



Understanding Ginhawa as Well-being in El Shaddai: Implications on Filipino Personhood, Spirituality, and Psychology

Gerard P. CONCEPCION

Associate Professor, Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature
College of Arts and Letters
University of the Philippines, Philippines
gerardconcepcion@gmail.com

Abstract. Drawing from traditional definitions of *ginhawa*, this study furthers it as a spiritual concept. By using Filipino indigenous methods, the researcher was able to interact with members of El Shaddai as the case of the study. Based on selected teachings of their servant-leader Bro. Mike Velarde, and testimonies of the members, *ginhawa* is experienced in aspects of *katawan*, *emosyon*, *kalooban*, and *kaluluwa*. In the context of El Shaddai, *ginhawa* is the interpretation of good human experience and condition, which is experienced with faith in God at present. Finally, *ginhawa* will be discussed as a concept of indigenous values towards a greater understanding of Filipino personhood, psychology, and spirituality.

Keywords. Ginhawa, El Shaddai, Filipino personhood, Filipino Psychology, Filipino Spirituality.

1. Introduction

The Philippines, having roughly around 180 indigenous languages, expresses the concept of well-being in many forms. One common concept is *ginhawa*, which is not solely rooted in the Tagalog language. In fact, various ethnolinguistic groups across the country attribute broad and profound meanings to it, generally referring to a “state of well-being” that encompasses both situational realities and aspirational ideals (Paz, 2008). From this perspective, it becomes compelling to examine how Filipinos seek well-being amid life’s various concerns such as food, finances, health, relationships, among others. In a country marked by a strong belief in the supernatural, the divine, or the sacred, the discourse on reliance upon deities, religion, and faith becomes central to understanding and attaining the kind of well-being perceived as something beyond one’s current material or worldly condition (de Mesa, 1991; Orbigo, 1996). This prompts a critical question: is there a difference in the understanding of well-being (i.e., *ginhawa*) when viewed and interpreted within a religious or faith-based community, compared to more secular or customary conceptions? It is within this context that the present study is situated. It explores the question: how is *ginhawa* preached within such a setting, and how do believers interpret and internalize it? To address these questions, the researcher selected the El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation International

Incorporated (hereafter, El Shaddai) as the case study. Beyond being one of the most influential and expansive religious organizations in the Philippines, El Shaddai presents a unique case through the preaching style of its leader, Bro. Mike Velarde, who articulates ginhawa as a reciprocal practice of giving and receiving.

Given the backdrop on ginhawa as a cultural word within the Filipino experience, and El Shaddai as a religious community preaching ginhawa, this study seeks to: 1) identify the various articulations of ginhawa based on the teachings of Velarde and the testimonies of El Shaddai members; 2) describe ginhawa as a spiritual experience; and 3) propose the implications of ginhawa as a spiritual encounter toward a deeper understanding of Filipino personhood and spirituality.

2. Method

This study is based on Enriquez's (1976) argument that research procedures must be culturally meaningful and intelligible to society under study, methods that its members understand and approve. In response, the researcher used data collection techniques that were culturally appropriate in the Filipino context: 1) *Pakikiramdam* (empathetic sensing) – The researcher relied on both emotional intuition and visual observation, guided by what she felt while immersed in the community under study. This served as the foundational mode of data gathering, as it allowed the researcher to gauge whether entry into the inner circle of El Shaddai members would be possible. (b) *Pagtatanong-tanong* (informal asking; probing through questions) – The researcher engaged in situations where casual questions could be posed not merely limited to quantitative queries such as how many or what kind but designed to elicit relational openness. Here, the core aim was to establish rapport with participants while obtaining preliminary insights useful to the research. 3) *Pagmamasid* (observational learning) – To build a basic understanding of the community's practices, the researcher observed El Shaddai members' routines and assessed their general norms and religious practices. 4) *Pakikipagkuwentuhan* (narrative-sharing) – Informal conversations were conducted in a non-obtrusive manner, which proved particularly effective for broaching topics not typically discussed in formal settings. Using this approach, the researcher gained access to members' lived experiences and personal narratives. 5) *Pakikisalamuha* (participatory engagement) – The researcher joined selected activities of El Shaddai, gradually gathering insights and deepening familiarity with the cultural expressions and everyday lives of its members. 6) *Pakikipagkapwa* (relational solidarity) – With conscious effort to reduce social distance, the researcher integrated into the community by participating in gatherings and events. This served as the guiding ethos of the researcher's role as a participant-observer and fostered a relational mode of engagement rooted in mutuality.

In addition, the researcher also consulted scholarly literature on the topic of ginhawa authored by Filipino scholars. Published teachings of Bro. Mike Velarde on ginhawa, found in El Shaddai Bagong Liwanag Magazine, were likewise collected and analyzed. Weekly healing messages by Velarde were transcribed and examined. Furthermore, written testimonies of El Shaddai members archived in the El Shaddai AVR Library were gathered and reviewed as part of the research corpus.

3. Augmented Reality and Mental Health

Early dictionaries by de San Buenaventura (1613), de San Antonio (as cited in Postma, 2000), Santos (1835), and de Noceda and Sanlucar (1860) define the term *ginhaua/ginhawa* as referring to good health; relief from burdensome work or sensations; a sense of well-being or comfort; ease in life; the experience of relief from problems or illness; and liberation from undesirable conditions, such as being able to eat when hungry or drink when thirsty. A similar range of meanings appears in Panganiban's (1973) dictionary-thesaurus, which associates *ginhawa* with ease or comfort in life, recovery from illness, alleviation of hardship, solace, consolation, tranquility, convenience, and overall well-being.

Among the various ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines, the concept of well-being is richly elaborated. For instance, among the Subanon and Bisaya peoples, *ginhawa* is closely associated with breath. In the case of the Bagobo, it is related to love and the rhythmic beating of the heart or pulse (Paz, 2008). This resonates with the concept of rest or *pahinga-hinga* among Bicolano, Hiligaynon, and Cebuano speakers (Salazar, 1977). As such, *ginhawa* becomes a signal of life itself: breathing to live, or the breath that signifies a state of good living (Covar, 1998). As in many Asian contexts, breath is believed to provide the human being with vital energy; thus, the common Filipino idiom *nakahihinga nang maluwig* (able to breathe freely) is a direct expression of *ginhawa* (Abrera, 1992). Consequently, *ginhawa* may encompass meanings related to nourishment, emotion, disposition, the internal organs, ultimately serving as a metaphor for life and the totality of one's being (Mercado, 1975; Salazar, 1977).

Frequently, *ginhawa* as a state of well-being is associated with material comfort or abundance. As depicted in the novel *Banaag at Sikat*, *ginhawa* is portrayed as an experience of the privileged classes in society (Chua, 2007). Even in Andres Bonifacio's manifesto *Ang Dapat Mabatid ng mga Tagalog*, the terms *ginhawa* and *kaginhawaan* are used to connote prosperity, a beautiful life, and relief from pain, suffering, and poverty (Agoncillo, 1963). Similarly, Emilio Jacinto's *Liwanag at Dilim* frames *ginhawa* not solely in economic terms, but as a general condition of peace, security, and goodness (Maceda, 2008).

On another level, *ginhawa* manifests in several forms: (a) *ginhawa ng katawan* (physical comfort) – such as recovery from illness or fulfillment of material needs; (b) *ginhawa ng kalooban* (emotional or inner comfort) – experienced when one feels peace, lightness, and clarity of emotion; and (c) *ginhawa ng tao* (human well-being) – where an individual experiences both bodily and inner well-being, and is also capable of bringing *ginhawa* to others (de Mesa, 2004). It is important to note that physical well-being does not always equate with inner peace, and vice versa. When discussing not merely survival but the quality of life, *ginhawa* serves as a key indicator of the quality of thought, emotion, belief, and philosophical orientation among Filipinos (Eugenio, 2002). In this sense, *ginhawa* is not only a present experience but also an aspiration, an ideal state sought when not currently attained.

4. Knowing El Shaddai

El Shaddai scholarship often takes four different tropes. First, several studies concentrate on the unique rituals and practices of the organization, which are marked by aspects of folk Catholicism, the charismatic movement, and popular culture (Zulita, 1999; Balajadia, 2001; Tremlett, 2014). Second, there are phenomenological investigations into El Shaddai members' actual religious experiences (Araw, 1999; Punnakal, 1999; Sanchez, 2003). Third, the group's organizational success as a religious movement is examined in several studies (Mercado, 2001; Wiegele, 2005). Lastly, some take a more practical stance and study El Shaddai as a political and cultural phenomena (Marasigan, 1996; Gorospe-Jamon, 1998; Quirong, 2019). While these works represent a rich body of literature, there remains a significant gap regarding the articulation and understanding of *ginhawa* (well-being) within the movement, particularly when analyzed using indigenous conceptual frameworks grounded in Filipino language and thought (Concepcion, 2009).

4.1. Tracing El Shaddai

Since spiritual renewal is a common subject in Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and Catholicism, El Shaddai is viewed as a manifestation of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement. It emphasizes how the Holy Spirit affects and works in Christians' lives daily. Manifestations of this include spiritual expressions such as singing, dancing, fervent prayer, and the phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" (Mercado, 2001). Like other charismatic groups, El Shaddai incorporates distinctly Catholic elements such as the Mass, the Holy Trinity, the rosary, healing, and veneration of prophets and saints (Wiegele, 2005).

Members of El Shaddai collectively recall the beginnings of its leader, Bro. Mike Velarde, which is considered a foundational story. Velarde stated that an angel of God woke him up and gave him a holy message in 1978 when he was at the Philippine Heart Center waiting for heart surgery. According to his account, he was instantly healed, and the operation was no longer necessary. Following this experience, Velarde became actively involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement in Quezon City. Four years later, he purchased the DWXI-AM radio station to broadcast the lessons he had gleaned from charismatic gatherings. His radio program *To God Be the Glory*, which began in 1981, was soon associated with miracles and healing among its listeners.

Velarde later invited his audience to attend a Mass, which became a weekly gathering known as the DWXI Prayer Partners Family Appointment with El Shaddai. The El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation was founded in 1984 as a non-stock, non-profit corporation and registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as attendance and funding grew (Robles, 1999). Because of the group's increasing recognition both domestically and internationally, the organization's official name was changed to El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation International Incorporated in 1991. Although official figures remain in contrast, current estimates place its global membership between 10 and 15 million.

4.2. Charisma, the Prosperity Gospel, and Transformative Experience

As with many charismatic groups, leadership charisma plays a pivotal role in the movement's popularity. The leader must embody a charismatic presence capable of responding to the needs of the audience through persuasive messaging. The researcher was particularly intrigued by reports of miracles, blessings, and divine favors experienced by El Shaddai members. Although this study does not aim to validate these claims, the rituals and rhetorical choices of Velarde clearly articulate a form of prosperity gospel. Emphasis is placed on spiritual healing, material abundance, and positive testimony (Wiegele, 2005). Members expect reciprocal blessings in return for listening to Velarde, offering tithes, praying Psalm 91, sowing a "miracle seed of faith," and raising prayer requests alongside symbolic items such as wallets, eggs, examination pens, and oil. These practices are grounded in Velarde's mantra: *Tiyak yun! Uuwi kang may pagpapala na siksik, liglig, at umaapaw!* ("Surely, you will go home with compact, more than enough, and overflowing blessings").

Velarde's teachings and speeches are often highly emotive. They emphasize a positive outlook on adversity, the claiming of one's aspirations, and heartfelt invocation of God. His messages revolve around a core principle: give to God and He will return it in good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing (Zulita, 1999; Mercado, 2001; Balajadia, 2001). This narrative framework positions Velarde's charisma as instrumental in shaping members' pursuit of prosperity.

From the perspective of the researcher, who engaged in rapport-building with members of the community, no participant expressed feelings deceived or manipulated by Velarde. On the contrary, their testimonies highlighted significant personal transformations in behavior, mindset, and values. In their own words, they described themselves as "enlightened," "saved," "faithful," and "continually trusting." Participation in El Shaddai activities, listening to Velarde, and following his teachings reportedly resulted in "goodness," "joy," "abundance," "happiness," and "salvation." These testimonies narrate positive change that can be interpreted in embodied, emotional, and spiritual terms. As such, they reflect how experiences of ginhawa not just as a concept but as lived reality, are expressed and realized within the El Shaddai faith community.

5. Ginhawa in Velarde's Teachings

The long speeches delivered by Bro. Mike Velarde at the conclusion of the weekly El Shaddai gathering, formally called the DWXI Prayer Partners Family Appointment with El Shaddai, are popularly referred to as healing messages. These are so called because, according to Velarde, their content "heals both body and soul." Unlike standard Catholic sermons or homilies, Velarde's speech style is informal and colloquial, resembling a message conveyed by a "close friend" to his audience (Wiegele, 2005). His healing messages, which typically span two to four hours, address practical, everyday matters such as giving, humility, forgiveness, honoring parents, and following the Gospel. They open with prayers of "worship" and "thanksgiving" to God, followed by Velarde's familiar greeting, "How are you all?"

Velarde often integrates jokes and personal anecdotes to enrich and enliven his messages. Throughout his preaching, he engages the crowd and encourages them to stand, sit, raise their hands, jump, clap, and laugh. At the end of each message, he reiterates the key points of his talk, then asks participants to raise their prayer requests and personal items such as wallets, pens, eggs, oil, so that he may bless them while praying for their petitions. These gatherings usually conclude with spirited applause and exuberant singing from the congregation.

5.1. Ginhawa as a Gift of Divine Benevolence

According to Velarde, ginhawa arises from the essential attributes of God: omnipotent, loving, compassionate, miraculous, generous, and ever responsive to human needs. A comfortable and abundant life, he explains, is both God's offer and divine plan for humanity, to be experienced not only in the afterlife but already here on Earth. Thus, he pushes El Shaddai followers to live in conformity with God's holiness, encouraging them to mimic His generosity, which is most clearly exhibited in the gift of His Son, Christ, to humanity. Velarde also preaches that God is continually active: knocking on people's hearts, watching over them, providing for their needs, bestowing ginhawa on the humble and generous, and safeguarding them from harm.

5.2. The Humble and God-Fearing Will Experience Ginhawa

Velarde defines humility as the state of not relying on one's own strength, but on the power and love of God. He asserts that those who remain faithful to God's Word will enjoy a stable and enduring life of ginhawa. Humility, according to Velarde, is demonstrated by fear of the Lord, a fear that discourages sin, lest one becomes distant from God. Avoiding sin, he contends, leads to wealth, health, peace, security, abundance, and honor.

5.3. Ginhawa Awaits Those Who Trust in God's Word

Velarde compares the Word of God to a seed that grows in the heart of anyone who waits in hope. If one does not believe in the Word, they will not succeed, will not attain ginhawa, and will not be saved for destruction awaits. But if one believes, meditates upon the Word, it will bring about salvation, cleans sin, protects from danger, and heals the body, heart, and soul. Velarde affirms that ginhawa is experienced by those who have faith in God's Word: they remain joyful even amid trials, undergo positive transformation, and receive what they ask from God.

5.4. Doing the Keys to Ginhawa Will Lead to a Life of Success

In his teachings, Bro. Mike Velarde outlines six key principles that serve as a moral compass for reaching ginhawa, or holistic well-being, and spiritual success. These principles are embedded in a framework of relational ethics and Christian virtue, largely inspired by Filipino cultural norms and Catholic social teachings. Together, they form a practical theology that includes familial responsibilities, social obligations, and personal piety. 1) Honor, Respect, and Obey One's Parents - The first principle

emphasizes the importance of familial hierarchy and intergenerational respect, both of which are important to Filipino cultural norms and biblical teachings. Velarde's emphasis on honoring parents not only emphasizes the commandment to "honor thy father and mother," but it also aligns with *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), a fundamental Filipino ethic. This moral imperative establishes the family as the primary site of ethical growth and well-being, with obedience understood not as subjugation but as a path to blessing. 2) Parents Are to Raise Their Children According to God's Commandments - Building on the first premise, the second one called for parents to raise their children according to God's laws. This means a "covenantal understanding" of the family where moral or religious education should be an ongoing responsibility. According to Velarde, a failure to raise their children according to God's laws does not only threaten everyone's spiritual future, but also the overall well-being of the family. This framework, therefore, situates and continues ginhawa within inter-generational moral continuity. 3) Serve Earthly Masters Faithfully, as You Would Serve the Lord - The third premise reframes the employer-employee relationship as the act of working is seen as a type of service to God. El Shaddai members need to conduct their duties as employees with commitment, honesty, and integrity. As a religious commitment, work is no longer the simple means of an economic living. Velarde democratizes ginhawa by marrying work and spirituality, offering one way to achieve ginhawa, which can be had through workplace effort and sincerity, rather than through social status or wealth. 4) Be Just and Kind to your Subordinates - Again building on the first premise, Velarde encourages those with a position of power as employers, managers or heads of households to be just and kind to their subordinates. In this context, ginhawa can be seen as an ethical economy of care in which those in positions of power are held accountable for the well-being of others, thereby expressing a theologically informed social justice stance, and encouraging a sense of mutual solidarity and moral duty. 5) Cultivate Steadfast and unshakeable Faith in God - Velarde's theory revolves around the cultivation of unshakeable faith (i.e., *lubos na pananampalataya*) as both a condition and a catalyst for ginhawa. This principle is consistent with charismatic theology, which holds that faith is more than just belief; it is a relational confidence in God's providence. Moreover, Faith, according to Velarde, is performative, it must be exhibited via praying, donating, attending gatherings, and trusting in divine timing. Such a theology defines success as the believer's constancy in the face of uncertainty, rather than the certainty of outcomes. 6) Steer Clear of Sinful Behavior and Engage in Virtuous, Upright Actions - Lastly, Velarde highlights the importance of leading a moral life to achieve genuine and long-lasting ginhawa. It is believed that virtue and righteousness (*kabalan*) are both generative and protective, drawing divine favor and protecting the believer from spiritual harm. Avoiding sinful behaviors is a kind of spiritual hygiene that enables one to experience God's blessings, not a punitive one. According to this viewpoint, ginhawa represents moral conformity with divine will and is more than merely a reward. Ginhawa then, based on Velarde's teachings, is the lived reality of a life marked by love, peace, abundance, health, joy, and salvation, made possible through genuine faith and trust in God. A person who lives with ginhawa feels its wholeness and shares it with those around them. Velarde emphasizes that life's blessings are meaningless if not shared with others.

From the four core themes in Velarde's teachings on ginhawa, one can synthesize the idea of "total well-being." This articulates an ideal relationship between

human beings and the Divine. In this framework, ginhawa can only be truly experienced by those who maintain a good relationship with God. Its manifestations include peace and serenity in mind, heart, and soul; sufficiency in physical and material needs; and health of both body and spirit. Thus, ginhawa is a spiritual experience, an elevated state of life bestowed by God upon those who live in righteous communion with Him and obey His commandments. It can also be understood as a narrative of spiritual journey, a progressive movement toward the fullness of one's spirituality, or what Velarde and his followers call *kaginhawaan* (supreme well-being). From the perspective of the researcher, this is the core aspiration of every El Shaddai member, a sign of "salvation" already being experienced here on Earth, a form of life flowing directly from God.

6. Expressions of Ginhawa in the Members' Testimonies

The act of giving personal testimony (*patotoo*) is a routine ritual among members of El Shaddai. These testimonies are narrative accounts centered on miracles or positive transformations in the lives of believers. As observed by the researcher, members engage in this practice out of a desire to share with others, both fellow members and non-members alike, the "greatness," "grace," and "miracles" of God in their lives. These testimonies are expressed in various forms: first, during weekly gatherings before the formal program begins (on stage); second, during member events such as seminars, reconciliation activities, outreach programs, and preaching (within fellowship spaces); third, through letters that are either read aloud on radio broadcasts or published in Bagong Liwanag Magazine and El Shaddai Newsletter; and fourth, through everyday conversations and informal social interactions outside official El Shaddai activities.

The researcher initially employed informal inquiry and conversational engagement to explore what El Shaddai membership meant to individuals, particularly regarding their participation in communal gatherings. The aim was to gradually and subtly capture the members' notions or understandings of ginhawa, if any. Of the ten members initially interviewed, seven associated their experience of ginhawa with physical and material dimensions such as improved health, employment, financial resources, and stable housing. The remaining three respondents expressed that their sense of ginhawa was primarily spiritual and emotional in nature, citing "joy" and "peace" as outcomes of their relationship with God. They further emphasized the strengthening of their faith during personal trials, noting that they remained "calm" and "secure" regardless of circumstances.

These preliminary findings allowed the researcher to gain a clearer, though still tentative, understanding of how members define and interpret the term ginhawa. However, the data at this stage remained insufficient, as the core term of interest had not yet been articulated through direct and self-reflective narrative. To address this gap, the researcher elicited additional testimonies using a set of guide questions: (1) How did you become a member of El Shaddai? (2) What was your life like before? (3) What is your life like now as a member?

From the thirty collected testimonies using this guided approach, only seven explicitly mentioned the term ginhawa. The concept in these accounts was associated with good health, access to financial resources, employment and business opportunities, inner peace, moral and spiritual renewal, and recovery from illness. In these narratives,

ginhawa retained many of its conventional meanings such as physical wellness, relief, peace of mind, consolation, healing from affliction, and ease in life. Yet these testimonies also reveal that within the El Shaddai context, ginhawa may be understood both as a personal experience (e.g., physical healing, obtaining a job, inner tranquility) and as a collective or social experience (e.g., familial abundance and well-being).

Table 1: Reported Expressions of Ginhawa

Aspect	Reported Expressions of Ginhawa
Livelihood	“We were able to put up a sari-sari store, followed by a mini-grocery, and eventually opened several other shops. Our lives became more comfortable and prosperous.” “I was granted a comfortable life, including my family. We used to have nothing, but since joining El Shaddai, God has bestowed many blessings upon us.”
Health	“I experienced great feeling; I suffered from many illnesses, but the Lord healed them all.” “I regained my former strength.”
Inner Self	“My inner self is now peaceful and at ease. I was able to raise my children well even after my husband left me. I entrusted everything to God.” “I felt <i>ginhawa</i> and was filled with renewed hope.”
Soul/Spirit	“Even when facing problems, I can overcome them because I have God by my side. I am not afraid of difficulties. It’s not just about material things; ___we give more importance to the spiritual.” “My life became more at ease because of my faith in the Lord. From a sinful life, jealous, ill-tempered, without fear of God, a liar. Now I have changed.”

6.1. Articulations in Experiencing Ginhawa

This section aims to identify the lived experiences that revolve around and are associated with the concept and meanings of ginhawa, even in instances where the foundational term itself is not explicitly stated. If such experiences are present, they serve as evidence of the manifestation of ginhawa within the El Shaddai community. Based on the definitions provided in various dictionaries, for instance, experiencing illness is understood to be a source of suffering, whereas healing brings about ginhawa. This suggests that even in the absence of the explicit use of the word, such experiences can be interpreted as articulations and expressions of the underlying concept.

From the researcher’s perspective, reports on acquiring material possessions and meeting essential needs were seen to bring joy, relief, and comfort to the members’ circumstances. However, ginhawa is not solely linked to physical health or material needs. On many occasions, internal disposition, emotions, feelings, and psychological states were given greater emphasis over physical well-being. For example, participants reported experiencing “inner calm” and “peace” because of the alleviation or disappearance of “suffering” and “disturbance” within themselves. Related reports

included feelings of “joy,” “contentment,” and “serenity” of the heart, mind, and conscience.

It was also evident that suffering, illness, and hardship are not experienced solely on a physical level but also affect one's inner disposition and emotions. Hence, the needs of the body are distinct from the needs of the inner self, both of which are relevant to the attainment of ginhawa. This is underscored by several testimonies indicating that the possession of substantial wealth does not necessarily result in emotional relief or inner peace (e.g., “We were wealthy, but my siblings and I constantly argued”).

Although the relationship between a member and God is a subjective and personal experience, its articulation often transcends physical and emotional dimensions, moving into the realm of what may be described as a spiritual experience. If faith provides ginhawa, then this aligns with Velarde's assertion that faith brings about a state of readiness for trials and tribulations, that is, the absence of emotional distress, fear, anxiety, or doubt, leading to a sense of lightness and peace.

To support this argument, the researcher examined 174 testimonials published in Bagong Liwanag Magazine from 1994 to 2010. The goal was to establish which components of self or personhood ginhawa are expressed based on members' reports of positive conditions and experiences. The findings show that: 1) 39 testimonies reported the acquisition of money, employment, business ventures, and material assets associated with an improved economic status or livelihood (i.e., economic well-being); 2) 73 testimonies described healing from illness, improved health, and physical strength (i.e., physical well-being); 3) 27 testimonies narrated freedom from or avoidance of vices (e.g., drugs, alcohol, gambling) and harmful behaviors (e.g., infidelity, theft, lying, even murder), which were understood to have led to improvements in both the body and the inner self (i.e., moral and corporeal well-being); 4) 25 testimonies cited the development of humility, strength of character, emotional joy, ease of spirit, inner peace, and mental and moral clarity (i.e., emotional and psychological well-being); 5) 10 testimonies described feelings of tranquility, calm, and serenity in the soul as a result of genuine confidence in God. These various expressions of ginhawa imply that it is a comprehensive term with physiological, emotional, moral, and spiritual elements, a holistic measure of Filipino well-being.

The researcher observed, through the lens of ginhawa as an articulation and manifestation of spiritual experience in the context of El Shaddai, that while ginhawa related to livelihood, the body, and health may appear as the most immediate and fundamental form, it is not necessarily the most significant when faith or spirituality is concerned. Greater value is placed on ginhawa related to inner disposition, emotional well-being, and the soul. Based on the researcher's field experience, even though many members of El Shaddai are in economic need, they consistently offer tithes and financial contributions to the organization. In reference to Velarde's teachings, this may be understood as the members' adherence to the view that the well-being of the inner self and the soul is more important than material wealth.

Drawing from both Velarde's teachings and the testimonies of El Shaddai members, ginhawa emerges as a condition grounded in the present, encompassing positive states in economic, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the person. It also becomes evident that ginhawa is not exclusive to any single domain; rather, it is often experienced as interrelated. For instance, the comfort of the soul and peace of mind are mutually reinforcing. This may explain why some members report that the joy

and serenity of their souls translate to a sense of contentment and clarity in their hearts and minds. Furthermore, this personal sense of ginhawa extends outward, contributing to a collective or social experience of well-being.

Table 2: Framework of Ginhawa: From Livelihood to the Soul

Aspect	Reported Positive Experiences
Livelihood	Acquisition of houses and land; children's access to education; financial stability; gainful employment; sufficient food; ownership of a business and vehicle; freedom from debt.
Body and Health	Recovery from illness; good health; physical strength and vitality.
Body and Disposition	Freedom from and avoidance of vices; renunciation of immoral behaviors and worldly sins.
Emotions and Disposition	Development of humility; inner strength; sense of gratitude to God and others; emotional contentment; joy of mind and heart; peace and calmness of mind and heart; clarity and serenity.
Spirit / Soul	Abiding in God's presence, resulting in fearlessness, peace, and contentment; freedom from anxiety; unwavering trust in God; resilience amid trials; confidence in salvation; joyful soul.

7. Ginhawa as a Collective Spiritual Experience in El Shaddai

El Shaddai members' personal accounts reveal three significant narrative components: first, a period in their lives marked by suffering and hardship (the absence of ginhawa); second, their engagement with the beliefs and practices of El Shaddai (e.g., participation in gatherings, giving of tithes and offerings, and embodying the teachings of Velarde); and third, their current state characterized by improved well-being (the presence of ginhawa). Whether or not miracles are explicitly cited, members' spiritual experiences in relation to God appear to have transformed their overall perception of their life situations.

According to the researcher's interpretation, this transformation arises from the internalization of their identity as "children of God" through their participation in El Shaddai's teachings and practices, which leads to changes in thinking, perspectives, and consciousness. In other words, their lives acquire new meaning: past anger and resentment are now managed and replaced with understanding and patience; a previously alcoholic father becomes the unifying figure in the family; and someone once impoverished now extends financial assistance to others. This view of ginhawa as a spiritual experience can begin in physical or material manifestations, progress inwardly (e.g., emotions, feelings, thoughts), and spread externally to one's family and community. As a result, an individual's sense of ginhawa as a member of El Shaddai helps to maintain the well-being of their family and community. Even if not all members have attained the complete state of well-being (the fullness of ginhawa or success) as envisioned by Velarde, his teachings emphasize that such aspiration remains

the goal for all. While concepts such as miracle, blessing, and grace are often invoked, these all refer to favorable experiences or conditions closely linked to ginhawa as a spiritual phenomenon.

Therefore, ginhawa appears as both a desired state and a lived reality within the El Shaddai context foregrounded by the improved quality of life that is “offered” and “granted” by God. It is thereby interconnected with other ideals such as health, prosperity, joy, peace, love, and salvation. Furthermore, ginhawa may encompass the full spectrum of human experience: the body, emotions, thoughts, behavior, will, and soul. 1) Ginhawa derived from the satisfaction of daily needs that bring ease and comfort to life; 2) Ginhawa that arises from good health and physical strength; 3) Ginhawa stemming from inner peace due to a life of uprightness, goodness, and stability; 4) Ginhawa felt through inner tranquility, joy, and peace, marked by the absence of anxiety or longing; 5) Ginhawa experienced by the self which, in turn, brings well-being to others. It becomes evident that the meaning of ginhawa cannot be separated from its absence (e.g., suffering, problems, life’s burdens), thus framing it as both an aspiration and a present reality. That is, since ginhawa is “infused within” and “offered by” God, it is understood to be a concrete and experiential reality in the present moment.

8. Implications of Ginhawa for Understanding Filipino Personhood and Spirituality

Drawing from the descriptions and interpretations of ginhawa within the El Shaddai community, this study underscores several key insights. First, it becomes evident that the physical body, emotions and inner self and the soul each possess distinct states and experiences yet remain inherently interconnected. A deficiency of ginhawa in one domain can influence or diminish the others (e.g., physical illness may lead to emotional distress and spiritual doubt). Conversely, the presence of ginhawa in one aspect may promote well-being in others (e.g., physical healing leads to peace of mind and strengthened faith). In some cases, however, even with material or bodily comfort, one may still lack emotional or spiritual ginhawa (e.g., despite wealth, the person remains anxious and lacks humility before God). Within the El Shaddai context, it is often the ginhawa of the soul that brings about ginhawa of the body and the inner self (e.g., because of a positive relationship with God, the individual remains calm amidst trials and desires nothing more). Second, the body is often a reflection of the inner self; the *kalooban* the body’s appearance and functions. It is through the *kalooban* that one’s internal states are made visible and communicable through the body. In this light, a serene mind, joyful heart, or peaceful spirit contributes to a healthy and vigorous body. Conversely, internal conditions such as anger, bitterness, resentment, sorrow, or vengefulness may lead to physical ailments or weakened constitution. Third, the ginhawa of the soul emerges as the most essential and ultimate expression of faith and aspiration. Fourth, personal experiences of ginhawa naturally lead to the sharing of ginhawa with others. One’s ginhawa becomes more profound and meaningful when it is visible, tangible, and shared with the community. It is a cycle of receiving and giving. Fifth, faith is embodied through the human body. Statements such as “I was healed,” “I felt the presence of God like cold water,” or “I stopped stealing when I came to know

God” exemplify this embodiment. El Shaddai’s practices such as singing, clapping, weeping, jumping, raising oils and eggs, bathing in the rain are physical articulations of spiritual experience. Spirituality is likewise manifested and felt in the *kalooban*, as in expressions such as “I found the courage to face my challenges,” “My mind became peaceful,” or “My heart rejoiced.” Spirituality also manifests in the soul: “My soul rejoices when I praise God,” “My soul is saved,” “My soul is at peace.” Sixth, the journey toward God is not solely individual but inherently collective. Spirituality is pursued in the context of family and community. This may explain why El Shaddai members find meaning in being physically present in crowds and engaging in interpersonal interaction rather than retreating into solitary reflection. Each gathering becomes a communal spiritual experience. Seventh, all religious rituals performed by believers constitute a form of communication with God. The giving of tithes and donations, for instance, reflects alignment with the doctrines of the Gospel. Hence, there is nothing absurd or irrational about devotees who jump seven times under the rain if such acts represent their conviction that this will bring ginhawa to their bodies, inner selves, and souls. Lastly, if spirituality is understood as both an individual’s experience of God and of fellow believers, then ginhawa becomes ever more pronounced as both a personal and collective spiritual experience.

9. Implications of Ginhawa for Understanding Filipino Psychology

The results of this investigation have important implications for Filipino Psychology (*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*), as it expands our understanding of indigenous constructs like ginhawa as being central to the Filipino experience of self, spirituality, and well-being. As an emic construct, ginhawa is not simply a state of ease or comfort but is also a culturally based construct that combines ideas of physical state, emotional state, moral state, and spiritual state. Ginhawa portrays a holistic orientation of the Filipino psyche, which, is towards harmony of *kapwa*, *kalooban*, and *kaluluwa* as interdependent aspects of personhood.

Ginhawa acts as a basic value in the Filipino world view which shapes the aspirations, choices, and religious practices of individuals and communities. The El Shaddai community views ginhawa as a status rather than an end. It is defined as a continuous, relational, and holy experience of becoming a human being via faith, a sense of belonging, moral regeneration, and interaction with the Divine. This adds complexity to psychological conceptions of well-being, which are generally individualistic, western, and culturally or spiritually context-free. Rather, ginhawa is a moral and spiritual economy in which one’s pain is framed as a necessary component of the process of personal development and financial comfort and emotional tranquility are viewed as manifestations of Divine grace.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the body as an expressive vehicle of *damdamin* (emotions) and *espiritualidad* (spirituality). As El Shaddai members exhibit physical gestures such as hand-raising, crying, and dancing in prayer, these actions cannot be simply understood as performative expressions of emotions, they are phenomenological expressions of bodily transport (i.e., embodiment) of their inner states. This illustrates

an important point of convergence between somatic expression and spirituality that should be unpacked in the development of a Filipino psychology.

Finally, this study provides an important corrective to the undervaluation of religious and spiritual phenomena within mainstream psychology. The deliberate positioning of religious communities like El Shaddai as sites of magical thinking or irrational belief is reductive; rather, these communities are multifaceted environments where valued psychological resources are activated and confirmed ad hoc, as they are embedded in local culture. In this way, ginhawa is both an indigenous theory of well-being and is also a lived example of resilience, healing, and meaning making in Filipino believers' everyday lived experience.

Considering these contributions, Sikolohiyang Pilipino is encouraged to reclaim vernacular concepts like ginhawa and theorize, not merely as cultural oddities, but as robust and critical foundations for constructing a true Filipino psychology. It is here within Filipino life worlds, and their everyday spiritual experiences, where the heart of Filipino personhood is best revealed.

10. Reflection and Conclusion

As an outsider who engaged in participant observation and dialogical immersion within the community, the researcher witnessed, experienced, and interpreted ginhawa as a living concept in El Shaddai. This concept is not merely abstract; it is viscerally reported and deeply felt by its members. The study reveals that, first, ginhawa functions both as an aspiration and an affective state. It finds diverse articulations and manifestations across various dimensions of personhood (e.g., the body, the inner self, and the soul). Second, ginhawa is understood as both a divine offering and a disposition of the human spirit; its experience entails a sense of responsibility toward God and fellow human beings. Third, ginhawa offers a valuable lens for understanding Filipino personhood, spirituality, and psychology being understood as a native conceptual framework or theory of Filipino values. It also provides an appropriate interpretive framework for social analysis and ethical reflection grounded in Filipino cultural values. Fourth, ginhawa encompasses and is associated with numerous overlapping concepts such as health, peace, joy, livelihood, and salvation. Fifth, ginhawa may be seen as a general orientation toward life, flowing through and permeating the totality of one's worldview, ideology, and beliefs. It is experienced and expressed in living out what is true, good, beautiful, and morally upright. From the individual to the communal, ginhawa as a spiritual experience has the potential to explain, if not measure the actions and inner thoughts of the Filipino believer.

A testimony is a testimony. There is nothing to discredit in a testimony; rather, it affirms what is held to be true. While it may be difficult to quantify or verify the truth-value of such narratives, they nonetheless function as rhetorical accounts of lived experiences that reveal how ginhawa is understood. In the case of El Shaddai, ginhawa is interpreted as the meaning and expression of goodness in life, made tangible through faith in God in the here and now. From this perspective, it may be concluded that ginhawa serves to illuminate, if not encompass the entirety of the members' spiritual experience.

Gerard P. Concepcion, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines. He earned his bachelor, masteral, and doctorate degrees from the same university. He served as a visiting professor in Busan University of Foreign Studies, Busan, Republic of Korea from 2019 to 2020. His research interests include Philippine Studies, ASEAN Studies, and Sociolinguistics.

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