



# THE GEPPPO



**A publication of the Buddhist Church of Ogden**

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**March / April 2023 Issue**

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF FILIAL PIETY

**J.K. Hirano**



Carmela, Kacie and I returned from the Philippines last night. Except for a few glitches with luggage, it was a good trip. My one suggestion is never travel Asiana Airlines. I have done a lot of traveling and I have been fortunate to have never lost luggage. I would guess over one hundred domestic flights and a dozen or more international. However, on this trip to the Philippines, they lost Kacie's and my luggage on the way between Korea and Manila and on the way home, they lost Kacie's luggage from Seattle to Salt Lake. Luckily, I had all my meds, my cpap and portable oxygen machine in my carry-on. However, Kacie and I had to buy new clothes for our first week. It was a good thing we were in the Philippines because the clothes there fit us well and cost about half the price of the same stores in the U.S. such as Uniqlo and Zara.

I had been to the Philippines about 12 years ago. However, my age makes it more difficult to travel long distances. The trip to Ilo Ilo City, Carmela's hometown, took about 33 hours from Salt Lake and the return trip from Manila to Salt Lake about 20 hours. As a result of the jet lag, I was a bit crankier and feebler than usual. However, when we got to her hometown Ilo Ilo City, her nephew Jon and niece Tinan were there to show us and get us around.

*Rev. Hirano's article continued on next page*

The respect for elders in the Philippines is more than any other place in Asia. Filial Piety is a very Asian characteristic which comes from the Confucian ideals of harmony and balance; however, the Philippines take it to another level. If you have a senior card, everything is discounted. Even movies are free one or two days a week. The photos I have included are from a restaurant in Ilo Ilo City, called “Breakthrough” and is one of the better restaurants. It is on the ocean and there are a few other statues, but these two are quite prominent. One is a young girl, placing the older woman’s hand to her head (a gesture of respect). The other is of two children listening intently to an older man. I saw a respect and attitude of deferral in many situations. Not just giving up a seat to the elderly on public transportation. This is something I believe is important to instill in our youth. I think that in many ways, we coddle our youth to feel entitled. The “you are so special” attitude that often backfires into, “Yes, I am special, so why do I have to listen to you?”

I have seen our Buddhist Churches of America coddle our youth, so worried about them leaving. There is often a lack of respect in general for those older. I know that I was shocked when I became a minister and heard that retired ministers were at the back of the line when ministers entered for a service.

Within Buddhism there is a sutra called the “Sutra of Filial Piety.” Some scholars have said that this is not an actual work of the Buddha but was written by Chinese Buddhists in response to criticism of Buddhist monks who left the secular life and did not care for their parents. In regard to filial piety, I like the story I read about a student who asked his teacher what is meant by filial piety? The teacher replied, ‘it is to take care of your parents and to live and take care of their funerals.’ The student didn’t really care for the answer and asked, “What do you really mean?” The teacher responded, “Don’t give your parents reason to worry.” This filial piety begins with respect for the elderly.

Another activity that Carmela and I do when we go to the Philippines is to visit the cemetery and place flowers on the graves of her grandparents, parents and her nanny. Now that Carmela is Buddhist and her family accepts her as such, it is okay for us to chant and place the flowers. I know that in the Philippines, so much of their traditions are like Catholics from Mexico. On November 1 and 2 the families go to the cemetery and even sleep there to eat and drink with their deceased family members, it is called “Todos los Santo” Day of the Dead. In Buddhism we have many services and occasions commemorating our dead. Obon, various family memorial services, Hoonko, Shotsuki Hoyo. Although we do not really eat, drink or sleep at the cemetery. In the past, there was also a wake service called “Otsuya” where families would often stay with the deceased throughout the night, eating, drinking and talking.

In the United States, we do have Memorial Day. However, Memorial Day is a fairly new tradition that recognizes those who died while in military service. I believe that we should really consider awakening to the reality of the impermanence of all life. In February, we hold Nehan E or Nirvana Day, commemorating the death of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. The Buddha is said to have chosen the time of his death to teach us about our death and impermanence. For many of us, the first time we experience death is from our pets. Thus on Nirvana Day, which we held on February 11<sup>th</sup> in Honeyville, February 12<sup>th</sup> in Salt Lake and Ogden and February 19<sup>th</sup> in Idaho Oregon.

Just as treating our seniors with respect is a step towards each of us better realizing the harmony of filial piety. Holding a memorial service for our pets helps us to understand our own impermanence.

