

# Balinese Silence Day

Monday, 28 February 2011



Every religion or culture all over the world has their own way to define and celebrate their new year. For example, the Chinese have the Imlek year and to celebrate it, have, as they called it in their own language, "Gong Xi Fat Choy". The Moslem societies have their Muharam year, and any of the people over the world using the Gregorian calendar, celebrate the New Year on January 1st.

The same thing also occurs in Bali, however the Balinese use many different calendar systems. They have adopted the Gregorian calendar for business and government purposes. But for the endless procession of holy days, temple anniversaries, celebrations, sacred dances, building houses, wedding ceremonies, death and cremation processes and other activities that define Balinese life, they have two calendar systems. The first is the Pawukon (from the word Wuku which means week) and Sasih (which is means month). Wuku consists of 30 items starting from Sinta, the first Wuku and end up with the Watugunung the last one. The Pawukon, a 210-day ritual calendar brought over from Java in the 14th century, is a complex cycle of numerological conjunctions that provides the basic schedule for ritual activities on Bali. Sasih, a parallel system of Indian origin, is a twelve month lunar calendar that starts with the vernal equinox and is equally important in determining when to pay respect to the Gods.



Westerners open the New Year in revelry, however, in contrast, the Balinese open their New Year in silence. This is called Nyepi Day, the Balinese day of Silence, which falls on the day following the dark moon of the spring equinox, and opens a new year of the Saka Hindu era which began in 78 A.D.

Nyepi is a day to make and keep the balance of nature. It is based on the story of when King Kaniska I of India was chosen in 78 A.D. The King was famous for his wisdom and tolerance for the Hinduism and Buddhism societies. In that age, Aji Saka did Dharma Yatra (the missionary tour to promote and spread Hinduism) to Indonesia and introduce the Saka year.

The lead upto Nyepi day is as follows:

1. **Melasti or Mekiyis or Melis (three days before Nyepi)**

Melasti is meant to clean the pratima or arca or pralingga (statue), with symbols that help to concentrate the mind in order to become closer to God. The ceremony is aimed to clean all nature and its content, and also to take the Amerta (the source for eternal life) from the ocean or other water resources (ie lake, river, etc). Three days before Nyepi, all the effigies of the Gods from all the village temples are taken to the river in long and colourful ceremonies. There, they have are bathed by the Neptune of the Balinese Lord, the God Baruna, before being taken back home to their shrines.

2. **Tawur Kesanga (the day before Nyepi)**

Exactly one day before Nyepi, all villages in Bali hold a large exorcism ceremony at the main village cross road, the meeting place of demons. They usually make Ogoh-ogoh (the fantastic monsters or evil spirits or the Butha Kala made of bamboo) for carnival purposes. The Ogoh-ogoh monsters symbolize the evil spirits surrounding our environment which have to be got rid of from our lives . The carnivals themselves are held all over Bali following sunset. Bleganjur, a Balinese gamelan music accompanies the procession. Some are giants taken from classical Balinese lore. All have fangs, bulging eyes and scary hair and are illuminated by torches. The procession is usually organised by the Seka Teruna, the youth organisation of Banjar. When Ogoh-ogoh is being played by the Seka Teruna, everyone enjoys the carnival. In order to make a harmonic relation between human being and God, human and human, and human and their environments, Tawur Kesanga is performed in every level of society, from the people's house. In the evening, the Hindus celebrating Ngerupuk, start making noises and light burning torches and set fire to the Ogoh-ogoh in order to get the Bhuta Kala, evil spirits, out of our lives.

**Ogoh-ogoh** are statues built for the Ngrupuk parade, which takes place on the eve of Nyepi day in Bali, Indonesia. Ogoh-ogoh normally have form of mythological beings, mostly demons. As with many creative endeavours based on Balinese Hinduism, the creation of Ogoh-ogoh represents spiritual aims inspired by Hindu philosophy.

The main purpose of the making of Ogoh-ogoh is the purification of the natural environment of any spiritual pollutants emitted from the activities of living beings (especially humans). The forms of Ogoh-ogoh represent the Bhuta-Kala (Bhuta: eternal energy, Kala: eternal time), according to Hindu teachings. The imperceptible potentials of nature cannot be thoroughly explored by anyone. Philosophically, civilized men are required to manage the natural resources without any attempts to damage the environment itself.

Aside from being the symbol of Bhuta-Kala, Ogoh-ogoh is considered a symbol of modes of nature that form the malicious characters of living beings. Ogoh-ogoh is usually made

by the group of artists found in villages around Bali. After being paraded on a convoy around the town, finally it is burnt to ashes in a cemetery as a symbol of self-purification.

An Ogoh-ogoh is normally standing on a pad built of timber planks and bamboos. This pad is purposed to sustain the Ogoh-ogoh itself during its being lifted and carried around the village or the town's square. There are normally eight or more men carrying the Ogoh-ogoh on their shoulders. This procession is accompanied by music orchestra performed by the youth. The use of flares is also a main part of the parade.

During the procession, the Ogoh-ogoh is rotated counter clockwise three times. This act is done on every t-junction and road intersection of the village. Rotating the effigies during cremational parade and the eve of Nyepi represents the contact of the bodies with the spirits. It is aimed to bewilder the evil spirits so that they go away and cease harming human beings.

After that the next day which follows is the "silence day and is called:

### 3. **Nyepi**

On Nyepi day itself, every street is quiet - there are nobody doing their normal daily activities. There is usually Pecalang (traditional Balinese security man) who controls and checks for street security. Pecalang wear a black uniform and a Udeng or Destar (a Balinese traditional "hat" that is usually used in ceremony). The Pecalang's main task is not only to control the security of the street but also to stop any activities that disturb Nyepi. No traffic is allowed, not only cars but also people, who have to stay in their own houses. Light is kept to a minimum or not at all, the radio or TV is turned down and, of course, no one works. Even love making, this ultimate activity of all leisure times, is not supposed to take place, nor even attempted. The whole day is simply filled with the barking of a few dogs, the shrill of insect and is a simple long quiet day in the calendar of this otherwise hectic island. On Nyepi the world expected to be clean and everything starts anew, with Man showing his symbolic control over himself and the "force" of the World, hence the mandatory religious control.

### 4. **Ngembak Geni (the day after Nyepi)**

Ngembak is the day when Catur Berata Penyepian is over and Hindus societies usually visit to forgive each other and doing the Dharma Canthi. Dharma Canthi are activities of reading Sloka, Kekidung, Kekawin, etc.(ancient scripts containing songs and lyrics).

From the religious and philosophy point of view, Nyepi is meant to be a day of self introspection to decide on values, eg humanity, love, patience, kindness, etc., that should kept forever. Balinese Hindus have many kind of celebrations (some sacred days) but Nyepi is, perhaps the most important of the island's religious days and the prohibitions are taken seriously, particularly in villages outside of Bali's southern tourist belt. Hotels are exempt from Nyepi's rigorous practices but streets outside will be closed to both pedestrians and vehicles (except for airport shuttles or emergency vehicles) and village

wardens (Pecalang) will be posted to keep people off the beach. So wherever you happen to be staying on Nyepi Day in Bali, this will be a good day to spend indoors. Indeed Nyepi day has made Bali a unique island.