — a divine grace or spiritual power that enables exceptional performance, healing ability, or sacred presence. Taksu is not a permanent personal attribute but a divine gift that comes and goes — it is most available to those who have prepared themselves through proper ritual observance, ethical conduct, artistic dedication, and the maintenance of right relationship with the divine. A dancer with taksu moves differently from one without — observers describe a quality of luminosity, of divine presence animating the body that transcends technical skill. A healer with taksu reaches beyond what knowledge alone could accomplish. Taksu is what Haligrlicity might recognize as the Awen of the Druidic tradition, the grace that flows through a prepared vessel.

**CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY**

The Balinese balian system — and particularly the concept of taksu as divine grace available to those who have prepared themselves through sustained practice and right relationship — parallels multiple elements of the Haligric tradition. The balian's work at the sekala-niskala interface corresponds to the Haligric energy work that addresses the human being in all four dimensions simultaneously (Feeling, Thinking, Speaking, Doing). The taksu concept parallels the Awen (Druidic), the Anointing (Christian mystical), and the Haligric recognition that genuine creative and healing power is not manufactured by personal effort but received through a vessel prepared by genuine practice. The SELC Reiki understanding that healing energy flows through the practitioner from a divine source rather than originating in the practitioner is the Haligric version of balian practice with taksu.

## **Kecak, Barong, and the Battle Between Good and Evil**

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Two of the most famous Balinese ritual performance forms — the Kecak and the Barong dance — present the Balinese cosmological understanding of the relationship between the forces of order and chaos in particularly vivid and accessible form.

### **The Kecak — The Monkey Dance**

The Kecak (often called the Monkey Dance by Western audiences) is a ceremonial form in which a large group of male performers — typically 100 or more — sit in concentric circles and provide the entire musical accompaniment through their voices alone, chanting interlocking patterns of 'cak-cak-cak' while swaying, raising their arms, and performing gestures that illustrate the story of the Ramayana epic being enacted by solo dancers in the center. The Kecak began as a sacred trance ritual (the sanghyang dedari ceremony) and was transformed into its current form in the 1930s through the collaboration of the German artist Walter Spies and the Balinese dancer and teacher I Wayan Limbak — a creative synthesis that has become one of the most recognizable expressions of Balinese culture.

### **The Barong and Rangda — The Living Cosmic Drama**

The Barong is a lion-like protective creature who represents the forces of dharma — cosmic order, benevolence, and the protection of the community. He is performed by two dancers inside a magnificent costume of elaborate carved wood, gilded leather, and layers of white horsehair. The Rangda is Barong's adversary — a terrifying widow-witch figure who represents the forces of chaos, disease, and disruption. She is performed by a single dancer in a costume of extraordinary ferocity: wild white hair, pendulous breasts, bulging eyes, and an enormous lolling tongue. In the ceremony, Barong and Rangda engage in an endless battle that is never conclusively won by either side. The warriors who join Barong's side are periodically seized by the Rangda's magic and turned against themselves — pointing their keris daggers at their own chests in a state of trance. Barong's magic protects them from actual harm. Eventually the battle ends in standoff — neither good nor evil has been permanently victorious.

The crucial theological point of the Barong-Rangda drama is that neither side wins permanently. In Balinese cosmology, the balance between the forces of order and chaos is not a problem to be solved but the fundamental nature of reality. The Rangda is not to be eliminated — she is to be maintained in

right relationship. The ritual drama enacts this understanding publicly, in the community, as a shared experience of the truth that cosmic balance is not a static condition but an ongoing dynamic negotiation.

### **CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY**

The Balinese understanding that order and chaos are not in a final war that one side will eventually win — but are in permanent, necessary dynamic relationship — parallels the Haligric understanding of the Hermetic Principle of Polarity: that opposites are the same thing at different ends of a spectrum, that day and night are not enemies but partners, that the challenging experience and the expanding experience are both dimensions of the same creative intelligence working through the practitioner's life. The Barong-Rangda drama teaches that the practice is not to eliminate difficulty but to maintain relationship with it — to stand in the midst of the dynamic tension with enough groundedness and spiritual preparation that you are not permanently overwhelmed by the chaos, and not so committed to your own order that you have lost the capacity for growth through disruption.

## **Bali and Haligrity**

### **Where the Paths Cross**

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Balinese Hinduism is not a peripheral tradition in the Haligrity conversation. It is one of the world's most completely integrated and sustained examples of what Haligrity holds as possible: a life in which every dimension of existence — the physical, the emotional, the social, the artistic, the ecological, and the spiritual — is woven into a single sacred fabric.

#### **Sekala and Niskala — The Two-Dimensional World**

The Balinese understanding that the visible and invisible worlds are two aspects of one reality in permanent interpenetration is the most clearly articulated ancient parallel to the Haligrity understanding of the relationship between the physical body and the energy body, between the manifest and the unmanifest dimensions of experience. The Haligrity practitioner who works simultaneously with the physical body (Well-Being book practices) and the energy body (SELC Reiki, GPAC, tuning fork work) is living the sekala-niskala understanding in Haligrity form.

#### **The Daily Offering and Sacred Practice**

The Balinese *canang sari* — the daily offering placed multiple times at every threshold and sacred site — is the most complete ancient model of what Haligrity holds about daily practice. The Haligrity rise practice, meal blessing, and daily movement and breath work are daily sacred practices in the same spirit: the recognition that a genuinely sacred life is not organized around special occasions but around the ongoing quality of daily, moment-by-moment engagement with the sacred. What the Balinese offer in palm-leaf and flowers, the Haligrity practitioner offers in breath, intention, and gratitude.

#### **The Tri Hita Karana and the Complete Life**

The Balinese three causes of well-being — harmony with the divine (Parahyangan), harmony with the human community (Pawongan), and harmony with the natural world (Palemahan) — provide the most complete ancient framework for the integrated, whole-life approach that Haligrity practices. The Tetralty (Feeling, Thinking, Speaking, Doing) is the internal navigation system. The Tri Hita Karana is the external map: the three domains in which that navigation must be applied for a genuinely whole life.

## **Taksu and the Prepared Vessel**

The Balinese concept of taksu — divine grace available to those who have prepared themselves through sustained practice, right relationship, and ethical conduct — is the Balinese name for what the Druidic tradition calls Awen, what the Christian mystical tradition calls anointing, and what the Haligric tradition recognizes as the quality of genuine creative and healing power that flows through a practitioner whose practice is genuine. The SELC Reiki understanding that healing energy flows through rather than from the practitioner is the Haligric expression of taksu.

## **The Sacred Arts as Spiritual Practice**

The Balinese understanding that art — dance, music, sculpture, weaving — is sacred practice rather than cultural production resonates deeply with the Haligric understanding of the Feeling and Speaking dimensions of the Tetrality. Art that is made as offering — with beauty, intention, and love — is qualitatively different from art that is made for commerce or reputation. The Balinese artist who places their creation on the temple altar has understood something about the relationship between creativity and the sacred that the Haligric practitioner can learn from: that the most genuine creative work is always, at its core, an offering.

## **The Ancestor Relationship**

The Balinese understanding of the deified ancestors — the Dewa Hyang who inhabit the niskala world and remain in active relationship with their descendants — is the most complete Southeast Asian parallel to the Haligric ancestor altar practice. The Galungan and Kuningan celebrations, in which ancestors return to visit their families and are welcomed with elaborate offerings and ceremony, are the Balinese expression of the same recognition that the Zapotec honor in the Dia de los Muertos and that Haligricity practices in the ancestor altar: the beloved dead are not gone. They have changed their mode of presence. The relationship continues, and it requires care.

## **Nyepi and the Sacred Pause**

The Balinese Day of Silence — an entire island entering stillness for 24 hours as an act of spiritual renewal and sacred reset — is the most dramatic collective expression in the world of the Haligric principle that genuine spiritual practice requires regular, intentional pauses: moments when the external activity ceases and the internal life can be heard. The Haligric practitioner who creates daily moments of genuine stillness — in breath, in meditation, in the conscious pause before Speaking or Doing — is practicing Nyepi in miniature, honoring the same recognition that the Balinese have embodied at civilizational scale.

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*"The gods need beauty.  
The ancestors need food.  
The earth needs respect.  
And the human being needs all three — at once, every day, without  
exception."*

— Balinese understanding, distilled from oral tradition and the Tri Hita Karana

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What Bali teaches the world is that the sacred does not require withdrawal from ordinary life. It requires the transformation of ordinary life into sacred life — through the quality of attention, the consistency of practice, the beauty of the offering, and the recognition that the invisible world is not elsewhere but here, in every breath, at every doorstep, in every grain of rice, in every note of gamelan music rising into the tropical dusk. The canang sari placed at the threshold is the same prayer as the universe beginning. The gamelan's first note is Zep Tepi. The cremation fire is the transformation that makes ancestors of the beloved dead. Bali does not separate these things. It never has.

*Grand Rising.*

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