

Low Carbon Memorial Ceremony for Ancestors

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(Translated by Fu Tak Iam Foundation)

It's the annual Tomb-sweeping Day again. On this day every family is busy preparing for the memorial ceremony for ancestors and we are no exception. Early in the morning, each and everyone in the family has a lot of work in hand: preparing chickens, shopping for meat and fruits, and also packing the ceremonial baskets. Watching their busy bodies, I recall the same day last year when I first participated in the memorial ceremony.....

It was raining softly. Dad was carrying two bags full of dollar-notes props, incense, candles and firecrackers. Mom also carried a heavy basket on her shoulder and three of us walked through a narrow avenue in the countryside. We came across groups of people on the way with the same purpose and appearances.

We were already panting when we arrived at the cemetery. With no time to lose, we immediately cleaned up the place and then decorated it with all the ceremonial stuff we brought with us. Dad and Mom began to light the candles and incense. All I saw was a bunch of incense held in their hands, creating smoke like a cover-up for monsters. "So many incense, what a waste!" said I causally. "What do you know about it?" Mom grumbled. Then she started burning the dollar-notes props in different cash values, piles after piles and smokes so thick and dense that darkened the surroundings. "Too many of them, what a waste!" I repeated myself spontaneously. This time Mom turned her angry face at me, "The more incense, the better we would be blessed by our ancestors! The more dollar notes, the more they would bless us with great fortune, and they would feel happier. Look how naïve you are!" I was stunned at such superstitious remarks. But still I did not doubt her. For if not why would she have spent so much money doing it? Perhaps this would really please the ancestors. After burning the dollar notes, the firecrackers were lighted up, releasing deafening noises. Without knowing it, they were heard everywhere nearby, as if competing for the loudest and longest blast.....

"Let's go." Mom's voice interrupts my 'play-back'. It is still drizzling like last year and we are likewise walking on that narrow avenue. In the soft Spring breezes I feel somewhat chilly. Suddenly I notice that Dad's hands are empty. Queries all over my face, I ask, "Dad, have you forgotten something?" "Reform for this year!" Dad says. Then I realize all the other groups going the same direction are not carrying heavy bags too.

When we get to the graveyard, we decorate it with a few ceremonial stuffs. After a brief ceremony we put them back and then all is done.

On our way back home, my mind is filled with doubts and I ask Mom if the ancestors would surely not be pleased. But this brings them into laughter. Dad, who works as a secondary school Principal, explains to me, "Mom certainly was joking last year. That's sheer superstition. This year we have seen all the press releases on newspapers advocating for low carbon memorial ceremony; resource saving and environmental protection by means of burning less incense and dollar notes or no burning at all." His words just open up my mind! How true that is! If every family practice that kind of burning year after year, it would be such a large amount of unworthy spending and wastes production which would be a sizable pollution to the earth. We should not only advocate for low carbon memorial ceremony for ancestors but also low carbon living so that the earth we live in would become younger and better!