



Traditional Healing In Bali, Indonesia

Evidence of the existence of traditional healers in Bali date back to the 1300's, yet the healers practicing today are an amalgam of the techniques of indigenous healers and the influence of Hinduism, just as the Hinduism of Bali is an amalgam of indigenous animism, Buddhism and the Hinduism of India. As the influence of the Hindu religion permeates all aspects of life in Bali, it is also at the core of the treatment used by the Balian. The Balinese religion incorporates tantric aspects of deliverance through magico-religious means (this influence being from the ancient east Javanese kingdoms). The Balian incorporates these various philosophical approaches to produce a cosmology of healing and "dis-ease".

The Balian

The system of traditional medicine in Bali has become institutionalized in the culture and specialization both in technique and expertise exist. The Balian Apun utilize physical manipulation of the body and set broken bones; the Balian Manak are midwives; the Balian Tenung are diviners; the Balian Metuunan are those who are able to be possessed by souls of the dead. These are the specialists. The majority of traditional healers are generalists who treat a variety of conditions and are known as either Balian Usada or Balian Tapakan.

The Balian Usada, often referred to as a literate healer, acquire their skills by formalized study of classical texts on the subject of healing (the "usadas"). They specialize in the use of the ancient palm leaf manuscripts (lontar) to give advise and treatment after eliciting symptoms from the client. The Balian Usada go through a process of apprenticeship to prepare for consecration (mawinten) by the community and the Hindu religion. All Balian Usada are male.

The Balian Tapakan obtain their mystical healing power (sakti or ilmu) by way of supernatural inspiration. They serve as mediators between their client and the mystical forces to which they have been chosen to have the ability to access. They act as spirit mediums to obtain advise concerning sickness, family problems and other matters of importance to their clients. This Balian undergoes no formal training but is eventually

recognized by their community as a healer and is eventually consecrated as such after a formal training in priestly duties.

Balians are consecrated practitioners who also perform many priestly functions and are highly esteemed by the Balinese, often referred to by the honorific title "jero". Many practitioners utilize techniques that cross the boundaries of their title. For example, a Balian Tapakan may be able to be possessed by souls of the dead or utilize massage to treat their clients.

Spiritual Power

The Balian is consecrated to be "kesaktian"(to possess sakti or spiritual power). The concept of good and evil does not apply to the concept of sakti, but rather it is a mystical power that can be used for both good and evil in the Balinese cosmology. The Balian once consecrated promises to God to use this power only for good. Balians are often reluctant to describe themselves as Balian, since to do so implies they are sakti. To possess sakti in Bali can produce fear and social distance by the Balinese. Many practicing and consecrated Balians prefer to refer to themselves as "healers" or "Jero Tapakan" and refer to their mystical power as "bayu" (spiritual or physical energy).

Once a Balian is recognized as such, they become subject to being "tested" by others who possess this mystical power. Such supernatural "battles" are common among the Balian and many dread this negative aspect of their position.

Altered States of Consciousness

Common to all Balians is the "ilmu tetenger" or the knowledge that comes to them from the mystical or spiritual world. This knowledge can come in a normal state of consciousness or in trance, an altered state of consciousness.

The Balinese (any Balinese) may experience altered states they call "trance" or possession by a spiritual entity as a temporary experience, especially during ceremonies in their temple. "Mass trance" and the viewing of "trance dances" are a normal feature of religious life.

The Balian experiences such altered states on a regular basis, voluntarily and often involuntarily, the difference being the Balian receives knowledge from the mystical world that has application in the real world. The Balian is able to enter "trance" at will and to consistently provide solutions to the problems of their clients, be they physical illness or social problems.

"Possession trance" is the state in which the Balian feels their body has been taken over by another entity, an entity from the mystical world. The Balian's spirit continues to exist as well, but once the Balian allows the spiritual entity to enter their body, their spirit

becomes an observer to the use of their body by the entity, or they may lose complete awareness of the events that occur during the possession.

Stephen (1989, 1995, 1997) has conceptualized the cross-cultural altered consciousness of the shaman as "autonomous imagination" (capacities beyond those normally available to consciousness). Balians would argue that such states originate from a divine source, that such an ability comes as a gift from God.

Balian Conceptualization of Health

The Balian views illness as the result of disharmony in the "Tri Hita Karana", the three elements which must be in harmony for a person to exist in a healthy state. The first of these is

"Sang Hyang Jagat Karana", the relation of a person to God, the supreme supernatural power. The second is "Bhuana Agung", the macrocosmos, the total physical environment of man. The third being "Bhuana Alit" or the microcosmos, the person themselves with their bodily needs, their thoughts and feelings.

If a disharmony exists between these elements, illness will be the result. The Balian's place is to identify the source of the disharmony and to re-establish harmony in the life of the client. To this end, the Balian may recommend changes in the physical or social environment to balance the macrocosm. The microcosm may need purification, contact with specific spiritual entities, natural medicines or a balancing of the energy flow of the body in order to bring the body to a harmonious state.

The harmony of the spirit, the environment and the body are the basis of individual as well as community good health in the cosmology of these traditional healers.