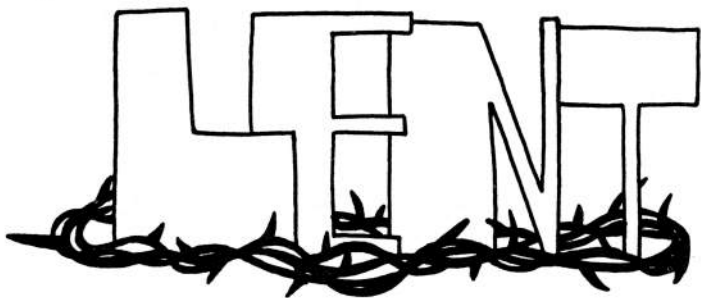


WHY FORTY?

The church will soon be in the period of Lent. The Armenian name for it is *Medz Bahk*. *Bahk* means a period of fasting. This one is great, because it is long, and because we have other periods of fasting that are shorter, namely, a period of seven days, or even one day, of fasting. The church calendar that comes from Etchmiadzin gives an additional name to the period of Great Lent: *Karasnortatz*, meaning a period of forty days.



Why forty, and not 20 or 30? Does forty have a special significance? Does forty have a religious story behind it? I do not know all the answers to these questions. I know, however that forty comes from the Bible and that forty occurs numerous times in the Bible. It is my intention to collect some of the instances where the number forty prevails.

In the Book of Genesis, the Bible tells us that the flood lasted forty days. While Noah was in the ark, it rained forty days and nights, making the waters rise and killing all animal life. Who knows, maybe the flood was caused by the first El Nino!

In the Book of Exodus, the Bible tells us that Israel, the people chosen by God, roamed in the desert of Sinai forty long years. It is not easy to be in the desert that long. No continuous water, no home-baked bread, no meat from known animals. The Bible says the people missed garlic and onion and watermelon.

The Gospels tell us that before starting his mission, Jesus went to the desert and spent forty days there, fasting and meditating. I am sure Christ could have found water and bread and meat there, but he decided to abstain from those for a period of forty days.

Again the Gospels tell us that Christ was brought to the temple forty days after his birth. And he decided to go to the heavens forty days after his resurrection. We

Armenians have deemed it proper to make two great feasts out of those two events. (*Dearnentarach* and *Hampartzoum*).

In the First Book of Kings we read that Goliath yelled and used foul language against the Israelite army forty days and forty nights, before David came forward and killed him. And, in the Third Book of Kings, we are told that David ruled forty years as a king.

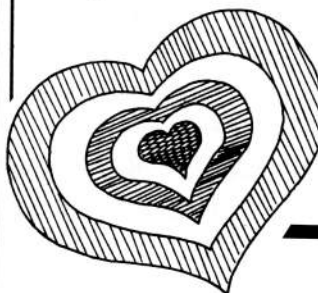
The following are not in the Bible; however, we Armenians give great importance to the number forty. We clergy advise parents to baptize a child within forty days of birth. Most Armenian Christians know what *Karasonk* means. After a period of forty days we come to church and we ask that *Hokehankist* be said for a beloved deceased member. When a man is ordained into the priesthood, he spends forty days in retreat and meditation, before he performs his first *Badarak*. I don't know how many priests actually do this, but, during the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we are supposed to say forty *Der Voghormias* during *Antasdan*. That is four times forty.

In March we are going to observe the Feast of the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia. I find it interesting to note that one of the soldiers changed his mind and came out of the frozen lake; at the same time one of the guards, a Roman soldier, became Christian and filled his spot. To complete the number forty, I'm sure.

And finally, though it has nothing to do with religion or the Bible, how proud we all are that the brave people of Musa Dagh fought the Turks for forty days.

– Rev. Fr. Garen Gdanian
Latham, New York

Never think that a small action done to your neighbor is not worth much. It is not how much we do that is pleasing to God, but how much love we put into that doing. Make sure you know your neighbor, for that knowledge will lead you to great love and love to personal service.



– Mother Teresa

