

## FILIPINO DEATH RITUALS

**DEATH IS GENERALLY DEFINED AS THE END OF ONE'S LIFE**, but in cultures such as that of the Philippines, it's seen as a "*continuation of kinship ties*" between the deceased and the ones they left behind. Therefore Filipinos are keen on paying their respects to the dearly beloved, which is aptly demonstrated during wakes.

Even though it's meant to be a mourning session, a wake for a deceased Filipino isn't supposed to be a somber occasion, but a social event where long-lost relatives and friends reunite, and immediate family from overseas come home. Filipinos believe that having a happy atmosphere during a wake assists the dead on its journey to the afterlife. Vigils are held throughout the night, with visitors and relatives passing the time away by playing cards or mahjong, drinking and eating. Vigils aren't only a sign of respect, but are also meant to keep the deceased company. Recognizing the social nature of Filipino wakes, some funeral homes have been providing mourners a venue for gathering and eating.

According to *Palayok: Philippine Food Through Time, On Site In the Pot*, by Doreen Fernandez, food is a symbol of bonding among Filipinos. Hence, during wakes it's expected that the family in mourning prepare food and refreshments for their guests. During the nine-day novena, which takes place after the burial, food is left on the steps of the family house on the fourth and ninth day as this is assumed to be the days when the soul of the dead returns. The 40th day of a person's death is also celebrated as it's believed that this is when the soul ascends to heaven.

As a whole Filipinos are very superstitious, and even though provinces may have their own unique death and burial practices, the one thing they share is the "*strong religious component interspersed with folk traditions.*" Here are a few "*rules*" they should remember:

- Feed the mourners, but don't walk them to the door when they leave.
- Don't sweep the floor while the body is still lying in state.
- No tears should fall on the dead or the coffin as it would make a person's journey to the afterlife difficult.
- When someone sneezes at the wake, pinch him.
- During the wake the dead person's relatives mustn't take a bath.
- Food from the wake shouldn't be brought home because it's believed that the dead touches all of it.

-- After a funeral service, guests should'nt go directly home. This way the spirit of the dead won't follow them to their house.

-- When carrying a coffin out for burial, it should be carried head first as it prevents the soul of the dead from coming back.

-- Before a man comes home from a funeral he should light a cigarette from a fire at the cemetery gate to shake off spirits of the dead.

-- The corpse should be positioned facing the door - the feet should be facing toward the door so it will allow the spirit ot depart easily.

-- Family members should wear black or white, colors are prohibited.

-- Weddings, birthdays, and other social activities should'nt be celebrated for one year.

(Source: FILIPINAS MAG in collaboration with Anthony Kan, Director of Field Force of Lifemark Group)

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