

Selected Writings by Kahlil Gibran

(Chronological order)

When My Sorrow Was Born

When my Sorrow was born I nursed it with care, and watched over it with loving tenderness.

And my Sorrow grew like all living things, strong and beautiful and full of wondrous delights.

And we loved one another, my Sorrow and I, and we loved the world about us; for Sorrow had a kindly heart and mine was kindly with Sorrow.

And when we conversed, my Sorrow and I, our days were winged and our nights were girdled with dreams; for Sorrow had an eloquent tongue, and mine was eloquent with Sorrow.

And when we sang together, my Sorrow and I, our neighbors sat at their windows and listened; for our songs were deep as the sea and our melodies were full of strange memories.

And when we walked together, my Sorrow and I, people gazed at us with gentle eyes and whispered in words of exceeding sweetness.

And there were those who looked with envy upon us, for Sorrow was a noble thing and I was proud with Sorrow.

But my Sorrow died, like all living things, and alone I am left to muse and ponder.

And now when I speak my words fall heavily upon my ears.

And when I sing my songs my neighbours come not to listen.

And when I walk the streets no one looks at me.

Only in my sleep I hear voices saying in pity, “See, there lies the man whose Sorrow is dead.”

Gibran Kahlil Gibran,

From *The Madman, His Parables and Poems*, London, Heinemann, 1973, pp 58-59.

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And when my joy was born

And when my joy was born I held it in my arms and stood on the house-top shouting, "Come ye, my neighbours, come and see, for Joy this day is born unto me. Come and behold this gladsome thing that laugheth in the sun."

But none of my neighbours came to look upon my Joy, and great was my astonishment. And every day for seven moons I proclaimed my Joy from the house-top -- and yet no one heeded me. And my Joy and I were alone, unsought and unvisited. Then my Joy grew pale and weary because no other heart but mine held its loveliness and no other lips kissed its lips.

Then my Joy died of isolation.

And now I only remember my dead Joy in remembering my dead Sorrow. But memory is an autumn leaf that murmurs a while in the wind and then is heard no more.

Gibran Kahlil Gibran,

From *The Madman, His Parables and Poems*, London, Heinemann, 1973, pp 58-59.

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O Wind

Now singing and rejoicing, now weeping and lamenting. We hear, but behold you not; we feel your Presence yet do not see you.

You were as a sea of love submerging our spirits, yet not drowning us; playing with our hearts in their stillness.

You ascend with the heights and descend with the valleys and are spread out upon fields and meadows.

In your ascending is there strength and in your descending grace.

You were as a merciful ruler dealing justly with the weak and lowly and shewing pride with the strong and mighty.

In Autumn do you sigh in the valleys and the trees weep with you, sighing;
In Winter you do shout and roar and all Nature shouts with you.

In Spring are you weak and sickly, and in your weakness the fields awake;
In Summer you are shrouded in stillness and we take you for dead, slain by the sun's shafts and interred in its heat.

Were you mayhap lamenting in Autumn's days, or laughing at the shame of the trees when you rendered them naked?

Were you angry in the days of Winter, or dancing about the snow-covered graves of the night?

And in Spring were you sickly, or were you loved one sickened by absence, and come with sighing breath upon the beloved's cheek, the youth of the seasons, to rouse him from his slumber?

Were you perchance dead those Summer days, or sleeping in the hearts of fruits, or among the vines or on the threshing-floor?

You bear the breath of illness from city streets, and from the heights the spirit of a flower;

Thus do the great spirits that carry life's agony in silence; and in silence shall we meet its joys.

You murmur wondrous secrets in the ear of the rose, and she understands. Oft-times she is troubled; oft-times she smiles. In like manner do the Gods with the souls of men.

Here do you tarry; there do you hasten. Thither you run, but you abide not. So does a man's thought; it lives by movement and in repose dies.

On the other water's face you inscribe verses—then erase them. Likewise do poets who recite.

From the South you come hot as love;

From the North cold as death;

From the East gentle as the caress of spirits;

From the West you come forth with violence as one hating.

Are you fickle as the Ages, or are you an apostle come to give us of your faith?

You pass in anger across deserts and trample underfoot the caravans and bury them in graves of sand.

Are you that hidden flood flowing with the light of dawn through the leaves of trees?

Passing on like a dream in the valley, where flowers incline for love of you and the plants sway in ecstasy?

You fall upon the seas in assault and disturb the peace of their depths so that they rise against you in anger and open wide their mouths to swallow vessels and souls.

Are you then that gentle lover who plays with the locks of children running among the houses?

Whither are you hastening with our souls and our spirits and our sighs?

Whither do you carry the pattern of our smiles? What do you with the flaming brands of our hearts in flight?

Do you go with them to where is beyond the twilight-beyond this life? Or drag them as prey to distant caves to blow them hither and thither till they grow faint and die?

In the stillness of night hearts reveal to you their secrets and with the breaking of dawn the fluttering of lids darkens the eyes.

Are you mindful of what the hearts felt and what the eyes saw?

Between your wings is stored the cry of anguish from the poor man, and the orphan's cry and the mourning woman's lament.

In the folds of your garment the stranger puts his longing, and the forsaken his grief and the fallen woman the cry of her spirit.

Are you the keeper of those lowly ones' trust? Or are you as this earth that takes nothing except to put it to her own body?

Do you hear this cry and this clamour and this weeping? Or are you as the mighty among mankind that heed not the outstretched hand nor hear the voices rising to them?

Gibran Kahlil Gibran,

From *A tear and a Smile*, Translated from Arabic by H. M. Nahmad, London, Heinemann, 1979, pp 143-146.

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On Self-Knowledge

And a man said, Speak to us of Self-Knowledge

And he answered, saying:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.

But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.

You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.

You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.

And it is well you should.

The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;

And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.

But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;

And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.

For self is a sea boundless and measureless.

Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth."

Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."

For the soul walks upon all paths.

The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.

The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.

Gibran Kahlil Gibran,

From *The Prophet*, Beirut, Sader's Library, 1985, pp 83-84.

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