

Assyrian Martyrs Day

August 7th

The 7th of August has been designated as a Memorial Day for Assyrian Martyrs by Assyrian Universal Alliance. Although this observance is of a comparatively recent date, it has gained widespread acceptance among the Assyrian people. And this is justly so. Every nation needs to have a day set aside for the remembrance of those who gave their lives for the preservation of their cultural and ethnic identity. This is especially important for the Assyrian Nation; for no other people have given so many martyrs in the defense of their national and ethnic rights.

Throughout our long history, each time an Assyrian man, woman, or child stood up against their oppressors and refused to give up their religion, language, or national existence, our nation as a whole was pulled one step back from the abyss of extinction! Yes! This is true, even if the immediate consequences of such actions were destruction and death. Our martyrs form the core of our history. They are the one who bravely and selflessly defended our existence, even to the point of giving up their own lives, so that we could continuously have before us examples of self-sacrifice which would serve to encourage us to preserve ourselves and our culture for future generations.

The legacy of our martyrs is a sacred obligation for each and every one of us, their children, to defend and protect our cultural national existence, even as they have done. But now we are faced with a difficult question: have we Assyrians at the present time lived up to this obligation? We do not raise this question here to give an authoritative yes or no answer. It is clear that some Assyrians do indeed live up to this obligation, while others do not. It is also true that some Assyrians fulfill this obligation more thoroughly than others. Our purpose here is to point out some problems and issues the solutions and understandings of which will help all Assyrians in fulfilling their obligation.

Martyrs Day was originally meant to commemorate the massacres of Assyrians in Iraq in 1933. Gradually, we Assyrians have realized that there have been many instances in our history of massacres and persecutions, which equaled or surpassed Simel in importance. Consequently, there is a greater emphasis in current observations on commemorating all the martyrs of our history. The development of the 7th of August into a Memorial Day for all Assyrian martyrs is important and beneficial. Such a development will lead to greater unity within our nation. Each of our churches, villages, and tribes have memorials for their own particular saints and martyrs. We must develop the 7th of August into a Memorial Day for all of these martyrs, so that we can bring the children of this nation together as a single entity to commemorate these people and events.

To this end, we have brought together in this booklet as many accounts of the persecutions and martyrdoms of our people as we could find. We are very aware of the fact that these accounts are but a pale shadow of the reality of our history. Unfortunately, our sources are limited and we make no claim to have treated these subjects in an original and exhaustive manner. Our aim is to bring together in one small booklet a variety of accounts so that those who have never known of them will now be informed, and others who are aware of them may be encouraged to search out and discover more information about our martyrs for the benefit of the present and future generations.

When we think of martyrs and retell their stories, it is often customary to mourn them and the events of their lives. We are saddened and overcome with grief, bitterness, and despair at their sufferings. This type of commemoration is one of passive mourning. While it fulfills an important human need, it also brings with it the danger of adopting a passive and indifferent attitude. But our martyrs were rarely passive or indifferent! It is necessary for us to turn away from a passive commemoration of our dead to an active celebration of their triumphs. In the light of their sacrifices, we must make a firm commitment to

understanding, developing, and preserving the cultural and national values for which our martyrs gave their lives. This is the only fitting way to commemorate our martyrs. Instead of weeping over the loss of their lives, we must become determined to preserve the very things for which they gave up their lives.

Finally, some that may think it the greatest threat to the preservation of our nation and culture is the loss of our lives and our property. The lesson of our martyrs is that this is simply not true. The swords and guns of our oppressors cannot kill our culture or our love of our nation. Rather, persecutions tend to strengthen our attachment to these. Killing, raping, and plundering can weaken these things, but they can never completely destroy them. There is only one thing, which can destroy our cultural and national existence, and that is the indifference of our own people. Nothing an outsider can do will ever permanently harm us, but the attitude of indifference and neglect on the part of many of our own people to our culture and national life will surely be the cause of its extinction.

On this Assyrian Martyrs Day, and on every one to come, let us dedicate ourselves to the struggle of preserving our culture, our language, and our nationhood in unity and harmony with our fellow Assyrians. Let us be worthy of the example of our martyrs. Let us honor their memory in this most suitable way by preserving the very ideas and values for which they died.