



**BEGINNERS GUIDE TO BALINESE PRAYER, OFFERINGS, TEMPLES
AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES**



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Guide to Balinese Prayer

This short introduction will hopefully serve as a guide to help visitors understand the essence of Balinese Religious Prayer and explain the do's and don'ts while observing or participating in them. The Balinese feel themselves to be a blessed people; a feeling continually reinforced by the wealth of their every-day life and strengthened by the splendor of their religion.

The beliefs of the Balinese are a living force that pervades the island and reverberates outside it. The island sings of love. The love that spends an hour making an offering of woven palm leaves and beautiful flowers. The love that finds the time, everyday, to think of giving something to the Gods; by lighting a stick of incense, by praying a Mantra, by sprinkling holy water or by doing a Mudra (a sacred movement with the hands).

Bali is also the love bestowed upon their children, the beautiful processions and the intricate offerings made with simple humility.

The Balinese consider magic as true and the power of spirits and much of their religion is grounded in this belief .As in Hinduism, Balinese religion is a quest for balance between the forces of good and evil.

The main expression of Balinese religion is through rituals or festivals in which the people spend hours making offerings of flowers, food, and palm leaf Figures. Daily small offerings called “canang sari”, which contain symbolic food and flowers are placed in temples and shrines around the family compound.

Religious festivals are innumerable in Bali. The Odalan is the most common type of temple ceremony. This is a regularly scheduled event to celebrate the anniversary of a temple dedication.

Over 20,000 temples in Bali have an Odalan every “uku” year to celebrate the anniversary of the temple, usually on a full or new moon.

These ceremonies usually last for three days, although some major celebrations will continue for a week to 10 days. The village prepares for days ahead cleaning and decorating the temple, preparing large ornate offerings at home, and preparing the food that will be provided to the priest and musicians during the festival.

Characteristically, the first day yields crowded roads, as throngs of worshipers, dressed in their finest traditional attire, march to the temples bearing offerings of pyramids of food and fruit on their heads. Days of prayer, music and dance to entertain the gods follow.

As the ceremonies in Bali display spectacular and colorful scenes, they have become a great attraction to visitors who, when they do not understand the procedures may unwittingly create intrusive distractions.

The visitor who just sees these ceremonies as a photo opportunity without regard for the proceedings and who disregards all reasonable requests to behave respectfully, will not be welcome.

However for those who are willing to honor customs and behave accordingly are very welcome to observe and participate if invited.

THINGS YOU WILL NEED

- 1)DUPA (INCENSE)** The Balinese word for incense is Dupa.
- 2)Flower offering.** A typical offering for prayer consist of 5 different colored flowers. Usually red, orange, yellow and green.
- 3)Temple Sash.** The minimum temple wear for prayer is a temple sash. Usually Yellow or colored will work well. It is worn around your waist and indicates that you are serious about the gods.
- 4) Holy water.** If you are praying in the temple. You will have holy water poured over your heads with your hands extended over your head.
- 5) A Pemangku or Balinese Priest** who serves the three village temples one to Siwa, Wisnu and Brahma. The Pemangku helps to bring the proper spirits for prayer.
- 6)Humbleness .**The main idea is to be Thankful to the many Hindu gods that provide abundance. Remembering Spirit is the Source of All

A GUIDE TO WORSHIPPING FOR VISITORS

Picture 1) Sit quietly, men cross-legged, women kneeling to calm yourself and breathe in harmony in preparation for prayer.

Picture 2) Wash your face and hands in the smoke of the incense.

Picture 3) Praying with empty hands to connect to your own soul.

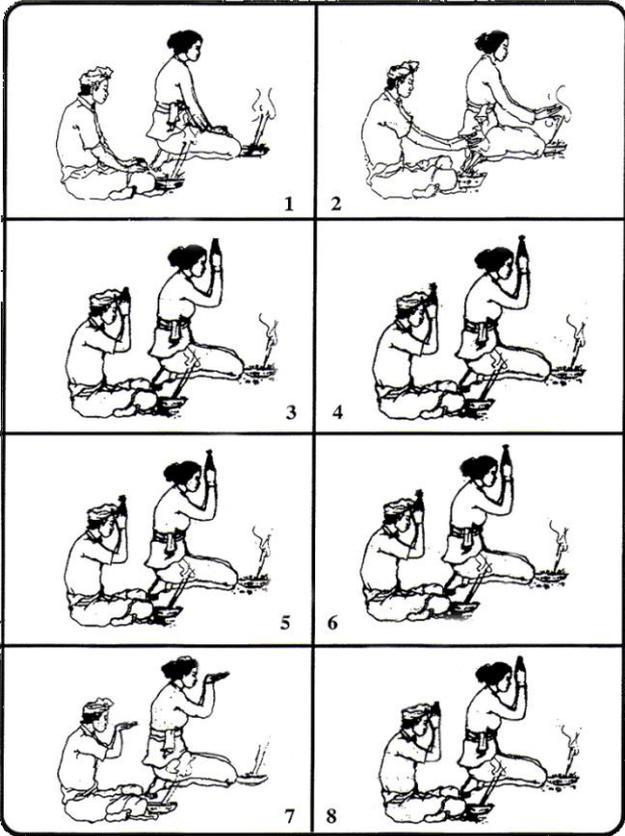
Picture 4) Hold a flower in your fingertips to pray to the supreme One.

Picture 5) Having discarded the single flower now hold different colored flowers in the finger tips to pray to the three God manifestations- Creator, Preserver and Destroyer.(Brahma, Wisnu and Siva)

Picture 6) Holding three or more flowers honoring the manifestations of the One God in All Beings

Picture 7) Praying with empty hands beseeching peace in our selves and othe
Picture 8) Wait quietly for the Pemangku to come around and sprinkle holy water on you.

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BALINESE RELIGION

Bali-Hinduism dominates the everyday lives of most Balinese, and has blended with culture, architecture, literature, philosophy, and much else.

Agama Tirtha

One of the oldest names for the Balinese religion is *Agama Tirtha*, or “religion of the holy waters”. The name depicts not only the sign of water as a tool of purification, but also the role of irrigation in the overall socio-ecological system. Balinese believe all religions are like rivers, which all flow from the mountain heights and all end up in the same large sea. Only their beds are different. Some meander, others do not. The religion is a combination of elements from the Indian Shivaite and Buddhist traditions with older beliefs and practices originating from other parts of Indonesia. Here ancestors are deified, as are the fundamental forces of nature. The resulting blend continues to be anti-dogmatic and ever changing as it absorbs aspects of the various religious systems that are brought to the island.

The Balinese idea of truth.

To the Hindu-Balinese, the truth, although it may exist, is not knowable. In Bali there is no attempt at religious uniformity. Such religious tolerance makes the Balinese open to all manners of social coexistence.

Balinese Hinduism versus mainstream Hinduism.

Although there are many similarities between Hinduism as practiced in Bali and most parts of India (deities, religious holidays), the differences are more striking. For example, in Bali the castes are losing their social significance, and intermarriage

between castes is not uncommon. The Balinese use their own 210-day calendar, consider Mount Agung as the center of the world, and - unlike Hinduism as practiced in India - allow people to become Balinese Hindus later in life. In practice, Balinese Hinduism is a separate religion.

Gods & deities

The Balinese pantheon still includes sacred power specific to Bali, usually under the generic term *bhatara* or god. Of all the gods residing in nature, the most powerful are those associated with the mountains, lakes and the sea. There are literally thousands of gods in the Balinese religion, the most important of whom are:

Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. This is the “one supreme unknowable God” and is represented as Atintya a being in meditation surrounded by flames. Atintya has gained importance in recent years because he falls in line with religious beliefs that revolve around a single god, of whom all other gods are manifestations.

Trimurthi.

This god is more generally expressed as the Trimurthi or Hindu trinity (Brahma the creator, Wisnu the preserver and Siwa the destroyer).

Dewi Sri.

The beloved goddess of rice. She is the anima of a rice cult of particular beauty. Her shrines in the rice fields are simple structures of virgin bamboo. She is honored in a number of different cyclical rituals, including the daily offerings set out after cooking every day

Bhatari Durga.

She is the consort of Siwa in her ferocious aspect. She rules over demons, ghosts and witches. Her most famous manifestation in Bali is Rangda, the queen of the witches in the Calonarang dance drama.

Saraswati.

She is the goddess of knowledge, wisdom and arts. She is usually depicted as a beautiful, richly dressed woman riding a goose.

Bhatara Kawitan. This is the term for the original clan of ancestors. The most intimate gods are the deified ancestors. The relationship between a Balinese and his ancestors is at once reverent and practical. The souls of the dead can be absorbed into heaven only by the purification rites of the living. In return, the ancestors bestow blessings and sometimes advice through trance mediums.

Sanghyang Semara-Ratih. She/he is the symbol of sexual union and also the symbol of beauty and is able to guarantee success in all ventures, cure sickness and chase away evil.

Ida Bhatara Gunung Agung. He is the god of [Mount Agung](#) and is honored at Pura Besakih and other major temples.

Ida Bhatari Dewi Ulun Danau Batur. She is the goddess of [Lake Batur](#) and her temple is on the edge of Batur crater. Her son is called Maya Danawa.

Offerings

Offerings, usually made of palm leaf, flowers and foodstuffs, are an art form associated with every ritual occasion in Bali. The Balinese belief in the forces of the invisible world dictates that offerings be created with a spirit of thankfulness and loving attention to detail. They seem never too tired of producing these colorful and highly symbolic, ephemeral creations for every ritual, from the simplest daily household offerings to gods, demons and ancestors to massive ceremonies such as the *PancaWali Krama* held at [Pura Besakih](#) to purify and bring blessings upon the entire world.

Canang sari offerings differ in form and function depending on locality. They function as a kind of repayment to the forces of the invisible world for their gifts to human society. Typically Canang sari offerings contain flowers, leaves, liquid fragrance and a symbolic betel quid.

Gayah. While women construct most offerings, elaborate offerings made of meat are fashioned by men for use on major ritual occasions. The *gayah* or *sate gede* is said to represent the animal kingdom, the complement to the kingdom of plant life so often represented in offerings made by women. Creations such as these represent the Balinese notion that offerings symbolize the “entire contents of the world”.

Gebogan are towering offerings constructed around the base of a banana trunk, to be presented at odalan. Typically, the first layer is composed of fruits, followed by layers of rice cakes in many shapes and colors. The next layer is a *canang sari* offering and the top an exuberant arrangement of flowers.

The *kwangen* is a small, triangular offering containing flowers, a small betel nut and often Chinese coins. *muspa* (to pray with flowers). *kwangen* are said to represent human action, purified in the act of worship.

Lamak. A small temporary shrine of bamboo called a *sanggah cucuk* is always found beneath a penjor. Small offerings to the deities are placed here for as long as the penjor is in use. This shrine is often “clothed” in a symbolic garment called a lamak.

The colorful runners made of plaited palm leaf often contain images of prosperity and fertility like the *cili*, an ancient symbol of both human and wet rice life cycles.

A penjor is an offering in the form of a tall, decorated bamboo pole whose gracefully curving upper end is said to resemble both the tail of the Barong, symbol of goodness and the peak of the sacred mountain, Mount Agung.

Penjor are placed in front of each Balinese household for the Galungan holiday and are also used in conjunction with important temple ceremonies and life-cycle rituals. Hanging from the end of every penjor are beautifully plaited palm leaf creations called *sampian*.

Sarad. These are elaborate offerings made of dyed rice dough arranged against a framework of bamboo and cloth. A sarad symbolizes the form and content of the Balinese mythic world. Sarad will typically include representations of Bedawang Nala and Naga Basuki, the cosmic turtle and dragon that provide support to the physical world. Another popular subject is Boma, son of the earth goddess, a fearsome but protective figure who represents all living things growing from the earth and helps to ensure a good harvest.

Ceremonies

Every Balinese performs thousands of ceremonies in a lifetime, often several a day. A ceremony will be held for all events of some importance in the life of a Balinese, such as birth, marriage, and death, but also the opening of a shop, or the purchase of a new motorcycle. A ceremony is essential to appease the gods and distract the evil spirits. Some ceremonies are very modest, such as placing a fresh [canang sari](#) offering in the house temple at the start of the day. Other ceremonies are very elaborate and may last for several days. It is not unusual for Balinese to complain about the high cost of such ceremonies! Of the many ceremonies, Ngaben and Odalan are perhaps the most widely known.

Temples are the meeting points of humans and gods and are the resting-place for the gods during their stay on the island. Temples come to life only on certain festival days or at temple anniversaries (odalan), when they are elaborately decorated to greet the gods with offerings. There are temples for almost all aspects of Balinese life. There are house temples, village temples, family temples, *banjar* temples, subak temples, cave temples, temples for ancestors, rice fields, and even for monkeys.

Monkey forests. Scattered throughout Bali are numerous temple groves and woods which have been set aside as sanctuaries for monkeys, to thank them for the assistance they gave Rama in the rescue of his bride Sita from the clutches of King Rawana, in the Ramayana epic. The most extensive of these is monkey forest at Sangeh. But in Ubud and Uluwatu, there are also monkey forests. Sad to say, years of overfeeding and pestering have made the monkeys rather unfriendly, and sometimes outright aggressive. Apart from Mount Agung, there are several other mountains and caves of interest. Most of them are associated with an important temple.

Visiting a Balinese temple.

Balinese temples are open to everybody, and you are free to take pictures. However, as the pura is the center of Balinese worship, ritual and devotion, be respectful whenever you enter. It is appropriate to put a bright yellow sash around the waist, and for men to wear either long pants or a sarong. Be prepared to make a nominal contribution toward the temple upkeep. Women are forbidden to enter while menstruating.