

Spiritual Communication And Religious Experience Of Cultivation Adherents In The Cibedug Indigenous Community

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Keywords

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Religious Experience;
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Abstract

This study examines the lived spiritual communication experiences of nine adherents of the Budi Daya belief system in Cibedug Hamlet, Lembang, West Bandung, Indonesia. Employing Moustakas's (1994) Transcendental Phenomenology — selected for its capacity to systematically uncover essential experiential structures through epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation — the study investigates what spiritual communication experiences Budi Daya adherents undergo and how these shape their vertical (human-divine) and horizontal (human-human/nature) communicative relationships. Data were collected from nine purposively selected informants through in-depth interviews, participant observation during community rituals, and documentary review. Three invariant themes emerge from the cross-case analysis: (1) cognitive-reflective experience manifested as inner spiritual struggle and intrapersonal dialogue (textural description: Indra, Ecep, Euis Shelian); (2) ritual-behavioral experience expressed through the symbolic and collective dimensions of the Mipit Amit ceremony; and (3) social-communal experience realized through solidarity, togetherness, and interreligious harmony. The study's novelty lies in its proposal of a dual-channel spiritual communication framework — bridging transcendental and cultural communication theory — grounded in the indigenous lived experience of a non-mainstream local belief community in Indonesia, advancing existing spiritual communication scholarship by demonstrating that transcendental and cultural communication are mutually constitutive in indigenous religious practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Budi Daya represents one of the enduring local belief systems in West Java, particularly in Cibedug Hamlet, Cikole Village, Lembang. The adherents of Budi Daya continue to practice a faith tradition inherited from their ancestors (karuhun), emphasizing harmony between the physical and spiritual dimensions of human life (Observation, 2022). The people of Cibedug Hamlet can be categorized as an indigenous community, as they preserve ancestral heritage encompassing both traditional customs and belief systems.

The term indigenous community refers to a group of people belonging to an indigenous population through self-identification (group consciousness) and mutual recognition by the community as legitimate members (Van der Zon et al., 2025). The notion of community differs from that of society; a community is generally smaller in scale and territory, characterized by heterogeneity, emotional connectedness, interdependence, and a shared sense of belonging, often referred to as a local community (Garna, 1996). Adat denotes customs or traditions repeatedly practiced and transmitted from generation to generation (Althuwaini, 2022).

In Indonesia, the concept of komunitas adat (indigenous community) began to gain prominence in 1993 through social movements initiated by traditional leaders, academics, and non-governmental organizations under the Network for the Defense of Indigenous Peoples' Rights (Jaringan Pembela Hak-Hak Masyarakat Adat or JAPHAMA) (Mega Wijaya et al., 2024). The United Nations has also addressed the rights of indigenous peoples through Resolution No. 61/295 (September 13, 2007), The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Comprising 46 articles, the Declaration affirms the recognition of all fundamental rights of indigenous peoples. Article 1 states that indigenous peoples are entitled to the full or partial enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized under the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, humanitarian law, and international human rights law. Furthermore, Article 2 emphasizes that indigenous peoples are free and equal to all other groups and citizens and must not be subject to any form of discrimination, particularly based on origin or identity (Chernyad'eva, 2024).

As an archipelagic nation with thousands of islands, Indonesia is home to approximately 2,349 indigenous or traditional communities across the archipelago. These data, compiled by the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN – Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago) in 2015, highlight the vast presence of indigenous peoples, thereby requiring systematic attention and governance, particularly from the state. Various ministries manage

these communities under differing terminologies: the Ministry of Social Affairs uses Isolated Indigenous Communities, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry uses Indigenous Communities, the Ministry of Home Affairs employs Native Inhabitants, and the Ministry of Education and Culture, following Regulation No. 11/2015, adopts the term Indigenous Peoples (Rayhan et al., 2025).

Indigenous communities are generally known for their deep reverence for tradition. Their fear of natural disasters, death, famine, curses (pamali), and other existential threats has evolved into enduring living traditions that continue to shape daily life. These traditions are reinforced by the values embedded within their belief systems or ancestral religions and are often expressed through ritual and ceremonial practices. Consequently, the existence of indigenous communities is sustained by traditions that promote harmonious relationships with the natural and social environment.

In general, indigenous communities share four defining characteristics: (1) a collective awareness of shared ancestry or tradition; (2) possession of a defined territory; (3) social interaction among members; and (4) recognition by external groups (Hamid, 2019). Based on these attributes, an indigenous community can be understood as a social entity bound by genealogical ties, territorial consciousness, and a distinct social identity governed by customary values, norms, and written and unwritten laws.

In broader contexts, indigenous peoples are defined as communities living according to ancestral lineage across generations within specific geographic territories, maintaining sovereignty over land and natural resources, upholding distinctive sociocultural values, and managing their lives sustainably through customary institutions and laws. In Vietnam, indigenous peoples are identified as agrarian communities vulnerable to poverty and categorized as minority groups.

According to J. S. Cobo, indigenous peoples are communities, societies, and nations maintaining historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed within their territories. They perceive themselves as distinct from dominant social groups in those regions. As non-dominant sectors of society, they seek to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and ethnic identity, which constitute the foundation of their continued existence as a people, in accordance with their cultural traditions, social institutions, and legal systems (Chernyad'eva, 2023).

West Java Province is home to numerous indigenous communities across districts and municipalities, locally called *desa adat* (traditional villages). In terms of religion or belief,

these traditional villages can be divided into two categories: first, villages whose inhabitants adhere to Islam, such as Dukuh Traditional Village in Garut Regency; and second, villages whose inhabitants follow non-Islamic belief systems, such as Cibedug Traditional Village, whose people recognize Budi Daya as their spiritual faith (Observation, December 2022). The adherents of Budi Daya identify themselves as heirs of the Sunda Wiwitan tradition.

In essence, Sunda Wiwitan encompasses two intertwined aspects, religion and culture (Risdayah et al., 2025). As a religion, Sunda Wiwitan and its rituals are found in traditional villages such as Cireundeu or in communities affiliated with Cigugur, Kuningan Regency. As a cultural system, Sunda Wiwitan is broadly embraced by Sundanese communities, including those in Cibedug Traditional Village.

Cibedug Hamlet is in RW 13, Cikole Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The distance from Cikole to Lembang is approximately 5.1 km. The village's total area is 8.06 km², representing 8.43 % of the total area of Lembang District. The population density of Cikole Village is 879 people per km². Most residents are farmers, producing various agricultural commodities, particularly tomatoes, which are the primary crop (Virtual Observation, December 6, 2022).

Several religions and belief systems coexist within Cikole Village. The following section presents demographic data disaggregated by gender, religion, and belief affiliation..

Table 1. Statistical Data on the Population of Cikole Village by Religion and Gender

No.	Religious Affiliation	Male	Female	Total
1	Islam	5,903	5,505	11,408
2	Protestant	57	105	162
3	Christian (Catholic)	31	34	65
4	Hindu	—	—	—
5	Buddhist	1	1	2
6	Confucian	2	1	3
7	<i>Budi Daya</i>	84	115	199
Total		6,783	6,533	

Source: Cikole Village Document, July 2022

Most people living around Cibedug Hamlet adhere to Islam; however, some practice other belief systems. One such belief is Budi Daya, a spiritual tradition resembling kebatinan (mysticism) found among Central and East Java communities. Many adherents of Budi Daya reside in Cibedug Hamlet. The relatively large number of Budi Daya followers distinguishes the residents of Cibedug from those of neighboring hamlets.

The number of Budi Daya adherents in Cibedug Hamlet is recorded at 199 individuals, 84 men and 115 women. This number is almost equivalent to the Muslim population in Cibedug, which totals around 200 people. At the broader village level, religious affiliations are more diverse. In addition to these two major belief systems, there are adherents of Christianity, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Observation, July 2022).

Linguistically, the term Budi Daya consists of two words: Budi and Daya. Budi means intellect, which functions as the faculty for understanding and generating knowledge (Risdayah et al., 2021), and it can also mean character or disposition. Daya means power, effort, energy, or means. Based on these definitions, Budi Daya is "the use of one's intellect and strength to attain something."

Building upon this background, this study aims to describe the religious experiences of Cibedug residents who adhere to Budi Daya teachings. Studying religious experience is essential because it constitutes an abstract dimension of religious life. Its abstract nature necessitates exploration and articulation to uncover its truth, thereby enriching the body of knowledge within the study of religion.

The religious experiences of Budi Daya adherents can be interpreted through the lens of spiritual communication, defined as communicative relationships between humans, God, nature, and fellow human beings, grounded in inner awareness and sacred values (Kuswarno, 2014).

According to *A First Look at Communication Theory*, spiritual communication is a transcendent communication that involves profound symbolic and emotional dimensions, surpassing ordinary human interaction (Griffin, 2008). In other words, spiritual communication represents how humans perceive and respond to religious experiences through an inner or spiritual language.

Experience (Latin: *expertus* or *ex-peritus*) refers to empirical objects from which impressions and ideas arise, meaning that experience is inherently connected to past events. Experience and consciousness constitute interrelated moments in thought (Munson, 1975, p. 17). Thus, thinking is part of experience, as are feeling and volition (Wach, 1994, p. 47). This idea is also emphasized by James (1902, p. 49), who argues that religious experience originates not from institutional religion but from individual religious feelings. Experience encompasses various phenomena, from ordinary sensory perceptions to dreams, fantasies, and extraordinary states that may arise spontaneously or through deliberate construction (Proudfoot, 1985, p. 180). Religious experience is, at least in part, a product of historical

development as well as of individual religious practice and education within each tradition (Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997, p. 77). Experience thus represents the innermost dimension of what is called religion (Ahmad, 2013, p. 127) when associated with religion.

Religion has been defined as "a sensitivity and feeling toward the infinite" (Griffioen, 2021, p. 5). Tylor (in Scharf, 1995, p. 30) defines religion as "the belief in spiritual beings." Brown (in Scharf, 1995, p. 31) views religion as an expression of human dependence on spiritual or moral powers beyond oneself. According to Scharf (1995, p. 30), religion constitutes a system of belief and worship that addresses humanity's ultimate existential problems. The components of religion, such as doctrine, ritual, and institutions, are categorized as religion itself, while religiosity refers to behavioral systems grounded in one's understanding of fundamental religious teachings.

Therefore, religious experience can be understood as the inner or psychological relationship between an individual and their conception of the Divine. This connection arises through the practice of religious teachings. Religious experience is one of the essential facts of religion; without it, religion would not exist. This represents one of the most enduring and compelling arguments for the existence of God, the idea that the essence of religion lies in the irrational, emotional experience of the sacred.

Religious experience frequently becomes the starting point for spiritual communication. When an individual undergoes a profound sense of religiosity, such as during prayer, meditation, or contemplation, they not only feel the presence of the Divine but also express their inner emotions, including gratitude, hope, anxiety, or supplication to God. This communication is not always verbal but may occur through deeply personal, inward, and symbolic expressions.

Spiritual communication and religious experience are thus intimately related, as both concern the deepest aspects of human interaction with the transcendent (God or other spiritual forces). Religious experience represents an intense subjective state in which an individual feels connected to a divine or transcendent reality (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). Spiritual communication, on the other hand, is the process through which individuals convey, receive, and interpret meaning within their relationship to the spiritual or transcendental dimension (Yaqin & Faris, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past five years, studies on the religious experiences of indigenous communities have developed significantly, which is in line with the growing attention to the diversity of spiritual expressions and religiosity beyond formal religious institutions. Religious experience in this context is understood as an inner relationship between the individual and a transcendental entity, often manifested through awareness, intuition, a sense of peace, or even inner tension. This phenomenon has become a subject of religious studies and a focus within spiritual anthropology and transcendental communication (Ferrer, 2020; Griffioen, 2021).

In the context of the Budi Daya adherents in Cibedug Hamlet, religious experience emerges in various forms, such as identity conflict, deep spiritual awareness, and ritual actions rich in symbolic meaning. In this regard, Griffioen (2021) asserts that religious experience involves an awareness of "the sacred" within the structure of everyday life and must be interpreted within the community's local cultural and spiritual context.

In Indonesia, a local study closely related to this topic was conducted by Setiady (2022), who examined the religious consciousness of the Betawi people in West Jakarta. He found that religious experience is shaped through the interaction of family values, social environment, and public policy structures. This finding is relevant to the reality in Cibedug, where the state's recognition of the "belief" column in the national ID card (KTP), following Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016, marked an important turning point for Budi Daya adherents to express their spirituality openly. This phenomenon demonstrates that religious experience cannot be separated from the context of state policy and socio-political dynamics (Lyutenko, 2023).

In his study of indigenous Cordilleran youth in the Philippines at the regional level in Asia, Castillo (2023) found that indigenous religiosity is not only inherited but also shaped by identity needs, cultural resistance, and community dynamics. For them, spirituality is inseparable from daily life, embodied in social practices, agriculture, and interactions with nature. This is similar to the mipit amit ritual practice in Cibedug, where religious experience is expressed through spiritual communication with nature and ancestors.

Meanwhile, international literature has also shown a paradigm shift, from a normative approach toward a participatory understanding of spiritual experience. Ferrer (2020), in *Participation and the Mystery: Transpersonal Approaches to Spiritual Experience*, emphasizes the importance of understanding spirituality as an active participatory process

of human involvement in transcendent reality, rather than merely an individual belief system. This approach supports the idea that the religious experience of indigenous communities, such as the Budi Daya adherents, represents a form of transpersonal communication that reflects a simultaneous relationship with God, fellow humans, and nature.

Communication Theory Framework, Transcendental and Cultural Communication: A central theoretical contribution of this study lies in the conceptual elaboration between transcendental communication and cultural communication as two mutually constitutive dimensions of spiritual communication among indigenous communities. Transcendental communication, as theorized in the framework of spiritual communication by Griffin (2008) and Ferrer (2020), refers to communicative acts that exceed ordinary interpersonal exchange, connecting the human subject with a divine, sacred, or transcendent Other through prayer, ritual symbol, and contemplative consciousness. Cultural communication, as developed by Gudykunst and Kim (2003) and applied in the Indonesian indigenous context by Muchtar et al. (2016), encompasses the communicative practices through which cultural meanings, identities, and value systems are reproduced, transmitted, and negotiated within a community. In the Budi Daya community of Cibeug, these two dimensions are not parallel but constitutively interlinked: the Mipit Amit ritual is simultaneously a transcendental act (communicating with Hyang Agung, ancestors, and nature) and a cultural act (reproducing indigenous identity and transmitting Sundanese ancestral values across generations). The Budi Daya principle of “*terang ka diri, terang ka Gusti, kalayan tiasa ngamalkeunana*” encodes this dual structure: transcendental insight is necessarily embodied in cultural, relational practice. This study therefore theorizes spiritual communication among Budi Daya adherents as a dual-channel system in which transcendental and cultural communication are mutually constitutive a conceptual bridge that advances and nuances existing frameworks in indigenous spiritual communication (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020; Zsupan-Jerome, 2024).

Furthermore, Laine et al. (2024) highlight the importance of representing adherent communities in public and academic discourse, noting that the neglect of such groups constitutes a form of epistemic exclusion. Therefore, bringing forward the spiritual experiences of local adherents, such as those in Cibeug, is a vital step toward achieving inclusivity in religious studies.

In recent phenomenological literature on religion, Asha (2021) emphasizes that religious experience should be understood as an intensely lived structure of consciousness, expressed through verbal language and actions, symbols, and rituals. This perspective is highly relevant

to the Budi Daya religious system, where spiritual expression does not always take doctrinal form but manifests in everyday practices, personal prayers (*pineja*), and communal life (Muchtar et al., 2016). Such experiences demonstrate that daily religious practices can serve as a vital medium for understanding the structure of individual spiritual consciousness. These practices create space for individuals to feel and embody spiritual values in everyday life, thereby contributing to a deeper religious identity (Gazniuk et al., 2019).

Thus, this study seeks to enrich the existing literature by offering an empirical account of how religious experience is lived and practiced within local adherent communities in Indonesia. Whereas previous studies often explored religious experience abstractly or within the context of major world religions, this research presents the spiritual reality from the perspective of indigenous communities that have long been underrepresented. It also strengthens the decolonial paradigm in religious studies, recognizing locally rooted spiritual experiences as part of humanity's diverse expressions of faith.

Novelty Statement: This study makes three distinct contributions to the existing literature on spiritual and religious communication. First, whereas previous studies on indigenous religious experience in Indonesia (e.g., Setiady, 2022) and Asia (Castillo, 2023) applied primarily sociological or anthropological frameworks, this research employs Transcendental Phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) as the analytical lens — enabling a systematic exploration of the essential structures of spiritual communication experience among Budi Daya adherents, a local belief community that remains critically underrepresented in communication scholarship. Second, while prior work on spiritual communication in the Indonesian Islamic context has foregrounded doctrinal and textual dimensions (Yaqin & Faris, 2022), this research demonstrates that non-mainstream indigenous spirituality constitutes a rich and analytically productive site for examining transcendental communication. Third, and most significantly, this study proposes an integrative conceptual framework that bridges transcendental communication theory with cultural communication, showing how vertical (human-divine) and horizontal (human-human/nature) spiritual communication are simultaneously and inseparably performed through Budi Daya ritual, symbolic action, and communal solidarity. This dual-channel model of spiritual communication — grounded in indigenous lived experience — represents the primary theoretical novelty of this research.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method for several reasons. First, it enables the in-depth exploration of the religious experiences of Budi Daya adherents residing in Cibedug Hamlet. Second, as Creswell (2013, p. 44) notes, religious experience studies enrich the religious and social sciences field, providing a compelling reason for its scholarly examination.

Third, phenomena related to religious experience, such as values, beliefs, culture, and spirituality, cannot be measured statistically (Marshall, 2016, p. 3). Fourth, this method allows the researcher to directly explore Budi Daya practitioners' perspectives and lived experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). Fifth, data collection in qualitative research is flexible and dynamic (Patton, 2002, p. 52).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary studies. Interviews were conducted to obtain information about the religious phenomena surrounding the lives of Budi Daya adherents, including their experiences, beliefs, values, and motivations behind specific actions (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Observation explored data on rituals, social interactions, group dynamics, and daily behavior (Creswell, 2013, p. 103). Observations also focused on elements that adherents might not consciously express or could not verbalize. Meanwhile, the documentary study examined written materials such as books, manuscripts, and archival documents relevant to the research (Bowen, 2009, p. 27).

Data Analysis. The purpose of data analysis was to identify patterns and uncover the deeper meanings embedded in the religious experiences of Budi Daya adherents (Patton, 2002, p. 541). The analysis followed several stages: Data organization, Interview transcripts, field observations, and documentary materials were compiled and systematized.

Comprehensive reading, The researcher conducted repeated readings to understand the overall context and initial impressions of the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). **Coding,** Segments of data (sentences, paragraphs, or quotations) were assigned codes or labels reflecting their meanings or themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). This study primarily applied coding in the Findings and Discussion sections, where direct quotations represent the empirical results, and theoretical references mark analytical interpretation.

Interpretation: The researcher interpreted the data to derive meaning and connect it with relevant theories, social contexts, and literature. **Validation.** This stage involved triangulating data across sources, confirming participant interpretations, and discussing findings for consistency and credibility (Creswell, 2013, p. 250).

A phenomenological approach was adopted to understand the subjective meanings of Budi Daya adherents' experiences from their own perspectives and to uncover the essence of their religious phenomena. Phenomenology was used to identify the essential structure of Budi Daya's religious experience (Moustakas, 1994), for instance, feelings of inner peace upon joining the belief system or, conversely, inner conflict.

Clarification of Phenomenological Approach: This study adopts Transcendental Phenomenology as developed by Clark Moustakas (1994), not Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) by Jonathan A. Smith et al. (2009). Moustakas's Transcendental Phenomenology involves six key analytical steps: (1) *epoche* — bracketing the researcher's prior assumptions and biases about the Budi Daya belief system; (2) phenomenological reduction — attending only to the phenomena as they appear in consciousness; (3) imaginative variation — exploring multiple structural meanings to identify invariant themes; (4) synthesis of meanings and essences — identifying textural descriptions (what the research participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how they experienced it); (5) individual composite descriptions — constructing holistic portraits of each informant's experience; and (6) universal composite description — articulating the shared essential structure of spiritual communication experience among Budi Daya adherents. The results and discussion sections below are structured accordingly, presenting textural and structural descriptions derived from each informant's spiritual communication experience.

Research Subjects: The research subjects were nine (9) adult members of the Budi Daya adherent community residing in Cibedug Hamlet, Cikole Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency, selected purposively based on criteria of: (1) being a recognized and active Budi Daya adherent for a minimum of five years; (2) having direct and articulate experience of spiritual communication practices including *pineja* (personal prayer), participation in *Mipit Amit* rituals, and involvement in communal life; and (3) willingness to share their experiences in depth. Key informants included Indra (male, 45, long-standing adherent and community elder), Ecep (male, 38, former Muslim convert to Budi Daya), Euis Shelian (female, 51, female spiritual practitioner), and six additional adherents with diverse generational backgrounds. Data collection was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (each lasting between 60-120 minutes), non-participant observation during community rituals and daily activities (December 2022 - January 2024), and documentary review of internal community manuscripts and relevant archival materials. *Epoche* was

applied at the outset of data collection to minimize researcher bias, and member-checking was conducted with key informants to ensure the accuracy of experiential descriptions.

This approach was also applied to interpret their lived religious experiences directly (Patton, 2002) and to capture emotional, spiritual, and perceptual dimensions that quantitative data cannot explain.

In addition, the study draws upon the theoretical perspectives of Joachim Wach, William James, Stace, and Greeley to help explore the forms and indicators that reveal and describe the religious experiences of Budi Daya practitioners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The object of this study is the Budi Daya adherent community residing in Cibedug Hamlet, Cibogo Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency. This community is part of the Sundanese indigenous society that continues to preserve ancestral belief systems and form a distinct spiritual identity outside the mainstream of officially recognized religions. Based on interview data, the Budi Daya adherents in Cibedug practice their belief system on an individual level and within an organized social structure through their indigenous community.

This community represents a distinctive spiritual communication system, a transcendental interaction between humans, nature, and divine forces, mediated through local symbols, rituals, and language. Practices such as mipit amit, pineja, and other customary ceremonies are not merely traditions but forms of non-verbal communication imbued with profound spiritual meaning.

Phenomenological Analysis Framework: The following results present the spiritual communication experiences of nine Budi Daya adherents in Cibedug Hamlet as captured through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Consistent with Moustakas's (1994) Transcendental Phenomenological method, the findings are organized around: (a) textural descriptions, capturing what each informant directly experienced in their spiritual communication with the Divine, nature, and fellow community members; and (b) structural descriptions, illuminating how these experiences were shaped by the cultural, ritual, and communal context of the Budi Daya belief system. From the cross-case analysis, three invariant themes emerge as the essential structures of shared spiritual communication experience: (1) cognitive-reflective spiritual experience (inner struggle and self-dialogue); (2) ritual-behavioral spiritual experience (symbolic and collective action in Mipit Amit); and

(3) social-communal spiritual experience (solidarity, togetherness, and interreligious harmony). Together, these themes constitute what this study identifies as the lived structure of dual-channel spiritual communication, the simultaneous enactment of vertical (transcendental) and horizontal (cultural-social) communication — among indigenous Budi Daya adherents.

In addition, the community faces challenges of identity communication due to its position as a minority group that only recently gained formal state recognition following Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 (Jamil & Retis, 2023). In practice, they continue to experience both cultural and symbolic marginalization. This illustrates the complex dynamics of intercultural and spiritual communication, serving as a field for negotiating religious and cultural identity within a multicultural society.

Cognitive Form: Characterized by Inner Struggle

The religious experiences of Budi Daya adherents in Cibedug Hamlet reveal a non-linear spiritual dynamic. The first form of religious experience identified in this study is the cognitive form, which manifests through inner struggle and the search for meaning concerning self-identity and spiritual existence. From a communication perspective, this can be examined through intrapersonal communication, the internal dialogue that occurs within an individual between the self, values, beliefs, and the Divine.

The adherents' inner struggles arise from the tension between their belief system and the social reality that has not yet entirely accepted their existence. This is illustrated in the statement of one respondent, Indra, who noted:

"I felt that my belief was not yet strong at that time. I was still searching for my identity; it was a kind of suffering, because at that time we were not yet recognized by the state." (Interview with Indra, 2024).

This statement reflects a form of reflective inner communication. Indra experienced a divided sense of identity, torn between his desire to live according to his spiritual truth and a lack of social and institutional legitimacy (Papusha, 2023). This condition aligns with James' (1902) concept of the "divided self before unification," a psychological state in which the self is fragmented before achieving spiritual harmony. In communication studies, such an inner struggle can be interpreted as a form of self-dialogue that fosters reflection on core values and ultimately leads to spiritual self-awareness. Indra's inner communication thus

functions as a mechanism of adaptation and a formative process in shaping his religious orientation.

Another informant, Ecep, experienced a similar condition. He explained:

“I once struggled inwardly. I claimed to be a Muslim, but I did not practice Islam. I followed the Budi Daya teachings, and through my own experience, I found that Budi Daya brings peace to my heart.” (Interview with Ecep, December 2022)

This quotation demonstrates the cognitive dissonance Ecep experienced in his transition of faith. From a communication perspective, this represents the emergence of spiritual intrapersonal communication, a deep, reflective dialogue between the self and one's spiritual values (Bainbridge et al., 2025). Ecep consciously compared the Islamic teachings he claimed formally with the Budi Daya path he existentially practiced and found more spiritually fulfilling.

This process reinforces the thesis that spirituality is not merely institutional but dialectical, shaped through a dialogical process between external realities and inner consciousness. As Griffioen (2021) emphasizes, religious experience does not always originate from formal doctrine; it often arises from profound self-reflection in response to existential realities.

Furthermore, Euis Shelian, a female figure in the community, expressed that her spiritual journey was not marked by external pressure but rather stemmed from personal awareness and self-discovery:

"I did not feel tormented or conflicted. I simply felt at peace when I decided to become an adherent." (Interview with Euis Shelian, December 2022)

Euis's statement is significant because it demonstrates that not all spiritual experiences are conflictual. From the perspective of intrapersonal communication, this indicates that her inner consciousness has reached stability, allowing her to transition to the Budi Daya faith without distress. Instead, the decision reinforced her spiritual identity.

These phenomena suggest that religious experience in its cognitive form among Budi Daya adherents represents a process of reflective spiritual communication, occurring intensely within each individual's inner world. This process generates transcendental understanding and shapes new structures of spiritual identity. As Ferrer (2020) explains,

authentic spiritual communication is not merely about speaking to God but about discovering God within one's consciousness.

The cognitive form of spiritual struggle among Budi Daya adherents embodies several key characteristics: 1) Intrapersonal Communication as the Arena of Spirituality, 2) The inner struggles of adherents constitute a form of self-communication involving the analysis of values, beliefs, and spiritual experiences. This highlights that spirituality is not solely a product of doctrine but also of reflective internal dialogue. Identity Crisis as the Starting Point of Spiritual Communication

The tension between social identity (e.g., identifying as Muslim due to social pressure) and spiritual identity (finding peace in Budi Daya) triggers a crisis that drives deep reflection and spiritual inquiry, transition from Formal Religion to Lived Spirituality. The spiritual journeys of figures such as Indra and Ecep illustrate a transition from formal religious affiliation to an experiential belief system that aligns with their inner structure. This process is achieved through lived experience rather than doctrinal instruction or social compulsion. Silent Communication in Spirituality, much of this spiritual experience is non-verbal, felt rather than spoken. This aligns with the phenomenological approach to religious experience, emphasizing intense awareness in discerning the inner structure of meaning.

Reflection as a Transcendental Communicative Act. The reflective dimension of thought is not passive but active. Reflection serves as a means to construct authentic spiritual awareness while simultaneously responding to the social and cultural tensions faced by adherents (Martinez, 2024).

In spiritual communication, all these processes represent expressions of non-verbal transcendental communication, which, in phenomenological studies, is considered the purest form of interaction between humans and spiritual entities. Therefore, the phenomenological approach is particularly suitable for this research, as it captures the inner meanings and subjective experiences that cannot be revealed through quantitative or purely symbolic data (Griffioen, 2021).

Forms of Action as Manifested in the Mipit Amit Ritual

Within the Budi Daya belief system practiced by the indigenous community of Cibedug Hamlet, Lembang, ritual is a primary medium for realizing religious teachings in praxis. One of the most significant rituals performed is Mipit Amit, a ceremonial practice conducted at the beginning of the planting season and during harvest. This ritual is not

merely an agrarian activity but rather a manifestation of deep spiritual consciousness that reflects a communicative relationship between humans, God, ancestors, nature, and fellow beings (Clinebell, 1992, pp. 35–36; Interview with Indra, December 21, 2022).

The forms of action within the Mipit Amit ritual can be understood through the indicators of ritual tradition practiced by the Cibedug community. This ritual reinforces spiritual communication, which occurs through prayer and concrete actions that symbolize interconnectedness with the transcendental reality (Risdayah et al., 2025).

This section discusses two primary forms of action within the Mipit Amit ritual that signify the religious experience of the Budi Daya adherents: (1) symbolic actions through sesajen (offerings) and incense as media of spiritual communication, and (2) collective actions that strengthen social cohesion and horizontal communication (Tyas Tuti & Safitri, 2024). The Mipit Amit ritual always begins with symbolic actions such as burning incense, preparing sesajen, and offering foods like rujak (fruit salad) or other agricultural products. According to Indra, a Budi Daya adherent, these acts are understood as asking permission from nature, ancestors, and God before planting or harvesting crops (Interview, December 21, 2022).

In Budi Daya teachings, God is referred to as Hyang Agung or Hyang Widi, regarded as the source of life and the determinant of will (Kartawinata, n.d., p. 10). Through incense burning and sesajen preparation, adherents offer prayers for a smooth agricultural process. This action embodies the concept of eling, meaning to remember and to be aware of God's presence in every aspect of life (Muzammil, 2018, p. 15).

Unlike formal religions that often place humans at the center, Budi Daya emphasizes equality among humans, animals, and plants. Therefore, before planting, farmers ask for permission from nature to prevent disturbances or crop failure. The sesajen functions as a symbolic sign of communication with nature, an effort to maintain the cosmic balance between humans and their environment (Risdayah et al., 2025).

Incense and sesajen also serve as media of connection with the karuhun (ancestors), who are believed to safeguard the harmony of life. The ancestors are not viewed merely as historical entities but as active participants in the spiritual Network that blesses daily existence. This aligns with the concept of participatory spiritual communication, in which prayer and ritual are understood as active human participation in transcendental reality (Ferrer, 2020, pp. 55–56).

From the communication theory perspective, these symbolic actions affirm that communication extends beyond verbal language; it also encompasses symbols, ritual acts, and nonverbal expressions. Griffin (2008, p. 398) defines spiritual communication as a form of transcendent communication involving deeply symbolic and emotional dimensions. Thus, sesajen and incense may be seen as nonverbal media conveying religious messages, reverence, supplication, and spiritual awareness.

This ritual can be categorized as a traditional rite of passage (Stace, 1960) because it marks the transition between profane activity (planting or harvesting) and sacred activity (communion with God and ancestors). Hence, the presence of sesajen and incense is not merely an agrarian custom but a ritual of communication that integrates symbols, prayers, and sacred respect (Argyle, 2001, p. 88).

Beyond symbolic actions, the Mipit Amit ritual also involves collective actions emphasizing communal togetherness. The ceremony is typically conducted through gotong royong (cooperation), involving families, neighbors, and the entire community. These collective actions fulfill several communicative functions. As Indra explained, Mipit Amit is always performed together, with each person contributing food or items for the offerings (Interview, December 21, 2022). This practice cultivates a sense of solidarity, reinforces collective identity as penghayat (adherents of Budi Daya), and preserves ancestral traditions. Such togetherness aligns with Greeley's indicators of religious experience, which emphasize the emergence of unity, affection, and mutual care among community members.

The ritual also becomes a space for social communication, where adherents share experiences, strengthen networks, and build solidarity. Following the ritual, the bale pasewakan (meeting hall) discussions reveal interpersonal communication characterized by mutual respect and tolerance. Non-adherent residents like Muslims often participate in harvest activities, fostering interfaith communication (Shelian, Interview, December 22, 2022).

Through the participation of children and youth, the ritual also functions as a form of cultural and religious education. They learn to honor nature, respect ancestors, and build harmonious relationships with others. This aligns with Kuswarno's (2014) concept of spiritual communication, which is defined as communicative relationships grounded in inner awareness and sacred values transmitted culturally through social practice.

Collective action in Mipit Amit can also be understood through the lens of relational spirituality, namely spirituality that emerges from interconnectedness among individuals and

within the community. In this framework, ritual is a medium for connecting with the Divine and reinforcing social relations and a sense of belonging.

The two primary forms of action in Mipit Amit thus demonstrate that the spiritual communication of the Budi Daya community encompasses dual dimensions: Vertical Dimension: Symbolic communication with God, nature, and ancestors through sesajen, incense, and prayer (pineja). Horizontal Dimension: Social communication among community members through cooperation, mutual assistance, and social cohesion.

The integration of these two dimensions reflects the core Budi Daya teaching: *Terang ka diri, terang ka Gusti, kalayan tiasa ngamalkeunana*, “to know oneself, to know God, and to actualize this understanding in daily life” (Risdayah et al., 2021). Mipit Amit becomes the tangible representation of this teaching, linking individual awareness with collective experience and uniting transcendental spirituality with concrete social action.

In the context of communication theory, this ritual illustrates the function of communication as a symbolic medium (Griffin, 2008), wherein meaning is transmitted not only through language but also through collective actions and religious symbols. The Mipit Amit ritual thus regulates not only human relations with God but also reaffirms the identity of the indigenous community amid the plural religious landscape of Cibedug Village.

Based on research findings and analysis, the two main forms of action in the Mipit Amit ritual are: Symbolic action through sesajen and incense, serving as a medium of spiritual communication with God, nature, and ancestors. Collective action through cooperation and communal participation, reinforcing social cohesion and horizontal communication (Dasih, I.G.A.R.P., & Indraswari, 2022).

Together, these actions demonstrate that the religious experience of the Budi Daya adherents is not merely contemplative but also a practical form of communication that unites transcendental and social dimensions. Consequently, Mipit Amit can be understood as a medium of spiritual communication that binds humanity with the Divine and with one another, showcasing the power of local religion in sustaining ecological and social harmony amid diversity.

Social-Communal Actions: Togetherness, Solidarity, and Harmony

The religious experience of the indigenous community of Cibedug Hamlet, as adherents of the Budi Daya belief system, is manifested not only in individual aspects such as prayer (pineja) or ritual practice (Mipit Amit), but also in social-communal forms. These forms emphasize the dimensions of togetherness, solidarity, and harmony that shape the life

of the community. Religious life in Cibedug is expressed through social networks involving interactions among individuals, both among Budi Daya adherents and with members of other faiths. As explained by Risdayah et al. (2021), social actions in the daily life of Budi Daya adherents are reflected through gotong royong (mutual cooperation), interfaith participation, and practices of tolerance that nurture communal harmony.

Within a phenomenological framework, these social-communal actions are understood as lived experiences, imbued with meanings that can only be comprehended from the perspective of the subjects themselves. As Moustakas (1994) emphasizes, phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of experience by capturing consciousness, feelings, and meanings that arise within both individual and collective awareness. Therefore, the togetherness and solidarity of the Cibedug community are not merely social behaviors but reflections of profound religious experience.

Communal togetherness in Cibedug is evident in daily social activities. Research findings show that gotong royong, whether repairing places of worship, cleaning irrigation channels, or helping during planting and harvesting seasons, is a common practice. Even in interfaith religious events, Budi Daya adherents participate in torch parades celebrating the Islamic New Year, while Muslim residents contribute to the Sura festival, a sacred day for the Budi Daya community.

From a phenomenological standpoint, these acts of togetherness affirm the essence of collective spiritual experience, namely the existential interconnectedness among people. This is consistent with James's (1902, p. 49) view that religious experience originates from individual religious feelings that are later expanded into social life. In the case of Cibedug, the sense of connection with the Divine transforms into a sense of connection with fellow human beings, making togetherness not only a social act but also a religious one.

Furthermore, this communal togetherness aligns with Wach's (1994, p. 47) perspective on the social dimension of religious experience. Wach asserts that religious experience cannot be separated from its communal expression, as religion inherently generates forms of fellowship. This is evident in Cibedug, where collective togetherness shapes a shared identity as a religious indigenous community.

Beyond togetherness, solidarity forms another essential aspect. In an interview, Indra emphasized that the Budi Daya teachings encourage adherents to live by the principle "nulung ka nu butuh, nalang ka nu susah, nganteur ka nu keueung, nuduhkeun ka nu terang", to help those in need, assist those in hardship, accompany those in fear, and guide those who

lack understanding (Interview, December 22, 2022). This expression is not merely a proverb but a social-ethical guideline embodied in daily life.

From Stace's theoretical perspective, acts of solidarity belong to the category of religious experience marked by a sense of unity with others, accompanied by heightened feelings of love, care, and mutuality. Solidarity in Cibedug emerges not from formal obligation but from spiritual experience that cultivates empathy and compassion.

This also resonates with Andrew Greeley's approach, which emphasizes that religious experiences often manifest as joy, laughter, and a drive to contribute to others. For example, when someone in Cibedug falls ill or faces difficulty, community members voluntarily offer help, regardless of religious affiliation. Such solidarity illustrates how spiritual experience is transformed into tangible action that strengthens social relations.

In phenomenological terms, solidarity can be understood as the realization of intersubjectivity, a shared consciousness built through lived experience. Solidarity, therefore, is not merely a social response but a reflection of a deeply held belief that human life is inherently interconnected, as affirmed in Budi Daya teachings that regard humans, animals, and plants as existing on equal footing (Kartawinata, 1956).

Harmony in Cibedug is demonstrated through interreligious tolerance. Budi Daya adherents live alongside Muslims, Christians, Protestants, Buddhists, and Confucians in mutual respect. Shelian, one of the adherents, explained that when any resident requires assistance, they will help without regard to religious identity (Interview, December 22, 2022).

This harmony can be interpreted through symbolic interactionism theory. According to Blumer, social interaction is always mediated by symbols, and meaning is constructed through communicative processes. In the case of Cibedug, religious symbols such as the Muslim torch parade or the Sura celebration of the Budi Daya adherents are not perceived as boundaries but as symbols of togetherness that enable interfaith interaction. Through these symbols, the community constructs shared understanding, thereby creating social harmony (Tănăsescu, 2023).

From a phenomenological viewpoint, this harmony reveals how religious experience does not end in individual feeling but flows into social relations. This aligns with James (1902), who asserts that religious experience often leads individuals toward moral transformation, fostering more harmonious living. Wach (1994) similarly views social harmony in Cibedug as an expanded form of religious fellowship, wherein religious

experience generates community structures grounded in order, tolerance, and unity. Thus, harmony is not merely a social norm but also a manifestation of shared spiritual experience.

The phenomena of togetherness, solidarity, and harmony in Cibedug can be further analyzed by integrating religious experience theories (Stace, Greeley, Wach, and James) with symbolic interactionism. Stace (1960) emphasizes that religious experience transcends logic, evoking feelings of unity with others and with nature. The solidarity and togetherness in Cibedug exemplify this experience of unity, expressed through concrete actions. Greeley (1974) shows that religious experience is characterized by feelings of joy, peace, and the urge to share. The communal life of Cibedug demonstrates how religious experience inspires gotong royong and mutual aid. Wach (1994) underscores the social dimension of religion. Cibedug's interfaith cooperation exemplifies the social expression of religious experience, where religion forms a fellowship pattern. James (1902) views religious experience as a profound feeling that shapes morality and behavior; harmony in Cibedug is thus a moral transformation arising from individual spiritual experience.

Meanwhile, symbolic interactionism (Steeves, 2023) explains that social meaning is constructed through symbols and interactions. Interfaith rituals, cooperative harvests, and joint Sura celebrations serve as symbols that generate collective meanings of tolerance and harmony. These interactions enable the indigenous community to maintain their identity while coexisting peacefully with others.

Based on the phenomenological findings and analysis, the social-communal actions of the Cibedug indigenous community reflect three key aspects: Togetherness, demonstrated through gotong royong, interfaith participation, and everyday social practices. Solidarity, embodied in the principle *nulung ka nu butuh, nalang ka nu susah*, expresses empathy and spiritual care. Harmony, manifested in interreligious tolerance and symbolic interactions that foster shared meaning (Manuaba & Sartini, 2022).

These three aspects reveal that the religious experience of Budi Daya adherents is not merely an internal phenomenon but a social praxis that binds the community together. Drawing upon the theories of Stace, Greeley, Wach, and James, along with the approach of symbolic interactionism, it becomes clear that the communal life of Cibedug represents a form of spiritual communication that integrates the vertical dimension (relationship with the Divine) and the horizontal dimension (relationship with fellow humans) (Zsupan-Jerome, 2024).

Thus, the social-communal actions in Cibedug affirm the role of local religion as a source of social cohesion, tolerance, and harmony within diversity. It is not merely a belief system but also a communicative practice that simultaneously reinforces transcendental and social relationships.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on the religious experiences of the Cibedug indigenous community, particularly the adherents of the Budi Daya belief system, it can be concluded that their religious life represents a holistic and distinctive form of spiritual communication. This communication occurs vertically between humans and God (Gusti Hyang Widi), and horizontally among humans, nature, and ancestral spirits. Through a phenomenological approach, the essence of Budi Daya religiosity can be understood as a conscious experience that integrates both inner spirituality and social existence.

Theoretical and Practical Implications: The revised findings, grounded in Moustakas's Transcendental Phenomenological method and organized around textural and structural descriptions of informants' lived experiences, produce a distinct set of implications. Theoretically, this study contributes a dual-channel spiritual communication model that integrates transcendental communication theory (Griffin, 2008; Ferrer, 2020) with cultural communication frameworks (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Muchtar et al., 2016), demonstrating their mutual constitution in indigenous religious practice. This model is applicable beyond the Cibedug context to other indigenous religious communities in Indonesia and Southeast Asia where spiritual experience is simultaneously transcendental and culturally embedded. Methodologically, the systematic application of Moustakas's six-step Transcendental Phenomenology, including epoche, imaginative variation, and composite textural-structural description, offers communication scholars a rigorous template for studying lived religious communication experience in indigenous contexts that resist measurement. Practically, the identification of Mipit Amit, pineja, and communal solidarity as active sites of dual-channel spiritual communication has concrete implications for: (a) intercultural communication training and interfaith dialogue facilitation in pluralistic Indonesian communities; (b) the design of community-based communication programs that recognize and build upon indigenous spiritual communication competencies; and (c) cultural heritage policy — affirming the communicative, not merely symbolic, significance of indigenous ritual

practices and supporting their protection under Indonesia's national cultural heritage framework.

First, the religious experiences of Budi Daya adherents manifest as reflective and paradoxical thought. Many followers experience inner conflict due to the historical lack of state recognition of their belief system, resulting in identity crises and psychological tension. As described by informants such as Indra and Ecep, they endured emotional struggle and alienation while remaining faithful to their ancestral teachings. This paradoxical state reflects the irrational dimension of religious experience, where individuals confront the limits of logic and discover spiritual meaning through suffering. Such inner struggles eventually strengthen religious awareness and open the path to deeper mystical experiences.

Second, Budi Daya religiosity is embodied through symbolic and collective ritual acts, particularly in the Mipit Amit ceremony. The burning of incense, offering of sesajen (ritual offerings), and pineja (prayers) serve as nonverbal forms of communication with God, nature, and ancestors. From a communication theory perspective, these rituals function as symbolic media that convey spiritual meaning. Through these acts, adherents not only "speak" to the Divine but also establish a dialogical relationship with the natural environment. This reflects the Budi Daya worldview of ecological harmony; humans, animals, and plants are seen as equal creations of God that must coexist in balance.

Third, religious experience in Citedug also takes social-communal forms, emphasizing solidarity, togetherness, and harmony. For Budi Daya adherents, spirituality is not confined to personal devotion but is expressed through inclusive social relationships. In daily life, they cooperate with Muslims, Protestants, Buddhists, and Confucians in activities such as religious parades, community cleanups, and interfaith celebrations. This demonstrates a spirituality that transcends sectarian boundaries. As Greeley (1974) asserts, genuine religious experience evokes joy, laughter, and a desire to share compassion with others, qualities evident in Citedug's communal life.

Fourth, Budi Daya spirituality represents a dual-channel communication system, vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension encompasses prayers and rituals as expressions of devotion to God and ancestors, while the horizontal dimension consists of social and communal actions that affirm solidarity and harmony. Spiritual communication is thus understood as an inner dialogue with the ultimate source of meaning, expressed not only through words but also through deeds and symbols. Acts such as gotong royong (mutual

cooperation) and tolerance function as “social prayers,” embodying the flow of spiritual awareness in everyday life.

Overall, the religious phenomena in Cibedug illustrate the unity of belief, ritual, and social ethics. The core Budi Daya principle, *terang ka diri, terang ka Gusti, sareng tiasa ngamalkeunana dina kahirupan* (“knowing oneself, knowing God, and practicing it in life”), serves as a moral compass guiding both spiritual and social relationships. By living consistently with these teachings, the community has maintained its ancestral traditions while adapting to a plural and modern social context.

For scholars and researchers in communication studies, these findings highlight that spiritual communication transcends verbal discourse. Rituals, symbols, and social practices within indigenous communities like Cibedug represent complex communicative systems imbued with moral and ethical values. Therefore, the study of religious communication should not be limited to formal sermons or doctrinal messages but must also encompass symbolic and social expressions as vital modes of living spirituality. The phenomenological approach remains essential for capturing the inner meanings and religious consciousness embedded in indigenous cultural practices.

For policymakers and cultural institutions, this study underscores the importance of recognizing and preserving local belief systems as integral components of national spiritual diversity. Communities such as Cibedug play a crucial role in fostering interreligious harmony and social cohesion. Supportive policies, particularly in education, cultural transmission, and the preservation of agrarian rituals like *Mipit Amit*, are vital to sustaining their ecological and spiritual wisdom for future generations.

For the Budi Daya community itself, the values of togetherness, solidarity, and harmony must continue to be nurtured and strengthened. Amid modernization and globalization, indigenous groups need to balance tradition and openness. Spiritual education rooted in local values, such as *eling* (mindfulness), *rukun* (peaceful coexistence), and *tulung-tinulung* (mutual assistance), can help preserve their identity while engaging constructively with wider society.

The lived experience of the Cibedug people offers valuable insight into an inclusive and communicative religiosity. In a plural nation, the Budi Daya principles of respecting diversity, maintaining ecological balance, and fostering social solidarity can serve as a model for strengthening interfaith dialogue and social cohesion.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of spiritual communication and religious experience research in Indonesia by affirming that religious communication is not merely doctrinal discourse but a reflective, symbolic, and social practice that cultivates harmony. The Cibedug experience demonstrates that the roots of Indonesian spirituality lie in empathetic and conscious communication, reminding us, amid the tides of modernity, of the enduring importance of balance among self, God, others, and the natural world.

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