

This is an abbreviated eulogy of Musa (“Uncle Moses”) Anter recently given to a group of Ohio University students in Athens, Ohio. It has been edited to meet Rudaw editorial guidelines for reporting news and commentary. For the full eulogy, visit the website of American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN) at <http://bit.ly/U4paYF>

## A Cry For Freedom

### Musa Anter—His Life And Times

It is altogether fitting that I tell you, here in Athens, that it was an ancient Greek, the blind bard Homer, who knew the answer to a question it took me the education of two universities to find out—that I am nothing but a lowly Kurdish slave, a stateless person. My discovery came when my American professor asked us to name the three most momentous events of 1776.

We agreed that Jefferson’s beloved republic obviously qualified as one.

But there was stony silence as to the other two. Our good professor volunteered them: *The Decline and Fall of Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon and *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith. In Gibbon, I discovered, courtesy of Homer, author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, that I was only a half man. Yes, you heard me right: what you see is not the real me, but merely a mirage.

The real Kani, according to Homer, lost half of himself in captivity in Turkish misruled Kurdistan. The real Kani is not allowed to speak or write in Kurdish the way you do in English. The real Kani related to the blind bard when he said, “In the first day of his servitude the captive is deprived of one half of his [manhood].” The real Kani wants to feel full again, man again: Like the Poles in Poland and the Danes in Denmark. And, yes, the real Kani would love nothing better than to help his people, the Kurds, be free and his country, Kurdistan, independent.

While in college, I learned something else about the Greeks. They knew how to take a measure of man, his life, and his times, in a way that we have lost in our times. They did it through expansive funeral orations, where the dearly departed was deservedly praised.

I want to attempt such a Greek-style oration for a Kurdish man of letters who was brutally murdered for promoting freedom for all of God's children. His death enraged all freedom-loving Kurds. Thousands rushed to pay their last respects. But the Turkish government did not want—and would not allow—a Kurdish patriot to be honored, since Kurdish patriotism is akin to Turkish treason.

Their gangster-like response was so unspeakably malicious—so outrageously hateful and incredibly shameful—that I doubt if you can even imagine it. They viciously snatched his body from the hospital and cruelly dumped it in the dirt road of his birthplace—as if he were a filthy bag of rotten potatoes. That's how the *heartless* Turks delivered their *soulless* funeral oration for this Kurdish patriot.

He deserves a *heartfelt* and *soulful* funeral oration such as free Greeks gave in the golden age of Athens, gushing with torrents of sublime eloquence that soared from the inspiring lips of Patrick Henry in magnificently declaring: "Give me Liberty or Give me Death!"

I cannot give you such a spell-binding oration.

But I can, with honesty and sincere conviction, blow the trumpet of freedom, as long and loud as I can, for all the Kurdish patriots who are fighting and dying for liberty in the blood-soaked mountains of Kurdistan. Someone is always needed to stand up for all the poor, downtrodden souls who have been unfairly beaten, bruised and left to die along the highways and byways of injustice in our merciless globe.

I stand up today for Musa Anter, also affectionately known as Apê Musa, who was brutally gunned down in Amed, the unofficial capital of Kurdistan, 20 years ago last September. If I could be that ancient Greek orator, giving him his just due, I would say something like this:

*Dear Apê Musa or in English, Uncle Moses:*

*We are gathered here to honor how you boldly stood up for Kurdish rights when the terrorizing sword of Damocles hung ominously over anyone foolish enough to defend freedom. Kurds were like dead men walking—clanging their cruel chains like Jacob Marley's Christmas-eve ghost before Ebenezer Scrooge. Kurdistan was declared illegal about one hundred years ago—when the unsinkable Titanic plunged to its death in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. Our fathers*

*were treated like shackled slaves, ordered to assume the identities of our masters—forced to uproot our Kurdish heritage—destroying it root and branch. It became fashionable to say, cringing in fear, that we were Turks or Persians or Arabs. Slavery was proclaimed to be stylish—even declared the apotheosis of advancement.*

*But, thank God, you didn't buy any of it, Uncle Moses.*

*You were born a Kurd and no one was going to make you deny that fundamental fact. You saw through their clever words and called them out as the destroyers of cultures that they were. The more violently they ganged up on you, the more heroically you fought back. You not only saved the lives of many Kurds—but exquisitely inspired others to stay the grueling course.*

*You were born during the turbulent years of the hideous Armenian Genocide—when Ottoman Turks butchered a million or more feeble souls. You had no choice, of course, of when you came. But God works in mysterious ways. I am convinced that you were put here to stand boldly against these godless cruelties. Suffering became your middle name, but you kept faith. Like the needle to the pole, you never wavered.*

*Your mom named you Seyh Musa, after a sultan, known for his liberality and love of learning. She wanted you to tread in his footsteps. Reading introduced you to justice, which compelled you to look into Kurdish rights. All your days and nights were dedicated to the Kurds and Kurdistan. You wanted the Kurdish voice respected and accepted. But bigots were incensed by your supposed impertinence. In your teens, they branded you as a person of interest—a scandalous scar you gallantly carried to your grave.*

*When your mom registered you at school, the Turks put you down as Musa, a derivative of Moses. Some Kurds who knew you well teased you as our rod-less Moses. Sadly, like the Jewish prophet, you never entered the Promised Land. We lost you at Canaan's edge. But like Moses, you held onto the sacred trust with both hands.*

*Truth and justice were always your constant, unfailing lodestars. Unfortunately, they also painted perilous bulls-eye targets on your back. The Turkish bigots finally ambushed you at age 75. They murdered you, but your glorious martyrdom, at least, left us one bit of good news: You died, as you always wanted, on the job—with your boots on. Now we are trying desperately to fill your gigantic, seven-league boots.*

*Ancient philosophers and religion tell us that souls are deathless, so let me tell you something that you never knew when you were alive. Remember, your mom always warned you: "Son, never trust a word of a Turk or an Arab." But what she didn't know—could never imagine—was that the Turks would deceitfully recruit a Kurd to kill you. In her days, Kurds never thought of collaborating with their enemies.*

*Now some do.*

*The Greeks knew it all along, as Aeschylus expressed it so graphically and poetically in his Libyan fable. It told of an eagle, who after being shot with an arrow, looked at the features of the shaft and said:*

*"With our own feathers, not by others' hands,  
Are we now smitten?"*

*We see that same treachery in Turkey, which uses the lure of its \$450-billion war chest against Kurds to entice thousands of poor and vulnerable Kurds to take up arms against their fellow Kurds and kinsmen. It has also transferred untold billions to the bloated coffers of primarily American arms merchants—fortifying its Kurdish-killing arsenals with the state-of-the-art technology. The insidious trafficking in human misery is paying off in Kurdish blood. Last December, American-leased drones killed 34 innocent Kurdish villagers—19 of whom were children.*

*Do you think President Obama really cares about these heart-rending calamities? Sometimes, it's hard to tell. Some of you, who may have volunteered for his campaign, might want to shoot him an email with your impressions of American weapons being used to kill Kurds. You could also point out that a society that killed my Uncle Moses for promoting freedom is no different than the society that killed your beloved Uncle Tom, beaten to death for gallantly refusing to betray the whereabouts of two escaped slaves.*

*While researching the civil rights movement of black Americans in the 1960s, I looked for lessons to advance Kurdish freedom. I saw a cartoon about Dr. King's murder in 1968. A Chicago Sun-Times artist drew a picture of him beside Gandhi in heaven. The caption had Gandhi saying: "The odd thing about assassins, Dr. King, is that they think they have killed you."*

*Gandhi was right. Dr. King did become immortal.*

*So did you, Uncle Moses, 24 years later, on a September evening in 1992, when your consecrated presence graced the balconies of heaven with the world's*

*immortals. I wonder who welcomed you into heaven. Knowing your love of literature, I hope it was Mark Twain or John Steinbeck. Mark Twain said something that unintentionally crisscrossed with your ill-fated assassination: "The only distinctly criminal class in America," the eminent humorist said, "is Congress." Twain was, of course, speaking tongue-in-cheek—such as when he said: "Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself."*

*All joking aside, it is deadly serious in Turkey—where a member of that truly criminal ruling class treacherously recruited your murderous assassin. But your tragic death has spawned a remarkable resurrection—a cherished silver lining for all Kurdish patriots: your books now grace their library shelves. When I pick up one, I think of another renowned resurrection: "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11:25. You still live—Uncle Moses—through your wonderful books! And when the lands of our fathers and mothers become ours again, our teens will study you the way Americans do Mark Twain.*

*This moving passage from your memoirs summarizes 89 years of abuse in the hands of Turks and Turkey: "It is a custom in medical science to do biopsies for the sake of curing patients. Think of me as someone who was taken from the Kurds as a sampling. Pathologists work on tissue and issue their reports accordingly. But the clueless [Turkish] authorities that worked on me had already declared me as carcinogenic. Forty years later, I was declared safe—not malignant. In the meantime, my life and body had been wasted because of their experiments. My memoirs are an account of these trials and tribulations."*

*Although you spent 11 years behind bars and countless hours in unjust courtrooms, your judgment that you were found "not malignant" was premature. You were tricked into believing that. Your mom failed to warn you about the cunning Turks, who hired a treacherous Kurd to kill you. You could never have imagined that, with your charitable assessments of our implacable foes.*

*Maybe you should have paid closer attention to the biblical parable of the tares and the wheat, and how, like oil and water, they don't mix, because they are so profoundly different. One is good and healthy. The other is evil and harmful. The wicked tares are separated and burned—according to the Bible—while the trustworthy wheat is put in the barn. Don't misjudge my use of that analogy. I'm not advocating burning all Turkish tares—even those who murder us. But I will say this, Uncle Moses, now that you are safely in the heavenly barn—I hope at least that evil tare who killed you will taste the scorching flames of hellfire.*

*While you remained on earth, despite the enormous limitations you suffered, you never ceased to expand the boundaries of freedom and liberty.*

*I am enormously awed by your courageous record. You fearlessly showed us that the worldwide and never-ending cause of freedom—if it is to survive and flourish—must be an undying passion that burns with unquenchable fire in the heart and soul of its true disciples. That means noncooperation with the despots always and forever.*

*Your craving for freedom, Uncle Moses, triggered many brushes with the law.*

*Time does not permit me to go into all of them, but one of the worst was when you were held in solitary confinement for 195 days at a prison in Istanbul. For five months, you were not allowed to shower. Sunlight never entered your cell. Food was scarce. Lice were not. Open sewage flowed freely nearby. I'm sure maggots were never far away. Death danced in the air, brazenly hovering at your forsaken door. Death did step through the door of Emin Batu, a third-year law school student, who before he died, coughing and choking on his own blood, feebly scribbled on his cell wall, with his own blood: "Instead of being a rose in a prison, I would rather be a thorn in freedom."*

*I salute you, Uncle Moses, for being a constant thorn for freedom in the side of injustice. You clearly stand out—like the huge antlers of a giant stag standing on a rocky knoll against the setting sun—gleaming as a towering lover of truth and stalwart fighter for justice.*

*Our armed struggle goes on, but I convinced that final victory for the Kurds lies through the path of nonviolence, as Gandhi and Dr. King showed us. And I feel like we may be on the cusp of this strategic change.*

*But we need your help. Many of your Ohio ancestors eagerly joined the young American anti-slavery movement, gallantly forming the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in 1835. You could show the same boldness and form a new Kurdish Freedom Society, joining humanity's undying struggle against tyranny. You could help do for the Kurds today what your glorious Ohio ancestors did in magnificently removing the shameful manacles from black American slaves of the past.*

*If you do, my children and grandchildren will one visit here, and read a plaque: "On this spot in 2012, Ohio university students formed the first ever Ohio*

*Kurdish Freedom Society, dedicated to freeing Kurdish people from their cruel masters, Turks, Persians and Arabs."*

*With God's help, and yours, the tormented Kurds will one day emerge triumphantly from the dismal darkness of slavery, and finally walk in the bright sunshine of freedom.*