



ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܘܪܕܐܝܢܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܘܪܕܐܝܢܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܘܪܕܐܝܢܐ

The Holy Apostolic Catholic  
Assyrian Church of the East

ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܘܪܕܐܝܢܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܘܪܕܐܝܢܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܘܪܕܐܝܢܐ

The biography of Mar Benjamin Shimon the Martyr

Written by: Mar Dinkha IV  
Catholicos Patriarch of the East

Typed and translation into English  
By  
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يَنْجِيهِ مَنْ. بِنَدِّ مَيْتَسَا حَابِبَا سَوَا بِنَدِّ حَاتِبَا مَجَّ كَهْفَا دَفْعَا  
 يَنْجِيهِ مَبْنَفَا دَفْعَا يَنْجِيهِ مَبْنَفَا سَوَا سَوَا دَجْمَانَا دَا سَا نِي كَانَا:  
 مَسَبْمَلِي سَوَا كَا حَاتِبَا: مَبْنَفَا سَوَا سَوَا يَدْرَانَا دَبْسَفَا:  
 مَسَبْمَلِي لَابَدَا دَبَدَا لِيُونَا: مَسَبْمَلِي سَوَا دَهْنِي.

حَاتِبَا سَبْنَعَا سَوَا سَوَا دَفْعَا يَنْجِيهِ يَجْنَدَا كِي سَوَا دَهْنِي  
 دَبْدَا كَا مَبْدَابَا: مَبْنَفَا لِيَدِي. سَوَا سَوَا فَدِي سَوَا مَبْدَابَا سَوَا  
 مَبْدَابَا: دَفْعَا يَنْجِيهِ فَبَدْنَدَا بَدْرَدَا كِي بِنَدِّ حَاتِبَا سَوَا دَهْنِي:  
 بِنَدِّ لَنْتَا دِي لَوَا كِي يَوَلِي مَبْدَابَا: مَبْنَفَا كَبْنَا كِي مَبْدَابَا  
 كَا يَدْرَانَا دَبْسَفَا: كَبْنَا دَهْنِي يَدْرَانَا سَوَا دَا سَوَا فَدِي سَوَا  
 دَبْسَفَا بَمَسَا: يَمْنَانَا سَوَا لَبْسَفَا مَبْتَرِي سَوَا حَاتِبَا كَا مَسَا:  
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لَبْسَفَا دَبْدَا كَبْنَا مَبْمَلِي سَوَا مَبْدَابَا سَوَا فَنَا: يَمْنَانَا  
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هكڙي ڏينھن: ڇاڪاڻ ته ڏينھن جي ڀاڱي ۾ به ڪجهه ڪم ٿيڻ جو  
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کەسە حەرف: ئێسە مەبەرى ئە قەيس فەكخە: ەي، ئا ئخچە ەدخا: ئێسە مەبەرى ئە  
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حکتسه اوتدقیق دفعه نوب موسیو کسه، ذوبه ن: این بنجند  
 فقیهه اینت موسیو کسه، لانه سبک فنت نوبه نوبه کسه اینت که  
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The Martyred Patriarch  
Mar +Benjamin Shimun

This day we remind the faithful of a past good shepherd. He had offered his life for the sake of The Holy Church and his people. This good shepherd is the pious and holy one, Mar Benjamin Shimun, Catholicos Patriarch of the East. His birth commemoration is the year 1887, in the Village of Kudchanis, in the region of Hakkari, Turkey. He was born into the home of Eshai d-bet-Mar Shimun to the beloved Asyet of Kambar d'Eil. He had been set aside and consecrated Metropolitan, by the Apostolic Laying on of hands by (his uncle) Mar Ruel Catholicos Patriarch, in the Village of Kudchanis, 1 March 1903

The primary consecrator Mar Ruel Catholicos Patriarch of the East rested in The Lord, 16 March 1903. The grievous news of the passing of The Catholicos Patriarch Mar Ruel had been delivered to Metropolitan Mar Isaak Khnanisho of Rustaqa, in his see City of Mar Ishu, Turkey. In turn, Mar Isaak Khnanisho took his entourage, and in the depths of that snowy winter; and proceeded up to Kudchanis post haste. The Clergy and the Clan Chieftains together met with His Excellency Metropolitan Isaak, elected and choose Metropolitan Mar Benjamin Shimun, consecrating him as Catholicos Patriarch of the East. The consecration was celebrated by Mar Isaak Khnanisho and assisted by Mar Stephanos of Gawar on the Sunday of the Palms, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1903 in the Patriarchal Cathedral of Mar Shalita, in the Village of Kudchanis, Turkey. This ancient Cathedral Church was built in 1689 during the Patriarchate of Mar Shimun Dinkha Catholicos Patriarch of the East.

His Holiness Mar Benjamin, of blessed memory, was organized and visionary leader. He was a very courageous and brave leader of The Holy Church and of our people. Although, a young chap, being of 16 years in age, and, because of his upbringing within the household of the Patriarchal House, he was exposed to leadership and in the knowledge appertaining thereto. In the year 1903, following upon his consecration as Catholicos Patriarch of the East, he called a



young fellow from among the villagers of Mar B=Isho to accept Holy Orders in The Holy Church. The fellow named Awemalek bet-Kalaita was subsequently set-aside into Holy Orders of the Sacred Diaconate, 7 July 1903. During the month of September, Shammasha Awemalek was Ordered Priest; in June 1904, Qashisha Awemalek was elevated to the rank of Archdeacon by Mar Benjamin.

Archdeacon Awemalek was a very faithful servant of the Holy Church, and as such a good and faithful laborer in The Church of our Lord, he served as a faithful assistant to His Holiness Mar Benjamin. On the first Sunday in the Advent, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1907, the Venerable Archdeacon Awemalek was elevated to the rank of Metropolitan, by the Laying-on-of Hand by Mar Benjamin Catholicos Patriarch of the East, and assisted by Mar Yabhalaha of Bishop of Barwarh in the Cathedral Church of Mar Shalita, Kudchanis, Turkey.

The newly consecrated Metroplitan Mar Awemalek, was given the name *AMar Timotheous, The Metropolitan of Malabar and of all India.* @ And in that same year, Mar Timotheous was dispatched to India to serve the Holy Church of India. The Catholicos Patriarch Mar Benjamin, shows his natural talents in leadership of The Holy Church by electing from among the laity a worthy lad outside of any of the episcopal or metropolitan families. Within the writings of Metropolitan Mar Yosip Khnanishoo, regarding Mar Benjamin, *in 1914, Patriarch Mar Benjamin realized that the Church of the East, day after day, is being weakened, because she lacks education/knowledge, she has no financial resources to establish her own school, or schooling system. The English missionaries were beginning to cut back on their aid and support of the Assyrian peoples. The faithful of The Church of East became conscious of their future. Their wish was not to allow their children (off-spring) to be devoid of an appropriate education (as they looked into the future). And since no schools of their own were available, they were obliged to send their precious heritage to the schools of the foreigners. Realizing the importance of educational programs, Mar Benjamin consulted with The Russian Orthodox and there was an agreement that they would help The Assyrians in the area of schooling/education. And, also,*

*if possible to consider education in the field of church-manship; to instruct the candidates of The Church of the East Theological truths, in their seminaries.*

It had been further decided, that Mar Benjamin would write to His Grace Bishop Serges of the Russian Church in Oormiah, inviting him to come up to Kudchanis; also corresponding with Metropolitan Mar Ishaak Khananisho, and all the Bishops of the Church of the East to convene at the Patriarchal Cell in Kudchanis. Sadly, Metropolitan Mar Ishaak, because of the age factor, and the difficulties of travel was unable to attend; however, he did send his personal representative The Rev=d Joseph Khnanishoo. His Grace Bishop Serges received the letter of invitation from the Catholicos Patriarch of the East, he did set-off on his journey toward Targah-warh. It was that point he was detained by the Turks. He was commanded by the civil authorities to return to Oomiah; the reason, the Turks and the Russians were at odds with each other, thereby hampering proper diplomatic exchanges. Turks had realized there had been communication between the Holy Father and the Russian Orthodox; The Turks had summoned the Catholicos Patriarch of the East to the City of Wahn; His Holiness was accompanied by Bishop Mar Elia of Wahn, and Mar Yosip The Catholicos Patriarch Mar Benjamin was question by the Turkish ruler, Tah-seen Pasha, >is it true that the Russian Bishop was enroute to visit you?= The Catholicos Patriarch of the East Mar Benjamin responded positively, by saying: >yes, it is true.= The Turkish ruler asked, >do you not know that we and the Russians are not on good terms? Why do you want to make friendship with our enemies?= The response of the Catholicos Patriarch: > . . we are not involved with the political aspects of the Russians, we only are communicating within church matters of the Orthodox, seeking help for the building of schools and educational facilities, because we are a poor church unable to erect edifices. There have been many times seeking help from the Turkish Government, but our pleas were not heard; obliging us to appeal to a sister Church for help.= The Turkish ruler responded to the Catholicos Patriarch that he had a right and an obligation to do so.

However, in the event that the Turkish Government helps you with schools, together with other needs, do you promise that you will not engage/dialogue or communicate with the Russians? The response by The Holy Father, was >we promise, we promise!= It was this time that the Turkish Ruler sent a telegram to Istanbul stating that the Turkish Government is willing to help The Assyrians in the following area:

1) The Turkish Government will establish four schools among the Assyrians, in any village that the Patriarch wishes;

2) Each Clan Chieftain will be will assigned officially as an administrative head; and, he will be salaried; and he will choose 15 men to function as police agents, their uniform and salary will be underwritten in a grant from The Turkish Government, each Chieftain will have one Turkish agent to train the 15 men; and to serve as a mediator between The Clan and the Turkish Government; and,

3) The rights of the Assyrian People will be honored.

His Holiness Mar Benjamin was pleased with this agreement, and promised the Turks that the Assyrians will be faithful to the Turkish Government as long as the Turks kept their promises. The 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1914, The Catholicos Patriarch of the East, and those who accompanied him returned to Kudchanis. On Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1914, Mar Yosip was elevated to the rank of Bishop by Mar Benjamin. In 1914 World War I began in Europe, and the sparks reached into the depths of the Middle East. Turkey was engaged in this European conflict. Turkey and Imperial Russia were not on good terms, and since the Russian peoples were very much Orthodox and Christian at this time; and, the Assyrian and Armenians were terribly oppressed in, these regions. The Christians were considered second class citizens of the Turkish-Ottoman Empire, therefore, they had looked for favor from among the Russians.

Earlier, when Mar Benjamin had met with the Turkish ruler, Tahseem Pasha, certain rights were assured for the Assyrian Christian minority; however, there was evidence of friction among many who were greatly displeased at the efforts of His Holiness Mar Benjamin; putting every effort to bring to ruin his untiring efforts on behalf of The Christian minority.

Evidence has been shown that in some instances insurgencies occurred where fraggng of Turkish officials was blamed upon Mar Benjamin and his Christians.

By way of example, to ruin the peaceful resolve of His Holiness and the Turkish Government a scheme was developed by a traitor, whereby a false decree from Mar Benjamin was sent northward into the Imperial Russian frontier requesting the Russians to attack the Turkish nation. The letter was sealed with a false Patriarchal Seal. The false letter was placed into a loaf of bread, and given to an innocent man, who had no idea of the deception-plot; and at the same time a traitor had informed the Turkish pasha, about a traveler going northward toward the Russian frontier with the message to the Russians. The instructions were to capture the man, which they had done, and upon opening the loaf of bread they found the false communique, killing the innocent man on the spot. The letter was brought to Tah-seem Pasha. In turn, The Pasha, called Mar Elia showing to him the false letter. Mar Elia responded saying that he did not believe it was true letter issued from the Patriarch, for once a promise had been made, it would never be rescinded.

From that time forward, because the Turkish Government did not believe the statement of Mar Elia, in turn, sent a message to the Kurdish rulers of Turkey to ruthlessly kill and confiscate the Christian Assyrians in their region. From that time forth, the Kurds began to kill Christian and to rule the regions of Gawar and Albaq. Men, women and children were annihilated. Churches, homes, etc., were burned to the ground, with few surviving. Upon learning of the extreme difficulties and persecution in the region of Gawar and al-Baq, he was deeply

grieved; and said, *>there is nothing we can in peaceful dialogue, diplomatically, we cannot tolerate any more.* . = He had tried most diligently to establish a peace and tranquil relationship between the Christian Community and that of the Turkish Government, sadly, he was not successful in his godly attempts.

The Turkish Government, in truth, did not see any act of treason from among the Assyrians; but, because the Armenians and the Assyrians were confessing Christians, and that they were united in protecting themselves, the Turks did not distinguish between both, so they proceeded to annihilate both groups of people. In WWI, The Turks and the Germans were allied; in the Turkish army there were many, many German military officers who were commanding their military, in each large city of Turkey there was a consulate of the Germans. It would appear that the general affairs of the Turkish people was in the hands of the German nation.

Before the Assyrians began to be engaged in the military conflict with The Turkish Government, Mar Benjamin, commanded Mar Yosip to write a letter, on his behalf, in the Aramaic language to the German Counsel in Mosul. He wrote, *We Assyrians, for many centuries have been subjects of The Turkish Government, and we have always been faithful to the Turkish Government, and we have never betrayed them. In the past year, the region of Gawar and al-Baq had been slaughtered by the hand of the Turks and yet, we still stand faithful to the Government of Turkey, and now that they are the allies of you, we pray that you instruct them to be kind toward the Assyrian peoples. ...* The Consul responded by saying. *. You Assyrians are subject to Turkey, and from henceforth in event you further petitions, you must do so from the Government of the Turks, the German government has nothing to do with you. The Turkish governance is obliged to punish the treasonous subjects.* At the time His Holiness received this reply, his hope mercy from the Turks and Germans diminished!

The Assyrian community thought, that in the event they had fall into the hands of the Turks, that it would be worse for them than that of the Armenians,

Bohtan, Seart and Gezeera. The purpose of the writing to the Germans was to appeal to the Christian charity of the German peoples. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1915, the Catholicos Patriarch of the East called for a counsel of Prelates and Clan Chieftains in the Village Tal. The purpose was to discuss the unfortunate development of war and warring factors. It was at this council, the suggestion was considered that the His Holiness Mar Catholicos Patriarch will go to Salamis and there to apprise the Russians of their serious plight and to ask for assistance. This was the second time that His Holiness Mar Benjamin went to Salamis to meet with the Russians to ask for help to save his people. The Russians did not give the Assyrians military help; however, they issued a few firearms (rifles) to them.

At time that His Holiness Mar Benjamin Catholicos Patriarch of the East, was in Tal, he was in receipt of a letter from Haidar-Pasha, the Turkish ruler of Mosul, we have brought your brother Hormis from Istanbul to Mosul, now he is under our jurisdiction, if you will surrender yourself to the Turkish Government and collect all the firearms of the Assyrian people, surrendering to the Turkish Government, your brother will be saved, however, if you do not do as instructed, you brother will be hanged.

The letter was read in the council of Village of Tal in the presence of His Holiness the Catholicos Patriarch of the East. All present heard the letter read before them; and, they became speechless, being stunned by these unsavory words. The Holy Father had anticipated council from among those present, the Prelates and Chieftains; but, since nothing had been offered, His Holiness carefully choosing his words said: . . . *if we surrender ourselves, to the Turkish Government, I fear we will be slaughtered, but it is better to keep ourselves alive, even though some of us will be killed in the war, so that the rest of the people will be delivered. It is, therefore, necessary that we be courageous men, to fight to save your people from the sword of our enemies who thirsts for our blood. My brother is but one person, let him be sacrificed for the whole of our Christian people.* The late Hormis was but a young man of 24 years of age, in the third year

of studies in the University of Istanbul. Mar Benjamin the Catholicos Patriarch of the East, was of such spiritual strength and of capable leadership that he was able to make such a decision, saying that... *that is better that my brother should perish that to have the whole of our people be slaughtered. . .*

According to The proposal of the council of the Chiefs of the clans Mar Benjamin will be leaving Tal and to journey to Salamis in an attempt to obtain military aid (help) fire-arms (rifles and/or artillery) for the Assyrians. Again, Mar Benjamin returns with no hope and empty handed to the fastness of the mountains of Hakkari. It was at this time that many of the Assyrian Christian villages were leveled; burnt to the ground. A great number of people were without food, shelter or comforts. Men, women, and the innocent little children were killed by the thousands by these hostile forces. The Assyrian Christians were truly in a devastated.

Catholicos convened another council of the Chiefs of clans. All the members present in this council have suggested that the Assyrians must leave (exited) Hakari and migrate to Iran in order to meet with the Russians there. The Russians were not able to help the Assyrians in the mountains of Hakari. September 8 1915 the Assyrians left their home land in their way toward Salamast, Iran. In order for the Assyrians to bring their people save to region of Salmast they have to fight with the Kurds.

September 19, 1915, the Assyrians of Hakkari crossed the border entering into Iran. In the Month of September, they arrived in the region of Salamas. In this area, The Assyrian people scattered into two segments, one part went into Urmiah; and, the other into Khoi.

The first year of their arrival in Iran many of these Assyrian Refugees died! The weather was inclement and the water was questionable (impure). Sadly, many diseases ran rampant among and through these blessed Christian Assyrian refugees. There were no available treatment centers; and, certainly no medicine;



the people suffered and died. Mar Benyamin unceasingly struggled, both day and night to meet with Russian government to establish hospitals or medical clinics among the suffering Assyrian Christians. These poor suffering souls needed the hand of aid and friendship extended to them; they were tired, exhausted, suffering and certainly hungry and encountering starvation.

Mar Benyamin was invited by Nicolai, the uncle of the Russian Emperor, who was the chief head of the Russian Army. The Russian Army was encamped on the border of Iran Turkey. At this time Nicolai was in Tiflis.

January 24, 1916, His Holiness Mar Benyamin the Catholicos Patriarch of the East arrived in Tiflis. Mar Benyamin had been received with great and majestic honor by the Russian Governmental Officials.

This most gracious saintly Catholicos Patriarch of the East, Mar Benyamin presented his request before Nicolai for the help the Russian Government would be able to supply; the request for hospitals, medical clinics, and finance, etc. June 7, 1916, an urgent telegram came from Russia regarding the financial help to the Assyrians. The Assyrian Christians were in a very serious situation; they had left all their possessions in Hakkari thousands of were killed hoping they will now be able to rest; and to take a breather in Iran while their wounds heal. Unexpectedly in 1917 the news of the Russian Revolution was underway. The Imperial Russian Army withdrew from Iran to return to Russia. This sad event left the Christian Assyrians and Armenians in a very serious, critical and terrifying situation.

When the Imperial Russian Army was still in the process of withdrawing from Iran, the Iranian government increased their army in Urmi. The Iranians Governmental officials requested the Assyrians of Turkey to leave the Iranian territory. It was the Blessed Catholicos Patriarch Mar Benyamin who had written requesting the Iranian Government to demonstrate and to manifest mercy towards the Assyrians; and, to permit the Assyrians to remain in Iran till the spring. It appears that the Iranians wanted to use their military power.



The Assyrians, however, did remain in Iran. They seemingly controlled the regions of Urmi and Salamas, together with all the Russian military equipment, abandoned and left for the Assyrians.

There was no organized Assyrian militia! They were unable to manage their affairs. Mar Benyamin attended the Assyrian National Council in Urmi and His Holiness had requested an organized militia which would be established from among the Assyrians and Armenians under the leadership of an Assyrian General, presently in the Imperial Russian Army. The suggestion of Mar Benyamin was unanimously accepted by the members of the Council. Since the Assyrians who were subjects of Turkey were not obliged to serve in Turkish army, many Assyrians were not accustomed to be part of an organized operating military; thus, the idea of establishing an organized militia was set aside.

Mar Benjamin had agreed to meet with the Kurdish leader. Sadly, Mar Benjamin had no success in establishing an organized army. By the establishment of an Assyrian Army, perhaps, the Assyrians would be prepared to meet the unexpected attack of the Turks in the spring season. It had been expected that with the meeting of His Holiness Mar Benjamin with the Kurdish leader, Semko, would produce and establish friendly relations between the Assyrian Christians and Kurds,

Captain Gracey of British army met with His Holiness Mar Benyamin. English Captain had suggested to Mar Benyamin to meet with Semko the Kurdish leader. Captain Gracey was a close friend of Semko. Mar Benyamin did not welcome the idea because he did not trust the Kurdish Chieftain, Semko. But because Mar Benyamin has responsibility towards for The Church and the people who had been entrusted to him, for the sake of delivering his people, he did not fear death.

Mar Benjamin, realizing that among his people there was no organized militia. Therefore, realizing his handicap, and also not wanting further bloodshed, he arranged to meet with Semko, the Kurdish Chieftain. His Holiness was profoundly concerned that the extreme difficulties of severe conflict between the Assyrian Christians and the Turks jeopardized the safety of The Christian Assyrian, perchance, that in the event of the Kurds and Turks joined militarily; and, they in turn would annihilate the Assyrian Christians. It was the thinking of Mar Benjamin that both the Assyrians and the Kurds would unite as a common force.

Captain Gracey meets with Mar Benjamin in the presence of all Assyrian and Armenian secular leaders, Chiefs of the clans, the Imperial Russian Council, The Head of the French Hospital, a French Bishop Doctor Seth, American Deputy Counsel, together with and many others, they all promise the Assyrians that they will returned back to their home land. And you will have your own Autonomy Government.

His Holiness Mar Benjamin, the Catholicos Patriarch of the East returns from Urmi to Salamas and sends Shmoel the son of Sarhng (Major) Bejan of the Village of Mawana to meet with the Kurdish Chief, Semko; to prepare for a meeting of Patriarch with the Kurdish Chieftain. Shmoel Khan's mission was also to discuss the issue of allying of the Kurds and Assyrians; and, to discover were the interests of Semko lay in this step. As Shmoel returned from his meeting with Semko told Mar Benyamin that Semko welcomed the Idea with joy and happiness. And semko told Shmoel khan that he will go to Kohna Shaher in order to closer to Patriarch and there in the middle we can meet and will discuss the idea of allied. Mar Benjamin had received Semko's letter which had invited him to meet with him in the Village of Kohna Shaher. Mar Benyamin commands his Chariot to be prepared and takes 150 Assyrian militia with him as his personal guards. In Kohna Shaher Mar Benjamin had been warmly received by Semko. Mar Benjamin was escorted by Semko into his reception room where they both entered into discussing the matter of unity. After they completed their session,

Semko, then, proceeds to escort the Patriarch out of his palace. As soon as the Patriarch attempted to enter into his carriage, the driver was shot to death by Semko himself. This was an agreed upon sign given by Semko to his roof top guards to begin to fire from above upon Mar Benjamin and his guards. The Catholicos Patriarch was shot to death! Shmoel Khan together with his brother were killed; four Russian officers shot to death, 47 of Mar Benjamin personal guards shot dead; and, 46 were wounded by gun-fire.

Grieving, we here state that the life of Mar Benjamin is ended. He as a good Shepherd had offered his precious life for the sake of his sheep. Thus Mar Benjamin martyred for the sake of The Church and that of his people as a young man of 31 years in age, accepted The Crown of Martyrdom from his Lord and God, Jesus Christ. The funeral service of Mar Benjamin was conducted in the Village of Khosro- abad by His Grace Mar Elia from the household of Abona, March 6, 1918. All the clergy of The Church of the East were present, together with over two thousand people attending his funeral. The body of Mar Benjamin lay-in-state in Saint George Armenian Church in Khosro-abad (Salamas).

The annual commemoration of Mar Benjamin and his life is observed in the Holy Church of the East on the Sunday before Lent (Great Fast). Thus all who work faithfully for and in The Church; and, among his people his name will be remembered in the Holy Church. Even though Mar Benjamin is physically martyred, he is alive in our hearts in the Kingdom of Heaven with his Lord Jesus Christ.

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