

**Key Dates****1883:** Gibran Khalil Gibran was born in Bsharri, a village in the north of Lebanon. He originated from a humble family. His father, Khalil, worked as a tax collector. His mother Kamileh Rahmeh had one son from a previous marriage (Boutros; Arabic for Peter). After Gibran, Kamileh gave birth to two daughters: Sultana and Mariana.

**1895:** Gibran's mother immigrated to Boston with her four children, hoping to flee misery, while her husband stayed in Lebanon drowning in financial problems. In the United States, Gibran met the famous photographer Fred Holland Day.

**1898:** Gibran returned to Lebanon to study Arabic and French at College La Sagesse in Beirut.

**1902:** In fifteen months' time, Gibran lost his mother, sister and half-brother.

**1904:** Gibran met Mary Haskell, an American citizen and a great influence in his life who will encourage and help him throughout his path. The same year, Gibran published several poems in prose gathered later under the title: A Tear and a Smile.

**1908:** He settled down in Paris to pursue an artistic training.

**1911:** From thereafter, Gibran settled in New York where he started a rich and intimate correspondence with May Ziadeh, a Lebanese intellectual living in Cairo.

**1918:** The Madman, Gibran's first book written in English was published.

**1920:** Gibran founded, with other Arab and Lebanese co-writers and poets living in the United States, a literary society called Al Rabitat al Qualamiya (The Pen-bond Society).

**1923:** The Prophet, Gibran's seminal work, was published. The book was an immediate success. Concurrently, Gibran started a solid friendship with Barbara Young who later became his confident.

**1928:** Jesus, the Son of Man was published after 18 months of uninterrupted work.

**1931:** Gibran died in a hospital in New York at the age of 48. His body was transferred to Lebanon. Today, it still lies in his native town of Bsharri, in the monastery of Mar Sarkis (Saint Serge) turned into a museum.

**Family Background** Gibran's father was a strong, sturdy man with fair skin and blue eyes; and despite his basic education, he was a man of considerable charm. Although he owned a walnut grove in his village, his meager income was soon wasted over gambling and alcohol. He was known to be "one of the strongest men" in Bsharri and everyone feared him, including his wife and kids...

Later on in his life, Gibran expressed his feelings towards his father, while moderating the harsh reality of this autocratic relationship:

"I admired him for his power, his honesty and integrity. It was his daring to be himself, his outspokenness and refusal to yield that got him into trouble eventually. If hundreds were about him, he could command them with a word. He could overpower any number by any expression of himself."

However, in truth, Gibran had never felt close to his temperamental father; an unloving man who was hostile to his artistic nature and skills.

On the other hand, Gibran always evoked his mother with the deepest feelings of affection and admiration.

Kamileh Rahmeh, the daughter of a Maronite clergyman, was described as a thin graceful woman with a slight pallor in her cheeks and a shade of melancholy in her eyes. She had a beautiful singing voice and was a devoutly religious person. When she reached a marriageable age, Kamileh was given to her cousin Hanna Abed Al Salaam Rahmeh, but like many Lebanese of his time, Hanna immigrated to Brazil seeking fortune, and died there leaving a widow and a son, Boutros (Peter). Sometime after his death, the young Kamileh remarried to Khalil Gibran, giving birth to a son and two daughters: Gibran, Marianna and Sultana.

In contrast to her husband, Kamileh was an indulgent and loving parent. She had ambitions for her children, and despite her informal education, she possessed an intelligence and wisdom that had an enormous influence on her son Gibran. Fluent in Arabic and French, artistic and musical, Kamileh ignited Gibran's imagination with the folk tales and legends of Lebanon as well as other stories from the Bible. Her spiritual nature and the mystical Maronites ceremonies she attended with her children had also a big impact on Gibran's life and work.

In one of his earliest works – *Al Ajnihah Al Mutakassirah* (The Broken Wings) – Gibran Khalil Gibran clearly expressed his deepest respect and admiration for motherhood: "The most beautiful word on the lips of mankind is the word "Mother", and the most beautiful call is the call of "My mother". It is a word full of hope and love, a sweet and kind word coming from the depths of the heart. The mother is everything; she is our consolation in sorrow, our hope in misery, and our strength in weakness. She is the source of love, mercy, sympathy, and forgiveness."

Another influence in Gibran's early life was a local man named Selim Dahir, a poet-physician who had sensed very early the boy's thirst for knowledge. Gibran, who was denied formal schooling the first twelve years of his life, remembered him in these words: "But some people are so wonderful that I wonder whether their life isn't creation after all. You remember Selim Dahir? He was a poet, a doctor, a painter, a teacher, yet he never would write or paint as an artist. But he lives in other lives. Everybody was different for knowing him. All Bsharri was different. I'm different. Everybody loved him so much. I loved him very much, and he made me feel very free to talk to him."