

# Investigation of Psychic Beliefs in Bali

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## ABSTRACT

In order to understand psi more fully, we need to study it cross-culturally. This study examines the beliefs about paranormal occurrences among the Balinese, and we compare these results, where possible, to survey results in American and European cultures. Most of our data is based on a survey conducted in Bali, but some information from in-depth interviews with Balinese practitioners is included to illustrate in greater depth some aspects of the survey data. The survey was given to 534 Balinese ranging in ages from 15-75; the respondents came from both the capital city as well as from a more rural area.

In general, we found belief in the existence of psychic phenomena quite high in Bali; there is no question that the vast majority of Balinese surveyed believe in paranormal occurrences. Yet, in contrast to the high belief in its existence, the Balinese do not generally believe that they personally possessed psychic ability. Although a larger percentage of people responded that they had personally witnessed psi than the percentage who believe they possess psi abilities, it is still a smaller percentage than those who believe in its existence; therefore, their belief in the existence of psychic phenomena seems to stem more from a cultural belief than from any personal experience.

In general, the Balinese believe, on the one hand, that psychic abilities are derived from divine sources, but they also believe that psychic functioning can be developed from meditative practices. Given the number of specific religious practices among the Balinese, it was surprising that they responded that paranormal facility is more likely to be developed through general meditative techniques, rather than through specifically Balinese practices.

Their responses about psychic belief fit in well with the general Balinese worldview, and the data begin to elucidate some cultural aspects of psychic belief and practice. Finally, we consider the implications of this data for the possible success of performing an ESP experiment in Bali.

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of the great diversity among the world's cultures, every culture seems to report psychic experiences. For instance, 97% of cultures believe in some form of out-of-the-body experiences (Shiels, 1978), 74% believe in spirit possession (Bouguignon, 1976), and all cultures report some form of hex death (Halifax-Grof, 1974). But, as one might expect, the beliefs about psychic abilities seem to vary from culture to culture – how they explain psychic activities, how much they believe psychic experiences are ubiquitous in the culture, and which psychic experiences are deemed important in particular cultures.<sup>1</sup>

We need a better understanding of the cultural variability in psychic beliefs and psychic practices, but that is a large-scale study that waits to be done. The approach in this paper is specific and more modest: it offers a detailed analysis of beliefs about psychic practices in Bali. Most of this information is based on survey data we collected. We then explore how practitioners understand their own abilities and practices as illustrations of some of the survey results; this material was gathered through in-depth interviews with them.

### *The Importance of Studying Psi Cross-culturally*

There are a number of reasons why one would want to study psi cross-culturally. First, we can understand psi beliefs and psi production more clearly if we understand the cultural beliefs that lie behind them, and we may get a better handle on cognitive aspects of psi, such as the experimenter effect. Secondly, we want to understand the variability of beliefs in psi and psi production among cultures, and investigate why these beliefs vary. Third, there have been claims of extraordinary psi in non-EuroAmerican societies, and we need to evaluate these claims. If such psychic functioning is so ubiquitous and so extraordinary in some cultures, we need to focus on these cultures and find out what would make such extraordinary abilities possible in that culture, whether it might be their beliefs, or special techniques, or special talent.

For instance, Marlow Morgan (1991), in her popular book, *Mutant Message Down Under*, purports to have walked across the Outback of Australia, taken by a group of Australian Aborigines. She reports a number of extraordinary events, such as one person suffering a fall down an incline, and receiving a compound fracture of the leg. However, a healer worked on this individual, and by the next day, the person was able to continue the journey without so much as a limp. Further, she reports that on a number of occasions, no one in the group spoke out loud since their powers of telepathy were so great that they could telepathically communicate specific information, even carrying on extended conversations. Needless to say, if such psi functioning exists, it would be well worth the time and effort of parapsychologists to investigate these cultures. It should come as no surprise to parapsychologists, however, that Marlow Morgan has admitted that not all of the story is literally true.

Finally, other extraordinary claims have been placed in doubt; for instance, Wiseman and Haraldsson (Wiseman, 1995) investigated ostensible macro-PK in India. Although Swami Premananda was not caught engaged in trickery, he was able to project objects only in informal conditions and not under more formal conditions. They also came to the same conclusion about Sai Baba (Haraldsson, 1995). Wiseman (1999) has also detected fraud in the Indian Rope Trick.

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<sup>1</sup> We gratefully acknowledge and thank the Bial Foundation for supporting this project.

Therefore, we can deduce from these and other cases that we have a right to be suspicious about these extraordinary claims.

Nevertheless, there are some reasons for believing that traditional people can produce a robust version of psi. For instance, Ronald and Lyndon Rose (L. and R. Rose, 1951; R. Rose, 1952; R. Rose, 1955; R. Rose, 1956) performed a series of experiments using Australian Aborigines, which was successful. In fact, the single most significant score published in a parapsychology journal was achieved by Lizzie Williams in one of these experiments (L. and R. Rose, 1951).

Yet, other parapsychologists have not achieved such success. For instance, Robert Van de Castle (1970, 1974) found only marginal success with Cuna Indian students on San Blas Islands, east of Panama; and Dorothy Pope (1953) reported no significant ESP in a test in New Guinea conducted by a school teacher there. In fact, formal studies of psychic beliefs and experiences in non-Western cultures are few and far between, and those few have yielded inconsistent results. This study in Bali is an attempt to provide some in-depth information on how one culture views psychic functioning in order to contribute to the data about non-Western cultures so that we may begin to have a fuller understanding of psychic beliefs and claims cross-culturally.

We should also mention the difficulty of developing appropriate experimental protocols for non-EuroAmerican cultures. Giesler (1984) has discussed in detail methodologies and experimental procedures that are sensitive to the culture being studied. Surveys have been used in Bali by academic researchers and by the government for over twenty years in Bali, so the survey approach is not inconsistent with contemporary Balinese culture. Since we did not attempt to test psychic functioning but rather sought responses about their beliefs, we felt our approach was culturally appropriate.

## METHOD

The study was conducted in two parts, using different methodologies, and we will report them serially. The survey data attempts to ascertain beliefs about psychic ability among the Balinese, and we will discuss this material and juxtapose some of its findings with survey data from the West. In the second part of the study, Suryani interviewed eight psychic practitioners in Bali in order to begin to investigate their understanding of psychic abilities and how they developed these abilities. We will integrate some of this material in our discussion late in the paper to illustrate and illuminate the survey data, but the primary analysis concerns only the survey data.

### *Participants*

We surveyed a total of 534 Balinese, fairly evenly divided between men and women: 251 were male, while 283 were female. They ranged in age from 15 to 75, with an average age of 30. The median age was 26.

In terms of religious affiliation, the overwhelming number were Balinese Hindu (508), while 15 marked Muslim, and 10 reported being Christian. One person failed to report an affiliation. It should be mentioned here that we told the participants they did not have to answer any question they did not want to, so some participants did not supply all of the demographic data.

In terms of education, one person marked no schooling, 31 primary school, 63 Junior High (ages 12-16), 277 Senior High(ages 16-19), 84 Vocational school (such as nursing), and 58 University.

452 were not yet married, 250 were married, 1 divorced, 12 widowed, and 1 separated.

452 of the participants were born in Bali, while 11 were born in Java, and 4 were born outside of Java and Bali.

276 participants marked that they had been greatly influenced by Western culture, while 217 responded that they had been influenced only a little.

Most of the participants had been brought up in rural areas. 403 marked that they had been brought up in a rural area, 103 in a city, and 16 from a tourist area (like Kuta Beach).

### *Instrument*

This survey on dreams and psychic experiences was given at the same time to a large sample of Balinese who were also taking a questionnaire concerning volition. Many of the questions about psychic belief came from the Edinburgh Personal Information Form they used in their research on volition. We selected questions related to belief about psychic experiences, and we add a few others. We also retained questions from the Edinburgh PIF relating to dreams because Suryani was working on a separate project relating to Balinese dreams. The form was entitled Questions about Dreams and the Psychic.

It should be mentioned that we chose several ways to express the concept of the paranormal. Balinese are familiar with the concepts of 6<sup>th</sup> sense and ESP (directly translated), but we also used the Balinese “betel-tingal,” which means knowing without the influence of senses, so seeing without using the eyes, hearing without using the ears, etc. The Balinese did not seem to have a difficulty with understanding what we were asking.

We began the study with an instrument having a 7-point Likert scale, and we tested it on 109 participants, asking them to mark which questions were: too difficult, normal, easy, difficult to understand, easy to understand, very good to understand somebody's dreams and ESP, and not appropriate to understand dreams and ESP. From these responses, we rewrote several questions and added a few, including two relating to volition. We also changed the scale to a 5-point Likert scale. Given these differences, the initial 109 responses are not included in this study.

Surveys were given to a full range of ages, from high school students to the elderly, and were given in a number of settings, including classrooms and health facilities. Most of them were given in a group setting. We accumulated 533 questionnaires. Participants were told that they did not have to answer all the questions, and so the actual number of responses differs slightly from question to question. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, with the meaning of the responses changing according to the question. For instance, the responses ranged from “certain,” to “uncertain,” to “impossible” for a question asking whether or not they thought ESP existed, and from "I have psi ability" to "uncertain" to "I have no psi ability" in a question asking them to describe their own psi ability. We will now discuss some of the responses (see Table 1 for the questions and the percentages).

### *Data Scoring and Analysis*

The respondents' answers were entered into an Excel program, and analysis was performed using Excel.

**Table 1:** Questions About Psychic Beliefs Among the Balinese  
(responses given in percentages)

n = 534

1. Is the existence of ESP or sixth sense or <i>betel-tingal</i> there?	<b>61%</b> Certain	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b> Uncertain	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b> impossible
2. Is the existence of inner power (PK or inner power) there?	<b>65%</b> Yes	<b>10%</b>	<b>16%</b> Uncertain	<b>3%</b>	<b>6%</b> No
3. Do you believe that through black magic one can harm another person?	<b>66%</b> Yes	<b>8%</b>	<b>16%</b> Uncertain	<b>1%</b>	<b>9%</b> No
4. Does everyone have the sixth sense ability?	<b>11%</b> Yes	<b>8%</b>	<b>29%</b> Uncertain	<b>4%</b>	<b>48%</b> No
5. What best describes your own psi ability or supernatural or <i>betel-tingal</i> ?	<b>8%</b> I have psi ability	<b>6%</b>	<b>32%</b> Uncertain	<b>8%</b>	<b>46%</b> I have no psi ability
6. Have you ever had an experience which is best explained by <i>betel-tingal</i> , ESP or sixth sense?	<b>16%</b> Yes	<b>7%</b>	<b>15%</b> Uncertain	<b>6%</b>	<b>56%</b> No
7. When playing a game of chance, do you feel that you can influence the roll of the dice, or the way the cards are distributed in order to have more success in the game?	<b>7%</b> Yes	<b>4%</b>	<b>29%</b> Uncertain	<b>6%</b>	<b>55%</b> No
8. Have you ever had an experience which is best explained by PK or inner power?	<b>12%</b> Yes	<b>4%</b>	<b>7%</b> Uncertain	<b>3%</b>	<b>74%</b> No
9. Have you personally witnessed an event such as a person knowing through sixth sense what is taking place in a distance place while it is occurring?	<b>21%</b> Yes	<b>7%</b>	<b>10%</b> Uncertain	<b>4%</b>	<b>55%</b> No
10. Have you personally witnessed an event such as a person finding a lost object only through the sixth sense?	<b>20%</b> Yes	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b> Uncertain	<b>3%</b>	<b>63%</b> No

11. Have you personally witnessed a person moving an object in front of your eyes through paranormal ability?

**21%**      **5%**                      **7%**                      **4%**                      **63%**  
Yes                                      Uncertain                                      No

12. Have you ever seen what you believe is a leyak?

**12%**      **6%**                      **13%**                      **3%**                      **66%**  
Yes                                      Uncertain                                      No

13. Has any member of your family had psychic or supernatural or sixth sense paranormal experiences?

**14%**      **3%**                      **9%**                      **2%**                      **72%**  
Yes                                      Uncertain                                      No

14. According to you what causes a person to possess sixth sense/ psychic/ supernatural/ ESP/ paranormal abilities? (select one or more or add if you think it is necessary)

**17%** descent  
**26%** choice of God  
**23%** trance/being sat on by power/possessed  
**2%** mental disorder  
**29%** learning a specific method or technique  
**2%** mention others

15. According to your understanding, how should practice [or what means, or what is the way] to develop the sixth sense? (select one or more or add if you think it is necessary)

**5%** through the betel leaf?  
**17%** through the thumb nail  
**25%** through dream  
**47%** through trance  
**6%** other

16. According to your experience and training or other methods, what can you do to develop the sixth sense? (select one or more or add if you think it is necessary)

**57%** meditation  
**38%** yoga  
**19%** fasting  
**47%** praying

17. If you had an ESP experience(s), was the ESP information conveyed to you primarily (most commonly) by means of: (tick as many boxes as appropriate): (% of 402 responses)

**63%** A sense, feeling, intuition, or thought  
**17%** Seeing a vision of a figure or an object  
**20%** Internal mental image

## RESULTS

### The Existence of Psi

We asked the whether they thought ESP, or sixth sense, or *betel-tingal* exists. 78% of the respondents answered positively (this represents the first two items on the 5-point scale; we will follow this reporting procedure unless otherwise stated); additionally, 17% said that ESP was uncertain (while 5% marked one of the last two boxes). Only 3% say that ESP is impossible.

Further, 75% of the respondents also thought that PK, or inner power, existed, and 74% responded that they believed that one can harm another person through black magic. The belief in PK, and even black magic, is as high as the belief in ESP, but a larger percentage of the people (6% for PK, and 9% for black magic) think that PK is not possible.

### Belief in their Own Abilities

When asked, "Does everyone have the 6<sup>th</sup> sense ability," only 19% gave a positive response, as opposed to 78% who believed in the existence of ESP in general. 48% said that this definitely was not true (the percentage rising to 42% for those marking the last two boxes). When asked, "What best describes your own psi ability," only 14% marked the two highest values, while a full 46% said, "I have no psi ability." When asked, "Have you ever had an experience which is best explained by *betel-tingel*, ESP, or 6<sup>th</sup> sense," only 25% responded positively, while 56% marked the last box, "No."

They are quite consistent, therefore, in responding that although they believe in the existence of ESP, not everyone has this ability. While it is not surprising to have fewer people respond that they possess psi as opposed to a general belief in the existence of psi, the great disparity is noteworthy. Indeed, this finding is an important one in understanding Balinese beliefs about psychic powers, and it will be discussed more below.

### PK Ability

This same disparity between a high percentage of respondents believing in ESP and a low percentage who believe they personally have the ability plays itself out when asking about psychokinesis. When asked whether or not they believed in PK, 75% answered positively, with only 6% responding that they were sure it did not exist. On the other hand, when we asked about their own PK ability, the percentages shrink. We asked them whether or not they thought they could influence the role of dice in a game of chance in order to be more successful in the game. Only 11% responded positively, while 55% responded that they definitely could not, the percentage rising to 61% for those who marked the last two boxes. When asked if they had ever had an experience which is best explained by PK or inner power, only 16% responded positively, while 74% said that they definitely had not had one (rising to 77% for those who marked the last two boxes).

### Witnessing Physical Events

We also asked whether or not they had witnessed a psychokinetic event, such as moving an object in front of their eyes by a paranormal ability. Surprisingly, the same percentage as saying they had witnessed finding a lost object through ESP, 26%, also said that they had witnessed a PK event.

Finally, we asked if any of them had ever seen what they thought was a *leyak*. The Balinese believe that practitioners of black magic can sometimes change themselves into another

form, usually animals, and harass people during the night. 18% of the Balinese responded positively to that question, while 66% were sure they had not seen a leyak, the percentage rising to 69% checking the last two boxes.

### Family members

Since it was possible that people were reticent to talk about their own psychic experiences, but they still might believe that others close to them had those experiences, we asked them whether any member of their families had ever had a psychic or 6<sup>th</sup> sense experience. Interestingly, the 17% who answered affirmatively to this question is lower than the 25% who affirmed that they personally had had an experience best explained by ESP. 72% responded that they were quite sure that a family member had had no psychic experience, with 74% marking the last two boxes.

### Origin of Psychic Powers

Finally, we wanted to find out what the Balinese considered the source of psi ability to be, and we asked two questions related to this. In the first, we asked: "According to you, what causes a person to possess sense/psychic/supernatural/ESP/paranormal abilities? (Select one or more or add if you think it is necessary.)" 55% of the respondents indicated that one could develop paranormal abilities by learning a specific method or technique.

47% of the people responded that paranormal abilities are given as a choice from God. In other words, it is a divine gift. We mentioned earlier that psychic abilities were thought to be a result of spiritual power, and a chief way to get this spiritual power is for it to be given by divine forces.

In a related response, 40% said that paranormal abilities could be caused by a trance, or being "sat on" by a power, or being possessed. Trance possession is rather ubiquitous in Bali, not only in mediumistic settings (mediums are viewed as healers in Bali, and most people will go to a medium at sometime in their lives). 31% indicated that psychic powers could be obtained by descent. It is not unusual for healing powers to be thought to come through generations within a family. Finally, 5% responded that paranormal abilities could come through some type of mental disorder.

In the second question, we asked: "According to your understanding, what practice should develop the 6<sup>th</sup> sense? 47% said that trance was a practice through which one could develop the 6<sup>th</sup> sense." 25% said that this could occur in dreams. 17% said that one could develop it through practicing the "thumb nail." This is a scrying technique (Kelly, 1981), much like staring into a crystal ball. In Bali, a person can put a drop of oil on the thumb, and have someone else, usually an adolescent, stare into the drop until a scene appears in the reflection which gives psychic information.

Finally, we asked the Balinese which training could develop the 6<sup>th</sup> sense ability. Again, they could respond to more than one category. 57% indicated that meditation was a good training, while 47% indicated that praying was effective. 38% indicated yoga was a training method, and 19% mentioned fasting.

In terms of the modality of ESP experiences, 63% of respondents who had had an ESP experience noted that it came to them in a "sense, feeling, intuition, or thought," while 17%

reported they had seen a vision of a figure or an object. 20% noted that the ESP information came to them in the form of internal mental imagery.

## DISCUSSION

### The Existence of Psi

The belief in psi abilities seems to be widespread in this sample, given that 78% of the respondents reported a belief in ESP, and 75% believed in PK. Further, 74% believed that a person can harm another through black magic. Since our sample was not a strictly random one, although it sampled a diverse population, it is not possible to generalize this belief to the population as a whole. However, based on the experience of both authors, the data seem to reflect our sense of the high belief in the existence of psi.

If we look at surveys in the United States, the belief in ESP does not seem to be as strong as in Bali. For instance, in a Gallup Poll, 50% of the American population said that they believed in ESP, with that percentage rising to 66% if the respondent had a college education (quoted in Wagner & Monnet (1979)). Further, in a survey of faculty from colleges and universities, 66% responded that they believed in ESP. Only in Iceland, where 86% of the people in a survey conducted by Haraldsson, et al, (1977) responded that they believed in ESP, do we find a higher belief in ESP than in Bali. Both Iceland and Bali are small island cultures, whose populations traditionally have been fairly homogeneous, and stories about paranormal events are a strong part of the cultural history.

Therefore, compared to non-random surveys in other countries, one can say that the belief in psychic ability is ubiquitous in our sample.

### Belief in their Own Abilities

When one looks at the American survey results, although the percentage of people who claim to have had psychic experiences is lower than those claiming to believe in ESP, the differences are not dramatically different. Presumably, a number of people believe in ESP because they think they have experienced an event that is explained by ESP. For instance, Palmer (1979) reported that 51% of the respondents in his mail survey responded that they had some form of waking ESP; that number rose to 55% if one included those who reported having an dream ESP experience. JoMarie Haight (1979) reported that about 50% of the students in her sample reported having some sort of psychic experience.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the American data suggest that a quite high percentage believe that they have had some sort of psychic experience; indeed, about half of Americans report having had a psychic experience. This is only slightly smaller than the percentage of people who believed in the existence of ESP.

With that background, it is interesting, and perhaps even startling, that the Balinese have a vastly opposite view of the ubiquity of *their own* abilities and their own experiences. Although 78% of the respondents believed in the existence of ESP, only 18% thought that everyone has ESP ability. An even lower 14% described themselves having ESP ability, with 54% saying they didn't have it.

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<sup>2</sup> Haight stated, however, that only 36% of these are what a parapsychologist would call a "possible psychic experience," and only 15% were "probable psychic experiences." Hence, she reports that not every experience classified as psychic by a respondent would be classified as such by a parapsychologist. But we are concerned with psychic belief in this article, not trying to discern the actual occurrence of psi.

Therefore, there is a great disparity between people who believe that ESP exists as a power, and the percentage who believe that they (or others) have this ability. Although three-quarters of the sample of Balinese have virtually no question about the existence of ESP, they question their own abilities. So, the Balinese believe overwhelmingly that psi exists, but they also tend to believe that they don't personally possess it. Why is this? This is where one sees that the cultural context of beliefs about psi is important.

One reason that the Balinese may claim such a low percentage of ability themselves is that they are taught to be very humble about their own abilities. It could be taken as a matter of excessive pride if they affirmed they had psychic ability, at least in a public forum. Given that the questionnaires were anonymous and not even the final results were made public in Bali, it is probably not the case that this factor played a major role.

The more likely reason why the Balinese personally do not claim to possess psychic ability is that ESP ability is viewed as a spiritual power in Bali. As such, they believe that only gifted people have this power; psi ability is a function of spiritual power, and not of simply being human. It is a result of an unusual spiritual ability, not simply of having consciousness. Thus, the belief in the existence of ESP is ubiquitous in Bali, but ESP facility is not believed to be spread evenly among the population.

However, this point of view has also been found in the West. If we think of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, they would probably have agreed with this view, even if they did not connect ESP ability with spiritual powers. They believed that psychic abilities were possessed by gifted people, and hence they studied those special subjects. J. B. Rhine's research changed this view to one that asserted that psi could be found throughout the population, and the focus of his research centered on producing data to support this belief. While many parapsychologists today believe that we will have better success working with special subjects, particularly in process oriented research, parapsychologists still tend to hold the Rhinean view that psi ability is spread throughout the population, even if some individuals do a better job in producing it than others (just as there are some basketball stars, but most everyone can play basketball to a certain level of ability).

### Witnessing ESP Events

Given that the Balinese have a high belief that some individuals possess psi, we wondered if this belief might come from personally witnessing such events, or if the beliefs came from a more general set of cultural beliefs. Even if they had not displayed psychic functioning themselves, they may nevertheless base their beliefs in those abilities on personally seeing what they interpret as other people displaying psychic functioning.

So wanted to find out how many people had witnessed events that might be interpreted as psychic events. Four questions in the survey related to this topic. We asked them if they had "personally witnessed an event such as a person knowing through 6<sup>th</sup> sense what is taking place in a distant place while it is occurring." 32% answered affirmatively, while 55% said that they had definitely not witnessed such an event (the percentage rising to 59% including the fourth box). Also related to ESP, we asked them if they had ever witnessed a person finding a lost object through the 6<sup>th</sup> sense; 26% said that they had, while 63% said that they definitely had not witnessed such an event (66% from the last two boxes).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Haraldsson et al., (1977) pointed out in their article that surveys in Denmark and Germany also showed quite low percentage of people saying that they had experienced some sort of psychic event, only 11% among the Danish, and 19% among the Germans, figures even lower than the Balinese.

The fact that about twice as many people report believed in ESP as opposed to having witnessed it is interesting. Normally, we think that belief in psi is based on personal experience, either personally displaying psychic functioning, or seeing an event that is interpreted as paranormal. We might criticize those who over-interpret events as paranormal as not being skeptical enough, or as failing to find the real reason for the event (misperception, etc.), but we think that belief is usually based on experience. However, this does not seem to be the case in Bali; rather, we can conclude that much of the belief in psi functioning is due to a cultural *Weltanschauung*. The population seems to believe in ESP without even having witnessed an event that was interpreted as due to ESP. This points out the importance of cultural factors in belief in Bali, both in terms of a worldview that incorporates paranormal phenomena, and in the ubiquity of belief in Bali.

### Witnessing Physical Events

The same conclusion can be made about PK. Only 26% of the people reported having witnessed such an event. Yet, the situation with PK is more complicated. Our question asking about witnessing a PK gave as an example a macro-event, the moving of an object in front of their eyes. While it is true that fewer people responded affirmatively to this question as they did in asking about belief in PK, it may nevertheless be surprising that such a large percentage responded positively to witnessing a macro-event, the same percentage as having witnessed finding a lost object through ESP. For over a quarter of the population to assert that they had witnessed a macro-PK event seems like a large percentage; intuitively, it seems more difficult to affirm having witnessed a macro-PK event than finding a lost object, as there seems to be more room for interpreting (or misinterpreting) the information given by a psychic as being responsible for finding the lost object. Palmer did not ask a question about witnessing a macro-PK event, so it is not possible to have a comparison with the U.S. data.

Finally, we asked if any of them had ever seen what they thought was a *leyak*, a shape changer. The Balinese believe that practitioners of black magic can sometimes change themselves into another form, usually animals, and harass people during the night. Traditionally, Balinese were quite fearful of walking outside the family compound at night because of leyaks, and anthropologists have referred to this belief since Western contact. We might expect a large percentage of the respondents to answer positively, given that belief in leyaks has long been a part of their culture, and it seems easy to interpret a shadow or moving object seen out of the corner of the eye as a leyak. Yet, only 18% of the Balinese responded positively to that question, while 66% were sure they had not seen a leyak. Again, psychic beliefs seem to be a large part of the cultural belief system, but this does not translate into the people easily interpreting (or over-interpreting) experiences in terms of this belief.

### Origin of Psychic Powers

We asked several questions relating to the origin of psychic powers. In talking about their responses, we will introduce some of our interview data to expand the understanding of the Balinese responses.

In the first question, we asked them specifically what caused one to have psychic abilities. They could check as many boxes as they thought appropriate. Interestingly, the largest

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response, 55%, was development through a specific method or technique; 47% responded that it was due to divine gift (perhaps similar to Westerners saying that it was a natural talent, or that one is born with it). Given the strength of religious belief in Bali, which includes belief in reincarnation and the power of God, it is perhaps surprising that a greater percentage (although only slightly) of the respondents thought ability could be developed through learning a technique than due to divine gift.

40% responded that psychic power could be received through trance possession. Trance possession is also ubiquitous in Bali, in religious ceremonies and in mediumistic sessions. At the conclusion of large ceremonies, the local priest often goes into trance and is possessed by an entity that says whether the divinities have approved of the ceremony. Additionally, there are a number of other trance possessions in religious ceremonies, and in all of these the Balinese expression is that they are being "sat on" by a power. Therefore, 40% of the respondents were indicating that paranormal abilities could come through, or arise in the occasion of, trance possession.

Often, healing ability is thought to be passed on through families, either because they possess a power object, or because these abilities are part of the ancestry. The Balinese believe that one tends to reincarnate in the same family, and ancestor worship is part of the religion. Therefore, the view that psychic powers can come through descent is connected to their belief in reincarnation.

Some of the information we received during the interviews related to the question of the origin of ESP ability. Of the eight people who were interviewed, seven were healers, while one simply offered psychic information to clients. We asked them what special event precipitated their ability. The responses varied, but fit in well as illustrations of the different choices on this last question. We will hold off on discussing specific methods or techniques until later, but several people indicated that their ability came through a special connection with God. Specifically, three of them said that either they or their husband had fallen ill, and that they had received a divine message that they had to take up the healing practice. Similarly, three people mentioned dreams being fundamental. In one of them, for instance, an old man came and brought medication to this healer, saying, "You take this leaf and take the tip and swallow it." The man indicated that after he swallowed the medicine indicated in the dream, he fell down and thought he was going to die, but he did not and from that point he became very strong.

The woman whose husband had taken ill indicated that she got her power and her husband was healed through her participation in a special ceremony connecting her to the ancestors. Finally, one of the men talked about wandering for a long period in Bali, doing work where he found it, but as he slept in the woods one night, he had a vision of entities with long hair, who gave him a message as well as a magic object.

All of these people interviewed indicated that some special event happened to them that gave rise to their ability, and divine beings or a divine force was behind the event. In general, these approaches show that the Balinese tend to think of psychic abilities as spiritual powers that come to them from a divine source.

A second question about the origin of psychic powers asked about ways to develop psychic abilities; again, one could select any of the answers that were appropriate. The categories given the respondents in this question listed some traditional Balinese practices. The largest percentage (47%) responded the origin of psychic powers was through trance, while 25%, the next highest percentage, responded through dreams. However, when looking at the total number of responses to this question, there were only 319 responses, a small number compared to the responses to the next question.

In another question, we asked which training could develop psychic ability, and there were a total of 861 responses, so the respondents seemed to think that these methods of developing psychic ability were superior. These responses dealt with more general, cross-cultural religious practices, rather than the more culture-specific practices from the previous question. 57% responded that meditation was the best way to develop psychic powers, while 47% responded for praying, 38% for yoga, and 19% for fasting.

Again, the comments of the psychic practitioners confirmed these choices. Seven of them described the methods they use to develop their abilities. The first one indicated that she has tried to make herself close to God and to practice breathing meditation, so she uses both praying and meditation.

The second person focused on the *mudras*, a kind of meditation based on hand movements. He has practiced this for a number of years and believes that this movement is related to his power, although he admits that he's not sure where his power comes from.

A third person indicated that he used meditation, as well as learning as much as possible about Balinese religion. As he was meditating, he went into trance and a special technique that he uses, of eating fire, came to him while he was in trance. The fourth person also focused on the *mudras*, which are commonly practiced by the high priest in Balinese religious ceremonies. He also felt that he was guided by his great-grandfather for several years. The fifth person thought that the power came from the gods through special ceremonial connections she has with the gods, while the sixth person is somewhat vague about his technique, although one suspects that fasting might have been a part of the development of his abilities. Finally, the last person specifically mentioned praying in certain temples as how the power entered his body.

So, we see that the various kinds of meditative practices are deemed effective for developing psi ability, including praying. These interviews illustrate that psi abilities are spiritual powers, and the meditation is understood as a religious practice. Very few psychic experiences will be thought of in secular terms, not only because it is hard to distinguish the sacred from the secular in Bali, but because psi functioning is thought to result from spiritual powers.

Within this context, it is interesting to consider the proposal from Irwin (1993) that "childhood trauma constitutes one of the origins of paranormal belief" (p. 27). There is nothing in this survey to support or to undercut this suggestion. Some of the interviewees reported childhood trauma, but most did not discuss any. However, it seems to us that Irwin's approach may not be sensitive enough to cultural, as opposed to psychological, factors in his analysis, although Irwin recognizes the influence of both, saying: "the level of paranormal belief

in an individual is in part a function of that person's broader cultural environment" (p. 11). Our emphasis is different from Irwin's psychological one, as we have focused on the cultural origins and expressions of paranormal belief. We believe that any understanding of psi has to be sensitive to cross-cultural data, and that cultural factors are as important as developmental or other purely psychological factors. Thus, a synthesis will need to be developed between a psychological approach and a cultural one. Irwin's psychological model needs to be modified to incorporate cross-cultural data. We hope this study helps in developing such data.

## CONCLUSION

We learned several things from this survey of Balinese beliefs about paranormal abilities. The first is that there is a high belief in psychic functioning. However, secondly, there is, relatively speaking, a low belief in their own psychic abilities. Third, these and other facts are best understood through the belief system of the Balinese. Psychic powers are the result of spiritual gifts, and not everyone has these gifts. Further, it is believed that these gifts can result from an external force, either being given to them by the gods or in possession or through descent. It is also possible to develop psychic powers. However, rather than developing them through some specifically Balinese practices, the respondents thought that they could be developed through various traditional meditative techniques. However, most Balinese probably believe some of these practices can often be a bit dangerous, since they relate to the unseen world. When one opens oneself up to the entrance of these powers, they can be both positive or negative, and so it is somewhat dangerous to engage in these practices.

Finally, it is interesting to consider what these data say about the possibility of being successful when running a parapsychological experiment with the Balinese, as we plan to do. The good news is that there is general belief that psychic abilities exist, and so we will not have to do much work in convincing them of this fact. On the other hand, the low belief in their own abilities causes a problem. In fact, one of the questions the survey specifically asked them was whether or not they thought they might be successful in a controlled laboratory experiment. Only 15% indicated that they thought they could, while 45% thought that they would definitely not be successful. Given the sheep-goat effect, such a low belief in the possibility of personal success in an experiment is disturbing. We can take one of two approaches to mitigate this problem. On the one hand, we might not work with unselected subjects, but rather with people who are publicly accepted as having special gifts, or, on the other hand, we might train subjects in one of the techniques, such as meditation, which is believed to be a method of developing ESP. As Giesler (1984) has pointed out, it will be incumbent upon us to place the psi task into an accepted cultural context, reinforcing their natural behavior, such as their extraordinary community spirit. Understanding the Balinese beliefs about the paranormal will hopefully allow us to be more successful in a parapsychological experiment

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