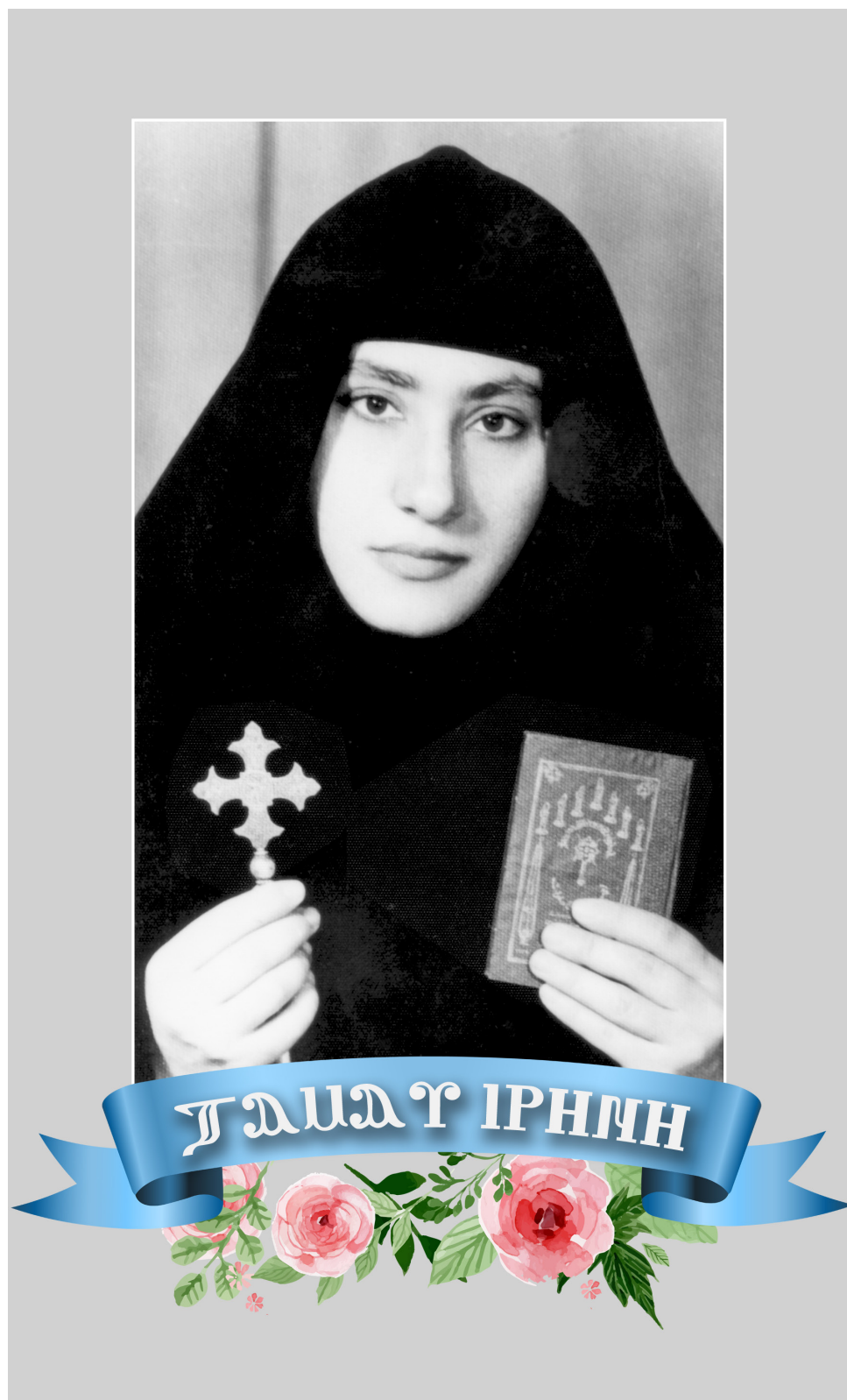


A blessed consecration and implementing the Pachomian communal life



A Photo of Tamav Irene just after her consecration

At the outset of her new responsibility, Tamav Irene wanted to raise the standards of monastic life. Her prayers never faltered; she asked God to guide her to the monastic rules that she should follow.

Tamav says:

At that time, life at the convent was neither solitary nor communal. Meals were distributed to the nuns, yet at the same time each nun had the facilities to cook for herself in her cell. The rule of the one common table for all was not practiced and communal prayer was offered only once per day. It was not easy to change the pattern of life at the convent because all the older nuns were used to a different way of life.

I dedicated three days to pray for this purpose. I fasted, tearfully prayed and prostrated myself asking God to guide me to the monastic rules He wants me to adopt. One night, while I was praying I said : *“Lord, the convent is yours and the nuns are your daughters”*, I saw an angel who took me to paradise.

There, I knelt before the Lord of Hosts. The Blessed Virgin Mary was on His right. God ordered the angel:

“Take her to St. Pachomious who will tell her about the monastic rules I want her to follow.”

The angel lead me up a long luminous corridor where I saw a big throne adorned with crosses that shone like diamonds. Seated was someone resplendent in magnificent clothes adorned with golden crosses. He carried a cross in his hand.

On both sides of the corridor, I saw countless monks and nuns clad in white. The angel told me:

“Go and greet St Pachomious. These are his children who have led a life of obedience that complied with the rules of monastic life. They always come and visit him.”

When it came to my turn, St Pachomious called me : *“Come, Irene”* His sight filled me with awe. I moved towards him, prostrated myself and kissed the cross that he carried in his hand. He then said:

“For three days you have prayed and fasted asking for God’s guidance, God wants you to embrace communal monastic life because it is the easiest path that leads to Him and it is safe. The middle path has saved many. I would like you to follow in this path. I will pray for you. Start and God will help you and bless you.”

I asked him:

“What is communal life?”

He replied:

“Treat all equally; all eat at one common table and all wear a similar uniform.

In your library, you will find a manuscript that explains what the communal life is and its rules.”

I looked for the manuscript in our library and was surprised to find that I have not read it before. I started reading about the Pachomian communal life to implement its rules.

I was afraid to inform the nuns about the new rules, but God gave me the courage. At that time, I was the youngest among fifty two nuns.

The communal table rule that I implemented, was welcomed by the majority. They flocked happily to the table. The few who abstained at the beginning, joined later. During the meals, I regularly read from the book of ‘Paradise of the Monks’ or the hagiographies of the saints. St. Pachomius, the founder of communal life, attended the first communal prayer and meal. Joy and peace prevailed.

An elderly nun testified before her departure to heaven that Tamav Irene exerted a great effort and faced considerable opposition to establish the new rules; she said :

“Forgive us, mother, we have sinned. Many a time have we opposed you but you captured our hearts with your love and patience.”

Moreover, it was usual for the street vendors and merchants to enter the convent to sell their commodities; they were prohibited.

Communal prayer rules were implemented and the congregation prayed three times daily : Midnight and midnight praise, from the 1st hour until the 9th hour, and from the 11th hour until Veil.

According to the book of the hours (Agpiya), the prayers are as follows:
The hours of the day start from sunrise until sunset.

1st hour	Prime	6 a.m.	Said upon waking up in the morning or after the midnight praise the previous night
3rd hour	Terce	9 a.m.	Are prayed before each liturgy during the offering of incense
6th hour	Sext	12 p.m.	
9th hour	None	3 p.m.	Is read during the days of fasting
11th hour	Vespers	sunset	Are read in the early evening and before bedtime
12th hour	Compline	9 p.m.	
Midnight			Is read just before the midnight praise
Veil			Is reserved for priests, monks, nuns and bishops

Tamav tells us about the joy in heaven when midnight praise is sung and how those who attend it regularly are consoled.

When the rule of communal prayer at church was first implemented, Tamav told us that during midnight praise, the Virgin Mary blessed every nun who attended happily and gave her a lit lantern. To the nuns who have unhappily joined and left their cells out of fear of breaking the rules, the Virgin gave them a lantern with an extinguished flame. Tamav continues :

“What about the lazy nuns who remained in their cells, they neither received a lit lantern nor an extinguished lantern.”

The blessing of the Virgin Mary was a great consolation for the nuns who continuously participated in prayer at church.

Tamav relates several stories which reveal the many blessings of prayer and praise :

At midnight, at the church of the martyr Philopater Mercurius in the convent, while singing praises of the month of Kiahk for the first time, the nuns noticed that the church was filled with a strong smell of scented incense and that they too were filled with great joy.

Kiahk (December 10-11 till January 8-9)
is the month during which hymns are sung at the vigils.

After the prayers have ended, Tamav told the nuns that she saw the Virgin Mary emerge from her icon on the iconostasis. Accompanying her was Pope Kyrillos V (1874-1927) and Anba Ebram, the late bishop of Fayoum; both were carrying censers. They entered the sanctuary and toured around the altar three times and then they passed by all the of the nuns present. The Virgin Mary blessed them one by one, followed by the two saints: Pope Kyrillos V and Anba Ebram of Fayoum. Finally, they returned to the sanctuary and disappeared.

Every nun felt the blessings of this heavenly consolation. The nun who suffered from pain in her stomach was cured and the nun who suffered from headaches was cured ...

The blessings and heavenly consolations that are obtained through praises, arouse the anger of the devil. Tamav Irene tells us also about what has happened while singing praises of the month of Kiahk for the first time in the church of St. Philopater Mercurius in the convent. It was during the Sunday Vespers that are recited from the Kiahk Psalmody. She said:

“The prayers were marked by great spirituality and suddenly a frightening snorting of a bull was heard; it seemed as if it was just outside the door of the church but when the door was opened there was nothing at all. We understood that this is the work of the devil, enemy of all what is good.”

These spiritual experiences explain why Tamav put a stress on learning the hymns of divine praise. In her early years, while she still lived with her parents, she spent all her pocket money on learning hymns by heart. Her teacher was Moalem Azuz, the tutor of the church in Gerga.

She continued to learn hymns after she joined the convent and also after she became abbess with the help of Moalem Michael the Senior, Moalem Tadros and Moalem Lewis. *She sincerely believed that the hymns are the most treasured possessions of the church.*

Besides implementing communal life, and urging her daughters to be regular in prayer and praise, Tamav felt that it is essential to build a church inside the convent to enable the elderly nuns to attend Mass and partake of the Holy Communion. Two years after she was appointed abbess, she started to build several churches in the convent thus fulfilling the prophecy of Pope Kyrillos VI that the convent will have more than one altar.

To help her daughters grow spiritually, she encouraged them to read holy books, hagiographies and saints' lives and founded a special library for that purpose.

Thus, after much toil and many hardships, Tamav established the rules of the Pachomian communal life in the convent. Later, communal life was implemented in all the other convents.

When Tamav implemented the communal life rules or any rule, as a spiritual mother she never compelled any nun to do anything beyond her means. *She poured her love equally and never granted privileges to anyone except the sick or the weak.* As a mother leading her children in the way of light, she was tolerant and patient. She asked them to fulfill their duties without exerting pressure on them and without persistence. *She was confident that nothing could stop the successful journey of communal life.*

She spoke with her nuns and gave each of them the appropriate advice. She did not let despair, boredom or anguish overcome them. She taught her daughters that the Kingdom of God is neither obtained by silver nor by gold but by humility, purity of heart and true love for all without distinction. She advised the nuns who are seeking the salvation of their souls to adhere to the teachings of the Christ.

While implementing communal life, conducting the spiritual revival and directing the constructional expansion, Tamav always received *Divine Support*. This was the secret of her success. She relates:

One night, while I prayed for a specific matter, I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary emerge from the anointed picture that I have in my cell. The cell was lit with a marvelous heavenly light. The Virgin Mary made the sign of the cross and approached me smilingly saying:

“With the grace of my Beloved Son, you will succeed!... you will succeed!... you will succeed!”

This is how heaven consoled Tamav and blessed her steps to make her feel the love of the One who has died for her. Her desire was to offer an insignificant spark of love in return for that wondrous love.

Amid all the pains and illnesses she has thankfully passed through, the desire of martyrdom, which many a time she has prayed for, flamed in her.

Heaven showed its consent several times. Tamav tells us that during a trip to Switzerland for medical treatment, one of the feasts of St. Philopater Mercurius fell on August 1st, 2001, so she sang for him a song of praise at night.

The martyr appeared to her and said:

“God has permitted that you suffer from physical pain because this is a cross that you are carrying and for which you will be recompensed. You have endured pain thankfully, isn’t this martyrdom? These pains are exactly like the suffering of a martyr. I am always praying for you. God be with you.”

Feasts of St. Philopater Mercurius

- June 16th Consecration of the first church built in his name
- August 1st Arrival of his relics to Egypt
- December 4th Martyrdom

This manifestation has occurred several times.

Another incident, when one day the Virgin visited her and asked her:

“Do you want to be a martyr?”

Tamav replied:

“I would like to but I am weak and helpless. If you support me, I will be able to. Without your help, I will collapse on the way.”

The Virgin replied :

“All the sufferings and pains you endure ... are martyrdom ... all the severe pressures you are subjected to ... are martyrdom.”

Another time, during a trip abroad for medical treatment, Tamav says:

Once while praying, my room was filled with light and the Virgin Mary appeared. This time, she did not come to deliver a message but to pray with me. She stood on my right and the martyr Philopater Mercurius on my left.

She said: *“Irene, let’s pray!”*

She commenced :

My great God and beloved son, I thank you, I praise you, I glorify you, I sanctify you.

Please accept this prayer from me, your mother, through whom You were incarnated and to whom You gave from Your glory and light ... lift your wrath ... be tolerant and patient with the world ...

With a thorn they have pierced the heart from which love has poured on all humanity.

You have done a lot of good ... whatever I say, I will never be able to pay Your dues, my great God and beloved Son.

Tolerate the weakness of mankind ... Raise Your hands and do not be angry with them for the sake of Your love, Your cross and Your blood ...

Those who please You, increase their love for You ... Those who are far, be patient with them and attract them to You.

In her prayers, the Blessed Virgin mentioned the churches and convents of Egypt and also the bishops and priests ... then she prayed for the whole world and finally she said nearly in tears :

“Your daughter Irene desires martyrdom but let Your will be done ... if You permit strengthen her and grant her grace. Amen.”

Translated by www.tamavireneforall.com