

Saint Sharbel's Phenomenon In Russia

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Lekar: "The Folk Physician" newspaper
which first introduced Saint
Sharbel to the Russian People.

This article embodies firsthand testimonies on the miracles that occurred in Russia at the intercession of Saint Sharbel. The bimonthly newspaper "Lekar" (The Folk Physician) which is published in Lipetsk, Russia, was the first to introduce Saint Sharbel to the Russian readers. Subscribers of this publication reported hundreds of cures and healings obtained through Saint Sharbel.

I. INTRODUCTION

Together with my wife and son, I have been editing and publishing an all-Russia medical newspaper entitled "Lekar" (The Folk Physician) since 1996. The newspaper is published once a fortnight in the city of Lipetsk (500 km southeast of Moscow) and is distributed in 75 of the 89 regions of Russia with a population of about 100 million people. The newspaper has a modest circulation due to the unusual character of its contents which deal with unconventional methods of medical treatment. As editorial staff of "The Folk Physician" we boast of being the first to have introduced the phenomenon of Saint Sharbel to the Russian people.

Saint Sharbel has been healing and curing people for one hundred years or so. Through prayers and belief one could be granted health with Saint Sharbel's intercession. Hundreds of thousands of people have received grace through this Maronite Lebanese

Saint. We at the "The Folk Physician" wanted to make known to the Russian people this "means" of getting well.

In 1997, we printed a photo of Saint Sharbel with information about his life and sainthood. We asked our readers to share information in case the Saint helped them get rid of their ailments. Frankly speaking, there was hardly any belief in this miraculous power of healing, especially that the Russian people have become alien to such belief due to the years of religious oppression. However, we were in for a surprise, soon letters started pouring in from all corners of Russia, from Voronezh, Tambov, Penza, Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Kamchatka, Perm, Yakutia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Mahachkala, Kaliningrad, and Tula to name only a few even from the city of Vladivostok which is 12,000 km from the city of Lipetsk. The newspaper received thousands of letters with a request for a picture of Saint Sharbel. In response to this outpouring of demand, Saint Sharbel's portrait was produced five times in the newspaper and three times in a booklet with either five or seven pictures. The booklet contained excerpted translations from letters received by the editorial staff.

People are quite right in saying that facts are more eloquent than pretty words. The following is a translation of selected letters written by Russians describing their own testimonies of cures obtained through the intercession of Saint Sharbel. The Folk Physician received over 5000 letters concerning Saint Sharbel and have documented 100 cures until the end of 1999. Even those few which you will include in this article present ample proof that Saint Sharbel is capable of relieving any disease.



Letters concerning the phenomenon of St. Sharbel from readers of the Lekar newspaper.
Photo by MARI, 'Annaya, Lebanon, 1999

II. TESTIMONIES OF MIRACLES IN RUSSIA

The file cabinet has a file labeled "They to whom Sharbel has Rendered Assistance." In this file there are thousands of letters from Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus. Probably, we could compile a thrilling book of letters written by the newspaper's readers and telling about miraculous healings through Saint Sharbel of Lebanon. The geographical origins of the letters to the editorial office from thousands of miles away is very impressive. The writers live in places as far away as the shores of the Pacific Ocean and the icy Barents Sea, the Peninsula of Kamchatka and the Caucasus Mountains. It is very likely that the saint monk really was enchanted by God because he was endowed with such a sacred power to heal people irrespective of their place of residence, nationality, or religious convictions. The

following testimonies are picked randomly.

"I'm a retired teacher. I'm eager to tell you in what way Saint Sharbel helps me and my family. The saint monk has become a kind of relative of ours. His image is of particular help in relieving pains, and when applied to an aching pancreas, the pains disappear in a matter of a few minutes. Recently, I happened to hurt my hand and a blue swollen mark appeared. I applied the image, prayed, and it was gone in a few minutes. It was a pure miracle. The portrait of Saint Sharbel is also of use with my neurosis. Sometimes I contemplate his image for some time, murmur the Lord's Prayer, appeal to Saint Sharbel for help, beg Jesus to forgive my sins and then thank God and Saint Sharbel for the deliverance from pain." Mrs. V .V. Antoniak, Lipetsk.

"... Recently, the doctors began considering amputation of my leg which is highly undesirable because of my advanced age. As a long-standing subscriber to 'The Folk Physician', I have decided to submit myself to the reviving power of the Lebanese saint. It was with profound faith in a successful outcome that I applied his picture to my sore leg at length, patiently pleading with God and Saint Sharbel to spare me from surgery. Believe me, the non-healing [open] wounds began skinning over [scabbing]. There's no talk of amputation anymore. This is why I'm making it public to 'The Folk Physician' that Saint Sharbel whose body is to be found so far from Russia is relieving the sufferings of the Russian people at such a long distance." Ivan G. Pokrovsky, a World War II veteran, retired secondary school director, and chairman of the local branch of the disabled persons' organization association gave a public testimony about his miraculous recovery.

"I'm so very grateful to you for the Lebanese saint's image. Thanks to it, I've got rid of nutritional allergy." Tatiana Taganova, City of Tambov, Karbyshev.

"I, Vasina Liubov Petrovna, write this letter on behalf of the inhabitants of our block of flats. I have a daughter twenty years old, who was suffering with severe headaches and I suggested that she should apply the image of the saint which was published in the newspaper 'The Folk Physician'. At first my daughter refused point blank to do so, because she believed neither Tchumak, nor Kashpirovsky who are popular Russian mass media psychotherapists, and she was quite right in doing so. But then she agreed since the headaches became intolerable. Soon she informed me: 'Mummy, I'm feeling warmth in the back of my head as if some evaporation has started'. A half an hour later, the headaches disappeared.

Later, the bottom of my belly ached. I also applied the picture of the saint to the spot and prayed, pleading with God for help by means of Saint Sharbel. The pain lessened and went away. My husband was always mocking me but recently he was experiencing pains in his knee cap. I suggested that he apply the image of Saint Sharbel. Soon the pain subsided. I also would like to add that with the blessed help of the saint, I succeeded in bringing my elevated blood pressure down to normal. On the very day I intended to post

this letter to you, my daughter started to feel pain in her left side. You may believe it or not, but our saint helped. I was told that it is not recommended to pass the image of Saint Sharbel on to other sick persons for it is likely to lose its power because diseases heap up, one upon another [sic]. Nonetheless, once I lent this 'medicine' to my neighbor Mrs. Yakovleva. And it did help her as well." The letter above is signed by A. Yakovleva, S. Diakonova, O. Gorbunova, T. Pyatich, Town of Tchaplyghin, Lipetsk region.

"My dear Folk Physician: Thanks to your assistance, I provided four families with pictures of Saint Sharbel and they proved to be very helpful in treatment of different ailments. Here's just an example: "My child was running high temperature. A doctor was not available. I applied Saint Sharbel's portrait and, believe me, in some fifteen minutes the temperature was down. If it is possible, send us one and a half dozens of images of Saint Sharbel from Lebanon." Nina Plotnikova, Matyrsky Settlement, Lipetsk region.

"My mother is 72 years old but she finds help and solace only in the image of Saint Sharbel. The great Sharbel has become her irreplaceable doctor." Mrs. Valentina P. Pisareva, Voronezh.

"The photo of Saint Sharbel has assisted me in recovering from a medium degree brain concussion. It helps relieve heart pain and colds. I have a profound belief in the saint's power." Lykova Raissa Semyonovna, Kirovsk region.

"Last year my daughter-in-law started bleeding. Her hands and feet grew cold. I knelt beside her bed and began praying. Then I placed an image of the saint from Lebanon upon her breast. In half an hour the young woman grew warm. The next morning, she told me that Sharbel's image radiated a powerful stream of warmth...." Tyrina Valentina Michailovna, Matyrsky Settlement, Lipetsk region.

From time to time to come across letters which tell about unusual cases of recovery by virtue of the saint's image. Here's a letter written by Anna Kiseleva from the ancient Russian town of Elets. She had a kid who died. Her husband told her to leave the body laying until tomorrow morning when he will bury it. The woman stayed next to the body and prayed over it and finally placed Saint Sharbel's image upon it and went to bed. In the morning the kid ran up to her bed and woke her up.

"Saint Sharbel rendered assistance to my father who was going to be operated on to remove a malignant tumor. Now he is still with us although his condition seemed hopeless. My daughter suffered from inflammation of the lymph nodes. After applying Saint Sharbel's image, she recovered completely. But I would like to tell in what way the Lebanese saint saved even our tomcat. It was dying. The veterinarian said that there was no sense in treating it. But I laid the cat upon the Saint's image, covered it with another image and sat down beside it while praying for about three hours. The breathing of the animal became regular. That night, our pet ran and climbed up into my bed. The tomcat is still alive. Thank God, Saint Sharbel and you, the employees of the newspaper, which

introduced this phenomenon to us, the Russians. God bless you!" Mrs. Natalia Kudiaeva, The Settlement of "Vesyoly", the Rostov region.



The red dots on the map indicate the villages and cities from which letters were received describing the phenomenon of St. Sharbel.

Photo by MARI, 'Annaya, Lebanon, 1999

"Recently, when I was staying at the hospital, I came across the image of Saint Sharbel in a newspaper. The nurses showed it to us. We became convinced in the healing power of this photo in which Saint Sharbel looked as if he were sleeping. I am writing about what I witnessed. An acquaintance of mine who was very nearsighted (she was not able to read at all without glasses) applied the photo her eyes and, after returning home, she was able to read without her glasses.

Another friend of mine developed a lump from an injection that accidentally struck the bones. She applied the photo to the lump that, in the course of two days, had disappeared.

Another friend, who was having acute pains in the arm above the elbow and was not able to raise her arm, hired two girls to put wallpaper on the walls of her room. However, the night before she applied the photo of Saint Sharbel to her arm. The next

morning, she was surprised to have been healed and she was able to do the work herself.

Another friend could not practically see anything from one of his eyes. It was as if a mist covered it. After having applied the photo of the Saint, she can now look out and see with her defective eye. I burst out crying on hearing this from her." Evgenia Nickolaevan Vachrushina, Bashkortostan.

"I intended to take some holy water from the springs in our park, but slipped, fell on my arm and could not get up. The pain was so intense, and I became frightened that I might have broken my arm. It took great effort to get home. I was given injections for a few days; the painful area was massaged and ointments were applied. Unfortunately, the pain did not subside. Then a strange feeling came over me, as if someone prodded my memory of the newspaper at home with Saint Sharbel's picture in it. I applied the picture to the painful spot a few times and I definitely felt better. Soon the pain disappeared completely." Mrs. Tchovzhik Irina Petrovna, Shevtchenko, Lipetsk.

"I would like to tell about the miracle associated with Saint Sharbel's picture which happened to me. All of a sudden, I literally lost the power to use my legs. Namely my left leg was encased in a plaster cast following the surgery performed for transverse platypodia on my big toe. My right foot was sutured after the removal of part of a needle and this foot supported me with the aid of crutches. The sutured area of my right foot became inflamed, swelled, grew red, and started to ooze fluid. It was painful to touch and even more painful when I walked on it. I could only be patient and continue treating it. I covered the suture area with ointment and a piece of paper and then tied the Saint's image to that spot. I fell asleep and awoke at daytime, a couple hours later. I removed the newspaper with the Saint's picture and the paper wrapping from my foot. I was stunned to see that there were no redness, no swelling, and no discharge. I had not felt any pain as well. I thanked God and Saint Sharbel with all my heart. From that moment on, I have never parted with Saint Sharbel's image." Mrs. Ivanova, Moskovskaya, Lipetsk.

We debated whether to publish this letter or not. It seemed too improbable to us, however we decided to make it public on the basis that if an adult person, especially a professional nurse, had wished to share it with us, what right have we to reject? The following is the content of that letter:

"I have been working as a nurse for many years and have seen a lot in my professional life. I have always believed only in conventional medicine, particularly in surgery. Forgive me, but I have never believed in cures by saints, and even believed less in cures by their images. Nevertheless, I am a believer and I often attend church. Quite by chance, a fibroid nodule was detected in my breast. I was sent urgently to the oncologist. Perhaps you understand how one feels when facing such a news and challenge. By accident — and probably not by accident because nothing in our lives happens by chance — I came across Saint Sharbel's portrait published in a booklet written by A. Bayukansky. I read it

and decided that there was nothing to lose and no harm in trying this remedy. I started placing the picture on the nodule and prayed zealously. For a month, I kept Saint Sharbel's image near as I slept. I pleaded with God and appealed to the Saint for help. Believe me or not, a genuine miracle took place. I could hardly believe it myself when I was medically reexamined by ultrasound and various analysis. I heard the doctors exchanging opinions in an agitated way. The senior doctor said: "We are unable to understand what has happened. There is no tumor anymore, it has resolved itself." I said nothing to the doctors. But on my return home, I thanked God and Saint Sharbel with all my heart. It is obvious that not everyone is likely to believe me, but this has happened. Maybe the tumor was affected by psychotherapy, but most probably it was removed by the monk Sharbel whose power I now trust infinitely." Ms. Natalia Lependina of Voronezh.

"Thank you very much indeed for bringing to our knowledge the phenomenon of Saint Sharbel, for your sympathy with humanity. I have already written telling you how helpful the Saint's portrait is to me, but I have to add something. I had been undergoing treatment for my eyes — I was suffering from an opaque lens. Upon completion of the treatment, I visited the doctor. During the examination, I learned that vision in the left eye had improved and the cataract had disappeared. The doctor was at his wits' end. He said: "I really don't know to what I should ascribe this spectacular improvement. You have not got a cataract at all; you are just myopic!" I said nothing to the doctor about the portrait of the Saint which had initiated this miracle." Ivalentina Ivanovna, Tambov.

"Saint Sharbel helped me immensely. I was suffering with acute pains in the foot. I did not know in what way to mitigate the pain when quite by chance I came across a picture of Saint Sharbel. The pain subsided after a single application of the picture on the painful area. I felt better. Consequently, I have applied the picture to my foot for long periods with that the swelling lessened and the pain disappeared. I do not know how explain it but I am thankful with all my heart to Saint Sharbel. His dead body not only sweats but perceives the plight of the sick as well. Accept my gratitude for publishing the photo of hermit who after his death is still doing good for people. God bless you for this act of kindness!"

"I am a retired colonel of the space forces. When I was still in the military service, I took part in the creation of the "Soyuz-Apollo" space systems and the spaceship "Buran." Now, I carry out a treatment of numerous diseases by means of Saint Sharbel's image. I even managed to develop my own techniques to treatment. First, I concentrate upon one disease, pray to God and plead with him to aid me through Saint Sharbel. Then I proceed with another disease. It is the only way for me because neither medicine nor doctors proved to be any use. I have deep gratitude for this Lebanese monk who is still aiding people after his death." A. N. Besedin, Town of Tchaplygyn.



From left to right: Valentine Bayukansky, Vladimir Iakoubenko,
Father Tannous Nehme of the Lebanese Maronite Order,
Mrs. Natalia and Mr. Anatoli Bayukansky
at the Monastery of St. Maron, 'Annaya, Lebanon.
Photo by MARI, 'Annaya, Lebanon, 1999

III. CONCLUSION

Three lessons we have learned through this wonderful experience. One is that people will not reveal their ailments openly, however when it is healed, the joy and blessing urge them to share their miracles with friends and even with strangers.

Second lesson concerns a bit of hype on behalf of some Orthodox Christians in Russia who were disturbed about promoting a Catholic Saint while the Orthodox Church has plenty of its own. The lesson was that God's gifts of healing are for everyone and that we need to pray and work for the unity of the Church. Maybe Saint Sharbel is uniting the Church in his own way.

Third lesson is that Saint Sharbel emanates power and healing energy and that with faith and prayer one could be healed through his intercession.