

# BALI PRAYER INITIATIVE CASE STUDY

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## Introduction

Bali is one of the most beautiful places on earth. It could be the Bali Hai of Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, a favorite tourist destination with towering mountains, magnificent beaches, perfect surfing, and fascinating cultural events. Balinese are lovely people, gentle, polite, and extremely gifted in art music and dance. Yet, unless they are spiritually perceptive, there is a dark side to Bali most tourists never see. My parents and other Christians who visited had described the heavy spiritual oppression like an iron band around their heads. A woman who had been a long-term missionary on Bali participated in the Cambodia prayer initiative in 1995. She mentioned the great spiritual bondage of the island, and later she and the local Christian leaders asked our team to do a similar initiative there in July 1996.

I began to research the island's history, culture, religious beliefs, and status of Christianity in the months leading up to this special prayer effort. I was looking for basically two things:

1. The identity of the spiritual strongman- Bali is known as *Pulau Dewata*, the island of the gods. There are many gods, demons and ancestral spirits which are worshiped, but which one is the chief honcho, the one Jesus would describe in Mark 3:27 as the main power holding the island and its people captive?
2. How does the spiritual strongman maintain its control, for this is the essence of the demonic, the attempt to control and dominate human beings and their institutions.

In this research effort, my missionary friend supplied some good material, and I did a lot of documentary study at a university library. Though somewhat dated the Yale Human Relations Area file materials were especially helpful, but also the works of anthropologists and even a hydrologist who had studied the water systems of the island and their relationship to the worship of the gods. During our visit to Bali, I interviewed local Christian workers and also two Hindu priests, one of whom had been converted to Christ. I want to share the picture that emerged from this research process and how it helped to guide our prayer initiative, as well as to report on what God did.

Bali is a solitary Hindu outpost amidst the thousands of islands of the Indonesian archipelago, which make up the largest Muslim country in the world. Before the coming of Hinduism ancient Indonesians worshiped great nature gods, such as the god of the sun, mountains, sea, as well as invoking the souls of the ancestors, which descended upon

large stones erected for them. Even today Balinese believe the abode of the Gods is upon the mountains, and the rocks, trees, winds, birds, streams, and lakes are inhabited by multitudes of local place spirits which are the owners of these objects and are said to become touchy unless properly placated. Bali belongs to the gods. The island's inhabitants are only transitory tenants. The gods are the true owners of the land. People also still pray to the spirits of their ancestors believing they are their helpers and sustainers of their lives.

Brahmanism, a form of Hinduism, and Buddhism came to Java and Bali in the fifth century. Buddhism was known for eight to ten centuries before Hinduism got the upper hand. The old sun worshipers then merged with the worshipers of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction. Shiva and the sun god, Surya, are now thought to be one and the same and are identified with the highest mountain, Mt. Agong. Shiva (or Surya) represents divinity, which permeates everything, the total of all the forces called god. He is considered the source of all life, and has both male and female characteristics. As male, Shiva/Surya is the father of all humanity, the sun, the space, the supreme teacher, the maker of the world. As female, she is Uma, mother of all nature; Giri Putri, goddess of the mountains; Dewi Danu, deity of the rivers and lakes. He is the divine hermaphrodite, symbol of completion, the ultimate perfection. All the gods overcrowding the Balinese pantheon, including Brahma and Vishnu, are manifestations of Shiva.

The famous mantra of the yogis *om*, pronounced in Balinese *ong*, consists of sounds representing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The symbol for the sound, called *ongkara*, is composed of an upright dash, a phallic symbol representing the male sexual organ, a crescent moon symbolic of the female creative organ, and a circle, symbol of completion as the hermaphrodite. This word stands for Shiva and is used as a magic amulet and in practically in all aspects of Shiva ritual.

Shiva is believed to be the spirit of the original Balinese ancestor. It is written that he made all men. He first made Brahma and Brahma made the world so that all men are in a sense the children and descendants of Shiva. The chief shrines in the temples are to this original ancestor Shiva, and his consort or female half (not better half!), Durga, goddess of death and destruction. Male and female together as an ideal runs through the whole culture. Durga, wife of Shiva, also represented by the phantom witch Rangda, represents everlasting and indestructible fear. The female is the *shakti* or supernatural strength of the male god. So Rangda or Durga is representative of black magic, witchcraft and especially love magic. There is a strong sexual character to Bali Hinduism with the principle of fertility running throughout. Witchcraft is best fought by the use of white magic which is personified in the famous Barong dance, a struggle between good and evil.

In the devotional rite performed by the priests, Shiva is worshiped as the sun god. He

enters the body of the priest so that the priest and Shiva become one. In this state he blesses holy water, which is then purchased by his followers so they can be purified and strengthened by the divine. Every pious Balinese housewife makes offerings to the sun three times a day. In the elevated east corner of every temple and in every household there is an empty throne waiting for the sun god to descend and meet human beings. Some Bali Hindus also go to Shiva temples at night to obtain occult powers. Shiva is known as the one who gave occult power to humankind. Sorcerers obtain from him the ability to transform themselves into spirits in animal form. On Bali battles between sorcerers are often lethal.

The above material was readily uncovered through documentary study and the identity of the spiritual strongman as Surya/Shiva was later confirmed to me in interviews with local Christian leaders.

Strongholds, in my opinion, are places where the strongman (Mark 3:27) grips a people group in order to maintain his control. Three ways he does this in Bali are through fear-inspired worship rites, the shedding of blood, and lines of occult power.

### **1. Fear-inspired Worship Rites.**

Balinese believe that if the gods are neglected, famine, pestilence, crop failure, death of beasts, earthquake, or flooding may occur, so nothing is more important than maintaining their favor. The word Bali means “offering” or “sacrifice” so everything is to be given back to the gods. Continual offerings are made to demons, as well as to the gods and deified ancestors, to keep the balance between the divine and demonic. There is a system to regulate every action in order to be harmony with the natural forces of male and female, right and left, high and low, clean and unclean, sacred and powerful, unholy and dangerous, life and death. Balinese see themselves and their existence on a razor edge between gods and demons, heaven and hell, and under continual threat of annihilation. Harmony with the gods is achieved by propitiation through proper offerings relating man to the cardinal directions. Great calamities will come upon a village when the demons predominate or are angry causing epidemics, loss of crops, etc. Therefore ceremonies of purification and offerings of blood sacrifices are necessary to wipe away pollution.

Each person to be respectable has to pray in several temples and participate in their rites to validate his or her standing as a member of the family, village or irrigation association. The same gods and ancestors are revered throughout the island, forming a spiritual link uniting every temple with every other. Every art form and dance is devoted to the spirits and often attended by spirit possession. Performers dance themselves into a trance while musicians also play themselves into a state of trance. During these dances they may stab themselves, force burning coals into their mouths and lick the fire, or eat living chickens.

“Trancers” are considered the thrones or the pillars of the gods. This is symbolic of the cosmic mountain, the dwelling place of the gods and especially Shiva.

Many are in deep financial debt to provide proper sacrifices but burdened with the cost and fear of danger and destruction if they do not participate. Social pressures are enormous and one reason why more Balinese don't come to Christ. If they do, they will immediately be moved out of their homes and off their family's land, cut off from any inheritance, no longer considered part of the family and community. The reason is that land considered owned and watched by ancestors. Allowing Christians to stay would upset the balance among the spirits and offend the ancestors. Happiness and survival depend on respecting the boundaries. Volcanic eruptions in 1917, 1926 and 1963 added to monsoon storms, which wreak havoc six months per year have fueled their fear. Many Balinese also live in terror of sorcerers in supernatural form, who are thought to stalk the island between the hours of midnight and dawn so that people are afraid to walk the streets or sleep alone at night.

## **2. Shedding of Blood.**

Balinese history from the 16th to the 19th centuries is full of countless bloody wars often over land ownership, inheritance rights or trivial reasons like an escaped thief, an improper greeting, etc.. Even a cock fight could cause a communal conflict with the whole island erupting in a frenzy of hate. When there were regional kings, they reigned in almost a permanent state of mutual war. In the wake of the attempted communist coup in 1965, at least 100,000, some say up to half a million, lost their lives in a holocaust of murder. Ostensibly to exterminate the Communists, it was also a time to pay off grudges, to eliminate rivals in business or inheritance, and to kill Christians. According to missionary Joye Alit, “The blood bath has left a great debt of unpaid revenge/payback still silently hidden away in a generation of fatherless children C a potential time bomb. As well, a great many of the ordinary people carry the blood-guilt and the fear from that rampage of blood letting.”

Sometimes the gods demand the shedding of blood, which may take the form of a large blood sacrifice in which the whole community is involved. Animals will be led in procession around the village and stabbed continuously with spears, shedding their blood in a circle around the village to cleanse away its evil until they fall dead. Human sacrifice has also been part of Bali's past. It has been practiced during the Eka Dasa Rudra ceremony held on Mt. Agung every 100 years or at times of volcanic eruption or calamity to appease the angry gods. Human sacrifice is traditionally of children under the age of seven years old because until that age they are deemed to be still holy. At times of island wide disaster, many village folks still hide their small children away for fear they will be

stolen for this purpose. Human sacrifice has also been used in construction of strategic bridges or buildings to ensure protection of the edifice, twins in the past, mixed sex twins, were sometimes destroyed because they had “committed incest in the womb”.

Significant blood has been shed in the past involving rulers. From 1906 to 1908 Balinese kings and their courts resisting Dutch colonial expansion were both massacred and committed mass suicide. The persecution and killing of believers has been mentioned. In addition, the first missionary Dutchman, Jacob de Vroom, who baptized his houseboy as his first convert in 1873 was later killed by this convert who was unable to stand the persecution he received.

### **3. Occult Power Lines.**

In my opinion, occult lines of power or ley lines are a net, which Satan casts over a population to maintain his control and to create an atmosphere of spiritual darkness. Habakkuk 1:14-17, 2:5-10 speaks of the “wicked foe” who catches human beings in his “net” ... “destroying nations without mercy”. He “takes captive all peoples” and has “plundered many nations”. Nowhere have I been where the presence of such lines of occult influence is as obvious. On Bali, I believe, they take three forms:

**a. The orientation and connection of the temples and household shrines-** The island has thousands of temples but all are linked and oriented towards the mother temple called Besakih which means “dragon”. It is located on the highest mountain, Mt. Agung, known as the mountain of the gods. Besakih was a pre-Hindu sanctuary consecrated to the cult of the “master of the mountain”. It is still the symbol of the island’s spiritual unity as the main state temple, including shrines traditionally for the ruler, princes, important village communities, and associations. All the districts of the island are represented and the complex has a sub-temple for every district. Once a year, during the full moon, the regents of Bali as part of a long tradition make offerings for the whole Balinese people.

All the temples and household shrines on Bali contain thrones to Surya/Shiva, all of which are oriented towards the central temple at Besakih. All the temples are oriented with respect to a mountain-wards/seawards axis. Family temples oriented towards the mountains and kitchens and livestock pens towards the sea. Generally any temple located towards the sea is visited by lower, more dangerous deities. Any temple lying towards the mountains is visited by higher, more benign deities. Also, the Balinese are very dependent upon correct spatial orientation. In order to function, they must know their cardinal points and be able to see the central mountain, otherwise they experience a sense of disorientation, of being lost. They generally even sleep with their heads towards the north or east where Mt. Agung is.

**b. Nawasangha C** A second form of occult power lines is called *nawasangha* which means nine gods. It is represented as a lotus flower with eight petals around the center. It is a *mandala*, a configuration of spiritual power and domination by which the enemy holds the island in bondage. The eight petals correspond with eight guardian deities, all of which are manifestations of Shiva who occupies the center. Physically it may correspond to Besakih as the center, which is linked to eight major regional temples. There is no king now since he was killed by the Dutch in 1908, but originally all the powers of the cardinal points emanating from the central divinity were thought to be concentrated in him. Even now a diagram of the *nawasangha* can be seen portrayed as an emblem on many of Bali's temples. (Incidentally, I have also seen this symbol in many other parts of the world and in Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic architecture and religious practice. I believe it goes back to the sun god of Babylon, Shamash, and before him possibly to Lucifer, the light bearer or the daystar himself.)

**3. Water system ---** Shiva's consort, Dewi Danu or Durga, rules the Crater Lake and neighboring volcano, Mt. Batur. As male and female deities of the two highest mountains, they form a complementary pair, the gods of the island. According to the inhabitants, both gods share dominion. The high priest of the temple of the Crater Lake was chosen from a group called the Paseks of the Black Wood. His ancestors trace their beginnings to a time before the age of kings in the distant past. Festivals at their origin temple seek to renew their contact with the pre-human sources of power in the mountains and the lake. The high priest is chosen by the goddess to serve her for life. All water in the lakes and streams, flowing down from the volcanoes is under her control. The high priest or his fellow priests ascend to the Batur volcano where steam comes from the vents in the rocks to collect droplets of water which is then taken down to the temple, mixed with holy water from 11 springs around the lake, and given to representatives from the various farming associations. They in turn take it home to mix with the waters of their regional water temples, then distribute it to individual farmers, who sprinkle it at the upstream edge of their fields. In this way each farmer and field is symbolically linked to the entire hierarchy of temples and water sources.

It has been suggested that spiritually speaking the high priest of Dewi Danu may now fulfill the role of kingship. When I interviewed this man with a couple members of our team, he said, "We try to make the world better through sacrifices. Since 1991 we have held more ceremonies to save the world." He told me how he got instruction from the spirits of four lakes to sacrifice there and on the mountaintops of Bali and other islands so that communication with the spirits would be "easier". We had opportunity to present the gospel to him and are praying that he and his family will respond to Christ. Many other Balinese would also believe if this would happen since no Shiva priest has ever yet been converted.

## **Prayer Initiative, July 15-19, 1996 and what God did**

An international team of ten prayer leaders and intercessors from five nations joined 70 local Christian workers from the island of Bali and other islands of Indonesia for a prayer initiative organized by the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship. Around the world there were many thousands of God's people supporting this initiative through prayer, including 40 prayer organizations attached to the AD2000 and Beyond Movement, David Yonggi Cho's church in Korea with its thousands of intercessors, 340 churches in Sri Lanka, plus hundreds of other prayer warriors in Scandinavia, Australia, the Solomon Islands and the United States. We could feel their prayers as the Spirit of God moved powerfully among us, giving prophetic words and visions about the destiny of the Balinese people and church, and producing times of deep identificational repentance for the woundedness and idolatry of this people.

Local Christian leaders who briefed us described the obstacles they face: the extreme influence of religious custom and tradition, the difficulty of breaking through the tight-knit social structure and see people come to Christ, and government intransigence in the securing of permits to build churches (nine official agreements needed). The bishop of the Protestant church said the most important thing is to: "Pray that the Balinese will be able to conquer the evil spirit. They are even afraid to sleep alone at night." He noted the prevalence of rituals involving spirit possession and the strongest manifestation of spiritual darkness which is fear. The evil one has used government and natural leaders to persecute the church. Added to that are internal problems of lack of cooperation, sheep stealing, and conflict between Christian leaders. Of course, with this kind of disunity, united prayer efforts have been difficult to bring off.

During the prayer initiative, there were times of united intercession focused on the unreached subgroups of the society, the needs of churches and para-church organizations, as well as identificational repentance for idolatry and the covenants with false gods like Shiva, Hindu god of destruction, and Surya, the sun god. We had a graphic illustration of the influence of this double god when one participant in the seminar went into a fit of demon possession and one of the spirits afflicting him identified himself as Surya.

Kjell Sjoberg, the late and much missed Swedish member of the team, spoke to the issue of the efficacy of the blood of Jesus to bring healing to the land and reconciliation in the Body of Christ. He said:

"God created Bali with a purpose to reveal his own personality and purpose. Satan wants to block God's voice in creation. He has done this most effectively since the whole island has been sacrificed to the gods . . . Spiritual strongholds are no problem for a united church. Therefore, the groundwork before spiritual warfare

always involves reconciliation in the Body of Christ....The deeper we go in repentance, the higher we go in spiritual warfare.”

There was a significant time of such repentance in which participants identified with the sins of their various peoples. A Javanese repented of the way his people had treated the Balinese as did an Indonesian with Dutch blood who asked forgiveness for the massacres of the Balinese by the Dutch colonialists. Balinese men repented for the subjugation and domination of women. Then nine Balinese led us all in repentance for the idolatry and worship of the creation, a major sin of the island.

Afterwards, forty-nine intercessors took part in a quiet, low profile prayer walk at Besakih. A very strong serpent/dragon motif pervaded this shrine. The Balinese leaders, acting on behalf of their people, broke the covenants made with Shiva/Surya, the chief spirit controlling the island. They did this with considerable weeping, repentance, and intercession on behalf of their people. A Balinese woman prayer leader experienced a vision during prayer at this shrine and saw it engulfed with fire. In 1963 this same still active volcano erupted, cascading lava down upon the temple complex and causing 3000 people to lose their lives.

Four teams led by local Balinese Christian leaders were dispatched to various strategic locations for on-site prayer, including some of the major temples and places of historic massacres and bloodshed. My particular team journeyed to the southernmost temple, Ulu Watu. Utilizing the information concerning a probable occult line of power linking this temple with Besakih, we stood outside the temple and in the authority of Jesus, broke that line and asked God to reveal his person and power to the Balinese.. Some weeks later it was this temple that was struck by lightning and burned, causing over \$100,000 worth of damage. A local newspaper whined, “Why did our god allow this to happen to his temple?”

Two other temples in the mountains where a team prayed were struck by falling logs. Another temple will be destroyed because of development purposes, and Besakih, the mother temple, has been closed to all outside visitors with the exception of active worshipers since the Balinese Christians quietly repented there. At the end of the initiative, everyone including the local leaders noticed a change of atmosphere with a significant lightening of oppression, and the next morning an earthquake shook the island. Before the initiative one of those who was providing supporting prayer “saw a dark blanket being rolled back off the island and God’s light beginning to shine in. Another saw a mushroom cloud of darkness lifting off the island.” Praise God for His mighty working!

Best of all there has been spiritual renewal among some nominal Christians including the



growth of healing and deliverance meetings, and a greater responsiveness to the gospel by unbelievers. In one particularly resistant area where one of the teams prayed, the pastor has now baptized 15 new believers! Some of the pastors are meeting once a month for extended prayer, and when the Indonesian government recently began to build a 400-foot statue to the Hindu god Vishnu, they were alerted to pray against this idol. Just a few weeks ago the head of the statue caught fire and burned.

Amidst these glorious answers to prayer there has also been a pretty significant backlash. One pastor was involved in near fatal car accident. Another was caught in a riot, beaten and jailed by the police, and a third has a daughter who came under demonic affliction.

Please pray for the Balinese brothers and sisters as they take their island for Jesus Christ. Pray for the unity of the church leaders, that they will continue to apply the lessons learned in strategic intercession and that they will be effective in reaching the unreached. Pray for the breaking of the spirit of fear and cultural pressure hindering people from coming to the Lord and specifically for the conversion of key people in government, Hindu priests, and businesspeople.

Finally, I just want to share some general lessons learned from this prayer journey and others we have taken.

1. The importance of objective research on history, culture, current situation, and briefing by local leaders.
2. Submission to authority of local church and mission leaders.
3. Humility and dependence on God by the entire team.
4. The value of a team approach, especially international and intercultural, but also male and female.
5. Informed, focused support by home-based intercessors.
6. United proclamation of appropriate passages of God's word.
7. Agreement in prayer according to Matthew 18:18-20.
8. Prophetic prayer actions as inspired by the Spirit.