

Lost Dignity

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Every year the Diaspora Assyrians commemorate the anniversary of the hundreds of thousands of souls that perished before, during and after World War I at the hands of Kurds and Ottoman Turks. They cry for the three thousand victims of Simele massacre committed by the Iraqi Army under Kurdish command Bakir Sidqi and assisted by certain Kurdish and Arab tribes. They attend memorials and gatherings in the memory of their martyrs. They say, never again. But the genocide, killings, displacement in the homeland continues again and again. It happened in the aftermath of 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars. Yes, Assyrians had no control over these internationally orchestrated wars, but nothing changes, as Assyrians do not prepare for the future. As few feared, the next genocide was in line. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) empowered by international and regional powers swept the indigenous Assyrians' and Yezidis' lands in 2014. The Assyrians lost yet more of their historic lands, sites, homes, churches, and yes more victims.

News of the genocide perpetrated by ISIS were published around the globe. On Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets, Assyrian Internet warriors press on the like, sad and angry buttons. However, after all is said and done, nothing changed. It just feels that no one really cares. The sadness, outrage and anger subside and the Diaspora Assyrians slip back into their normal routine. Few step in -- Few speak up and go beyond social media activism of clicking on buttons. Individuals are not alone. The church and political leaders go back to their merry ways as well. What are we doing in preparation for tomorrow, the next genocide? Assyrians will react again, but more Assyrians will flee and more Assyrian lands will be lost, and of course those lands will be controlled by Kurds. Assyrians do nothing. They sit like a lame duck waiting for the next genocide and hope to see the promises of the world community for a just solution, a solution that just does not come and will not come.

How much longer do you think that the indigenous Assyrians, Yezidis, Mandeans and the rest of the smaller and lesser ethnic and religious groups will be able to survive in Iraq? When do you think the last Assyrian will leave our historic Assyrian lands of Occupied Assyria (Mesopotamia, modern Iraq)?

Few with courage and dignity criticize the church and the political leaders and mostly the former, because they, unfortunately, hold more power in the Assyrian Diaspora society. But the response from the masses, which is very vital to this passiveness and recklessness by the Assyrian leadership is meek. Our church leaders lie, they preach one thing and practice the opposite and they break the laws of their own respective churches, yet, the congregations stays silent. Kurdish empowered Assyrian so-called leaders are the front face of Assyrian politics today. They paint the picture that suits their Kurdish masters who themselves or their parents or grandparents committed and continue to commit acts of genocide against the Assyrians. Do we question, for example, why the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) of Australia chapter invited the Christian

representatives in parliament that won their seats from votes by Shi'aas and Kurds and not via Assyrian votes? Why is it that the AUA has never invited the true Assyrian representatives who won in several earlier elections? What message is the AUA spreading? Do we care to know why?

The Assyrians' biggest problem is that the vast majority of Assyrian society is religious. Thus, Assyrians tolerate the blunder of the high clergy, because people fear losing their place in heaven and fear hell. Meanwhile, the intellectuals silently continue to hope that the religious leaders confine themselves to their churches, act like true men of God but that has not been happening. Bishops continue to sermonize eloquently and turn around to practice immorality, wickedness, hate and sin. Standards continue to fall. It's a very grim portrait of the health of the Assyrian society as Assyrian refugees around the world accumulate while most of the well to do Diaspora's Assyrians continue to build bigger churches and house their beloved bishops in spacious and fancier homes. On the other hand, when few Assyrians raise their voices, the church hooligans are there to defend their beloved clergymen.

Are we truly the descendants of those mighty Assyrians? Where is our patriotism? Where is our commitment to decency and where is our resolve? Is this how we reward our martyrs and protect our heritage? How long are we going to relish this slumber?

The days when martyred Mar Benyamin Shimun sacrificed the flesh and blood of his own brother for his people are over. Today's bishops and patriarchs adore themselves with colorful and expensive robes, live in fancy and large homes. Two or three rooms are not enough any longer. They want more space to entertain, drive better cars and secure after-death shrines worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Most of the bishops of the Assyrian Church of the East for example answer to no one since the departed patriarch Mar Dinkha was dysfunctional having been at the center of the ugly events of 1973 – 1975 that led to the assassination of martyred Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun.

For 40 years, the Church of the Assyrians has been hijacked and in disarray. The Kurdish leadership has dictated to the church leadership its policies, stands and who the church must support. Why are we different than the Armenians? Soghomon Tehlerian followed to Germany Tal'at Pasha, one of the masterminds of the Christian Armenian (and Assyrian) genocide during World War I. After getting familiar with Tal'at Pasha's routine, Tehlerian on March 1, 1921 watched the Turk stepping out from his hotel, followed him, then at the right location he yielded, Tal'at Pasha. When the Turkish leader turned around, Tehlerian pointed the pistol at him and shot him dead. Tehlerian had dignity – he cared and loved his people who were massacred in cold blood. He served justice. He was a hero and the monument Armenians erected on his behalf was well earned.



Picture of the Monument erected for the Armenian hero Soghomon Tehlerian at Masis Ararat Cemetery, Fresno, California.

Meanwhile, Assyrians build monuments and shrines for the wrong people. Lets reflect on the case of late patriarch Mar Dinkha. His shrine cost \$200,000 with \$100,000 from his own patriarchal account. Consider that the shrine was in its final plans when Assyrians in the homeland were prisoners and refugees under the rule or threat of ISIS in 2014. Did Mar Dinkha publish a book on church history? Did he personally author a thesis or a study on Church theology? Did he establish true unity among his people? Did he strengthen the structure of the church besides building more churches for the continuous influx of refugees from the homeland and more importantly to satisfy some of his renegade bishops in the US thus place the church under more debt and burden? What was the purpose of Mar Dinkha's continuous and never ending praise of the Kurdish tribal leader and war criminal Masoud Barzani? Did he really had to over do it? How did a handful of his loyal tribal followers who surrounded him in Chicago deceive the people into worshipping him for almost 40 years when he produced almost nothing serious besides "we Assyrians" talk when in Chicago or San Jose, but never mentioning Assyria, his beloved "Atour" when in northern Iraq (Occupied Assyria)? Did he care about Assyrian students and education when he refused repeatedly to visit any of the over 30 Assyrian schools and the innocent students in northern Iraq considering that he was only steps away in some cases? Was that due to the explicit instructions from Barzani, because they were built by the Assyrian Aid Society? Oh, he did not want to interfere in politics?

Furthermore, the news of the death of assassin David malik Ismael was posted on Facebook recently. It is stated that he was given a fully dignified funeral service in Canada. This criminal had assassinated martyred Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun in cold blood. He had knocked on the patriarch's door and when the patriarch (being the humble that he was) personally opened the door, David pulled the trigger. The hands of treason assassinated a patriarch who spent his life arguing at the League of Nations and later the United Nations to save his people. Yet, the policy of Mar Dinkha as patriarch was to honor this murderer as David attended church services. In fact, David would always be seated at one of the front rows when visiting the US and to add insult to injury be honored by mentioning his name by the clergy. We have lost our dignity.

We build shrines for the wrong people.



Picture of the shrine of Mar Dinkha in Chicago, Illinois.



The symbolic grave site erected for the memory of martyred Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun in Chicago.



The humble grave of the martyred Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun in Turlock, California.

Recently, a massive blaze devastated large parts of the 850-year-old medieval Catholic cathedral Notre-Dame de Paris. Many Assyrians were crying while others were sending words of support and solidarity to the French people. For Centuries, Assyrian ancient churches and cathedrals have

been burnt and destroyed. The examples of bombing and burning Assyrian churches have been plentiful since 2003 US invasion of Iraq and during the rampaging of ISIS. How many tears did the Assyrians shed on their own churches, monuments and artifacts?

We have lost our dignity and lost our pride, indeed.

Hear the voices and cries of the martyred. They lost their lives for Assyria and today we are selling their honorable souls to please the likes of Sargis Aghajan, Fawzi Hariri, Romeo Hakkari, sub-deacon Benjamin Hariri, Lara Yousif, Nimrod Baito Youkhana, Emmanuel Baito Youkhana, Loay Mikhael, Rihan Hanna Ayoub, Rayan al-Kaldani, and few more.

Wake up Assyrian from thy slumber. Where is thy dignity? Find courage to save thy future and existence. Face and challenge those who commit wrongful acts, lead society via dishonorable path or violate mighty Ashur. We Assyrians must transform our little minds otherwise we are doomed where it is most vital, on our ancestral lands. Assyrians must create the healthy, open and progressive environment to metamorphose society from the caterpillar slimy stage that it is in to that beautiful butterfly otherwise the greatness that was Assyria will never re-blossom again.

Many Assyrians just do not deserve to be Assyrians. I wished the words of Bertolt Brecht could be how life is lived, he wrote: people should not choose which nation they want to belong too but the nation should choose its own people.