

PREFACE

The Syriac term for '**culture**', *mardūtā* (ܡܪܕܘܬܐ), stems from the verb *rdā* (ܪܕܐ), which carries a rich spectrum of meanings: *to educate, to enlighten, to walk, to journey, to flow, to discipline, to guide, to nurture, and even to correct*. This etymology reveals that culture is far more than a static repository of knowledge—it is a dynamic companion in humanity's lifelong journey of self-formation and growth. Culture is a living legacy, endowing us not only with knowledge but also with enduring values and virtues. It acts as a moral compass, guiding us as we navigate life's path, grow in wisdom, and strive for maturity. Without it, we are like a bucket riddled with holes—constantly losing the very essence that sustains us. Thus, to be '**uncultured**' is not merely to lack knowledge; it is to be adrift—deficient in refinement, moral grounding, and the transformative power of a shared human heritage.

Though the radiance of Syriac culture—once a giver of singular meaning to human thought—has dimmed with time, it endures as a muted refrain of ancient wisdom, echoing across the centuries. This melancholic voice, speaking to our wounded consciousness, resists the tide of self-alienation; it calls us to gaze into the mirror of the self and rediscover truth anew.

This mournful voice from history's depths stirs bitter northeasterlies in my heart, yet with its peculiar sincerity leaves silken smiles upon my face. My early search for its cherished truth let me hear it more deeply—a voice resonating with love and service's essence. It sanctifies service-oriented thought, echoing the teaching: '***Man shall not live by bread alone...***' (Matthew 4:4). This wisdom guides us toward life's balance between material and spiritual sustenance. Without this equilibrium, one remains trapped in duality's tension, unable to break free. As Saint Mor Ephrem (306–373) implored: '***O Lord! Turn me not toward worldly things that darken my vision, but toward the radiance enlightening my soul.***'

The Logos (*melṭā* ܡܠܬܐ) carries within it the vital energy that sustains life – goodness, justice, honesty, sincerity, loyalty, responsibility, diligence, and generosity. At its heart lies a sacred imperative: that one must create value not only for oneself but for the **Other** – that is, for Life itself. Yet those who perceive existence through purely material eyes often fail to balance **Logos/Meaning** (*melṭā* ܡܠܬܐ) with **Bread/Matter** (*lahmā* ܠܗܡܐ). To restore this equilibrium, the truth within man must merge with a higher ideal. For where spiritual meaning is absent, **ego thrives instead of service**, and power-centred thinking takes root. And

this – like a ship unmoored from its compass – leads only to aimless wandering in existential seas.

Syriac culture, in guiding the discovery of one's *true self* through the soul's direction, equally calls for the soul's looking-glass – a profound confrontation with conscience. This wisdom resonates with the Delphic imperative "*know thyself*": for in knowing oneself, one unveils their culture's essence, thereby drawing nearer to their authentic being and fortifying that sacred sense of belonging.

Attaining one's true self demands the illumination of the ego's shadowed dimensions through love, wisdom, and sacred knowledge. Ancient teachings speak of an unceasing struggle within the human heart—where soul and ego contend—marking the supreme trial of self-knowledge. The soul, that fount of all virtue and beauty, touches humanity with its boundless compassion, guiding us toward the radiance of Truth.

Depending on the intention behind thought, the mind becomes either a source of light or of darkness. Culture, through the mental transformation it enables, acts as a guiding light in one's inner struggle. It helps a person find balance and attain peace. At this point, a positive way of thinking has great significance. For thoughts spread not only within one's inner world, but also radiate outward as energy into the surrounding environment. As it is written in the Holy Scripture: "*What defiles a person is not what goes into them, but what comes out of them.*" (Mark 7:15).

This principle is upheld as a moral truth. When anger, resentment, pride, selfishness, and prejudice take root within, **the soul is not merely tarnished—human bonds fray as well. For the soul is dyed in the colours of thought.** Thus, the purification of mind is essential on the path to truth—a safeguard for the soul's radiance. Left unchecked, dark thoughts crystallise into inner reality, poisoning both psyche and world alike. Yet positive thought illuminates and refines the mind. What we dwell upon inevitably takes form before us. As the ancients taught: "**As a man sows, so shall he reap.**" The outer world is but a looking-glass for the inner. Where thought lingers, there energy pools. Complain ceaselessly, and grievances multiply; fix the heart on goodness, and goodness blossoms in turn. Yet without culture—that compass which steers thought—we remain shackled to the very negativities we seek to escape.

Culture is a set of values and a way of life that shapes the emotional and intellectual world of individuals who form a society. From traditions to language, from literature to architecture and clothing, from governance to music and cuisine — everything is part of culture. Culture is a force that grants identity, educates both intellectually and morally, and nourishes the soul. It is shaped through the subtleties of language within the conditions of life, and it is also the primary factor ensuring the continuity of language itself. Culture takes form within the mould of language and is passed on to the future in the vessel of language. Without language, neither cultural development nor personal advancement is possible.

Culture and humankind exist in dynamic reciprocity—while culture shapes human development, people simultaneously preserve, refine and steer its course. Intellectual growth fortifies culture, just as cultural evolution propels both individual and societal advancement. Through sociological and anthropological lenses, we recognise humans as both culture's offspring and its living **vessels**. Cultural impoverishment, by contrast, breeds fragility and decline across all domains of life.

For Syriac culture—a tradition of unplumbed historical depth and philosophical sophistication—this vulnerability carries profound consequences. Like cloth mended with corroded thread, it has suffered either distortion through dislocation or reduction through partial understanding. Thus, vigilant, innovative stewardship becomes not merely beneficial but essential—to honour its truth and secure its continuity.

As Syriac culture's architectural legacy—its churches, monasteries, and sacred spaces—emerges from obscurity, the living spirit that forged them commands growing fascination. Yet in our era of commodified cultural values, even fragmentary attempts to articulate this tradition's distinctive worldview and philosophy of existence must be honoured as **a moral imperative**—essential for both comprehension and transmission. For the unknown remains incomprehensible; the unrecognised, unloved. And what is not loved will neither be guarded nor sustained.

The future can only be built by strengthening the power of light. This is not merely an ideal, but a moral duty. It is especially crucial for those in positions of responsibility to uphold this awareness and discharge their duties with integrity. For existence is a matter of consciousness

and understanding. At its core, to exist means to be of benefit, to contribute to goodness, and to leave behind a meaningful legacy.

Regardless of visible or invisible differences, everyone with whom we share existence and life has the same right to be as we do. The well-being of every living being is our well-being, and their suffering is our suffering — for they are our companions on the journey of life.

Advancing step by step along the path of life is a virtue. To walk this path by digesting each step, internalising every piece of knowledge, and reaching the maturity to share it — this is the only true path to lasting success, authentic humanity, and real strength.

I prepared this work for publication upon the kind encouragement of Mr. Yusuf Türker, the esteemed Chairman of the Board of the Midyat Churches Foundation. For the past 35 years, our valued chairman has embraced serving the ancient churches of Midyat as a way of life, enduring many challenges with patience and dedication. It was with the belief in the importance of honouring such commitment and contributing to social awareness that I embarked on this endeavour.

My greatest wish is that these lines are read not only with the eyes, but with an inner gaze — with feeling. That they may contribute to mental transformation, leave lasting impressions on the path of goodness, and multiply what is good. If they illuminate minds and warm hearts, the influence of conditioned realities and various prejudices that recklessly spread hatred will largely be broken. In turn, the negative energy that numbs the soul will dissolve, and that positive, embracing force — the one that sustains life and defines our humanity — will emerge naturally. And that life-giving energy will spread: from person to person, from heart to heart, from word to essence.

It is a great honour for me to publish *The Perception of Life In Syriac Culture* and to present it to the attention of valued readers. And if I can help even a single person become acquainted with this culture, I will consider it — on my part — as breathing new life into a heritage on the verge of being forgotten. That, to me, would be the greatest reward and a source of indescribable joy.

Note: I wrote this preface for a work entitled "The Perception of Life in Syriac Culture." This booklet will soon be published in four languages -Syriac, Arabic, Turkish, English- with the aim of serving the common good.

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