

Humanization and Culture in Syriac

In this text, I will try to shed light from a sociological perspective on the Syriac concept of **"humanization and culture"** and the importance, meaning, and etymology of the dominant concepts contained therein, such as **"student, discipline, virtue."**

Discipline/virtue/culture is the humane path which paves the way for the student's inward transformation and development in a social reality. Without these, it is difficult to secure a fulfilling and gratifying life.

Culture is shaped by the mold of language and passed on to future generations through language. Without language, the development of humanity, family, culture, and civilization is impeded. **Cultural and literary weakness is not just one weakness, but a weakness in every respect.**

This is because language and culture shape one's world-view and contribute to one's success. A person's success is bound to the development of language and culture, while the success of language and culture is bound to humans/society. Therefore, there is much interaction between humans and language/culture. They complete and sustain one another. In a sociological sense, humans, who are a product of language/culture, are simultaneously its sustainers and improvers.

The security provided by material wealth to the perceptive world is bound to cultural wealth. Without spiritual freedom, there is no worldly freedom. No matter how tall the mountain of material things/carnality/selfishness is, the path of culture/discipline/virtue spans them.

On this path, humans must learn/know about philosophy for self-knowledge and self-development and about sociology in order to understand life's truth and social reality.

Contributing to the comprehension of sociocultural concepts, sociology emphasizes the character of concepts prized by social reality. Such is the nature of sociological research.

Meaning and Richness

How developed a language is depends on the richness of meaning contained within its words and concepts. The wider a meaning is given to a word or concept, the richer that language is considered. Moreover, a concepts' richness of meaning points to the profundity of meaning which that language has carried from the past and shows its antiquity.

For a language to exist and evolve together with its own unique terminology in various arenas, someone must rack their brains, sweat blood, and keep their nose to the grindstone. This is because every language has a unique beauty, efficiency, and competence.

However, since Syriac is the **"mother of languages,"** the subtleties of this beauty, efficiency, and competence; the web of meaning of words and concepts is very different. Its scope of meaning is very broad.

With its rich and ambiguous vocabulary, Syriac has unique concepts and flavors of meaning by nature. The Syriac language goes back to the roots of literary expression - the rich sources of the culture of ancient Bethnahrin (Mesopotamia).

There is much wisdom originating from those historical strata and waiting to be brought to light. It will do well to evoke these wise words from the strata that enhance the meaning of life's constants: **"Why learn, if you are not going to teach?"**

The Syriac Alphabet and Cuneiform

As is known, the Syriac alphabet is a product of cuneiform writing's evolution into an alphabetical writing system. All other alphabets have developed based on this initial alphabet system. Every Syriac word consists of a three-letter root that reflects the word's basic meaning; many other words are derived by adding a prefix, suffix, or infix to these roots. This is the common characteristic of Semitic languages. A less common and seldom known characteristic is that words created from the symbols used in cuneiform writing are used in the alphabet system too.

It is a historical fact that Syriac, an extension of East Aramaic, developed its lexical vocabulary from Assyrian, Babylonian, and in the first place, Akkadian. In this respect, Syriac's relation to other Semitic languages like Hebrew and Arabic also originates from this shared language trove. In this respect, Akkadian is a crucial etymological basin and stratum for Syriac. This is why Akkadian is the reference point in studies related to Semitic (Syriac, Hebrew, Arabic) and other languages¹.

According to psychosocial studies, the way to become more humane is revealed through understanding oneself and others. It develops when the world of meaning/thought is shown respect.

¹ <http://www.karyohliso.com/articles/article/2220>, Yusuf Beğtaş, **"The Profundity of Syriac"**.

This is where **"character education/tulmodo d'yasro/ܬܠܡܕܐ ܕܝܥܣܪܐ"** forms the main power of humanization.

This is what our great literary master St. Jacob of Sarug (451-521), who foresaw knowledge and experience related to identity and character education as a responsibility, has to say on the subject: **"Those who sow ignorance reap misery."**

Afterwards, he refers to intellectual richness and adds, **"The more we invest in education, the richer our minds become."** Therefore, it should be known that students who - with virtue - reflect their education and discipline into their lives will be happy and successful.

Though there are historical facts, genetic links and other factors at play in this unique area, leading concepts such as **"humanization = unošo/burnošo ܠܒܐܝܬܐ ܠܒܐܝܬܐ, student = talmido ܬܠܡܕܐ, discipline = tarbitho ܬܪܒܝܬܐ, virtue = myatrutho ܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ, and culture = mardutho ܡܪܕܘܬܐ"** really ought to stimulate life's complementary and formative elements, just like humility and generosity.

The thematic content of these concepts has crucial functions in people's moral and intellectual lives. Based on this logic, we are faced with the following truth: **The erosion in these concepts' plane of meaning causes weakness both in culture and in people. This is not just one weakness, but a weakness in every respect.**

If we do not care about culture, we neglect not only our spirit, but our bodies and the meaning of our life as well. This is a basic truth in the lives of both societies and individuals. Therefore, ignorance of this important knowledge of life and worldview makes moral humanization more difficult.

Those who cannot develop their cultural identity struggle in making sense of and overcoming this difficulty. They are unable to lay the groundwork for the cultural and philosophical outlook necessary to understand life. This makes the exit route more difficult.

Under today's conditions, the winners are the ones who understand this and do what is necessary.

Student Means Demand and Claimant

The Arabic word for both **"claimant"** and **"student"** is **"talib,"** which signifies **"someone who demands, wants."** It is a plural of **"talib"** in Arabic. It means a student, a pupil who takes

lessons with the intention of receiving education. It means someone who studies a particular subject under the supervision and direction of a guide, teacher, or master. People who desire and wish to be informed, disciplined, or trained on a certain topic are called **"talabah/student."**

The Syriac equivalent of student is **"talmido ܬܠܡܝܕܐ."** It originates from the verb **"Imad ܐܡܕ"** which means to clean up a mess, collect, partner up, unite, associate, coalesce, and focus.

It derives from the verb **"talmed ܬܠܡܕ,"** which is formed according to the measures/mold of the four-letter Syriac verb. It means to give a lesson, educate, discipline, inform, or be the disciple of a school of thought or movement.

The word discipline originates from the Syriac concept **"tarbitho ܬܪܒܝܬܐ."** It is used in a pedagogical sense.

It has been derived from the verb **"rbo, rabi, ܪܒܐ ܐܬܝܐ"** which means to educate and raise in the necessary rules of etiquette and behavior, such as politeness, courtesy, kindness, educatedness, respect, and gentlemanliness; learning and developing your talents rules and conventions for the purpose of being informed; as well as mastery of manners, decency, and etiquette on moral grounds.

The concept of **"virtue"** is called **"myatrutho ܡܝܬܪܘܬܐ"** in Syriac. It originates from the verb **"ithar ܐܝܬܪ,"** which means to make profit, increase, gain, yield a profit, utilize, attain, remain over, or a remainder.

It derives from the verb **"yatar ܝܬܪ,"** which, according to the second verbal model, means to increase, make plentiful, multiply, enlarge, prefer, favor, and make one superior to another.

In order to grow, multiply, prosper, make a good impression and be preferred in life, we must cling to virtue!

The concept of **"culture/mardutho ܡܪܕܘܬܐ"** has been derived from the verb **"rdo ܪܕܐ,"** which has connotations in Syriac such as "to walk, go, travel, flow, discipline, educate, teach manners, give guidance, and learn."

This shows that culture plays an indisputably crucial role in walking, progressing on the path of life.

The Syriac equivalent of "human" is "nošo/barnošo." The words "unošo ܠܢܫܐ/nošo ܠܢܫܐ" derive from "aneš ܐܢܝܬܐ/humanization," while the noun "barnošo ܠܢܫܐ" derives from the verb "barneš ܒܢܝܬܐ."

In Syriac, these meanings are associated with weakness, losing power, slackening, debilitation, forgetfulness, incapacity, memory lapse, obliviousness, and negligence.² This reveals the philosophical attitudes at its roots.

Incapacity and flaws are part of people. These Syriac meanings are not inconsistent with human nature; on the contrary, they correspond to human psychology and physiology.

Without grasping the subtleties of tarbitho/discipline ܬܪܒܝܬܐ and mardutho/culture ܡܪܕܘܬܐ, it is not easy to become more humane. It is difficult to remain in flux without the values of culture.

In such case, one must be in a state of flux in order to grow in politeness and courtesy; and to walk in knowledge and wisdom. One must be a "talib"/talmido ܬܠܡܝܕܐ. One must constantly demand.

Life is like a human being. It creates two sociological channels according to the context of intent/words/actions. One of these is positive, the other negative.

Life flourishes through the sustenance and nourishment of the positive channel. This is indicated by these laconic words: **"Only with respect and courtesy did anyone ever achieve anything, while those who spurned respect and courtesy were deprived as a result."**

As they say, **"No one knows the value of gold better than a goldsmith."** In that case, I salute our hard-working and stoic goldsmiths/people who value and strive to keep our language and cultural treasure alive!

Never forget! Societies that do not safeguard their language and culture are doomed to be uprooted by the wind, just like trees with dry roots.

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² For a full explanation see <https://www.karyohliso.com/articles/article/2220>, Yusuf Beğtaş, "The Profundity of Syriac".