

# **The Prophet Study Guide**

## **The Prophet by Khalil Gibran**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Prophet Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">"The Coming of the Ship".....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">"On Love".....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">"On Marriage".....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">"On Children".....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">"On Giving".....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">"On Eating and Drinking".....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">"On Work".....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">"On Joy and Sorrow".....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">"On Houses".....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">"On Clothes".....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">"On Buying and Selling".....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">"On Crime and Punishment".....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">"On Laws".....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">"On Freedom".....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">"On Reason and Passion".....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">"On Pain".....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">"On Self-Knowledge".....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">"On Teaching".....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">"On Friendship".....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">"On Talking".....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">"On Time".....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">"On Good and Evil".....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>



"On Prayer"..... 27

"On Pleasure"..... 28

"On Beauty"..... 29

"On Religion"..... 30

"On Death"..... 31

"The Farewell"..... 32

Characters..... 35

Objects/Places..... 36

Themes..... 37

Style..... 40

Quotes..... 42

Topics for Discussion..... 44



# Plot Summary

*The Prophet* presents the farewell observations on and recommendations about life and death of Almustafa, the chosen and beloved Prophet, as he ends a twelve-year sojourn in Orphalese.

Almustafa, the chosen and beloved Prophet around whom the story revolves, has spent twelve years of his youth in Orphalese, serving as the people's harp, flame, seeker of silence and guardian of the night. Much of his time has been spent in the overlooking hills, watching and listening to their lives. The people have generously met Almustafa's physical needs, but he realizes that some have criticized his aloofness. Now the ship he has been watching for to take him home arrives, and Almustafa comes down from the hills to the temple, bittersweet about leaving. The people gather to see him off, hungry to imbibe whatever wisdom he can deliver, for posterity's sake.

In the temple and on the prompting of the seer Almitra, who believes in him, a tongue-tied and emotional Almustafa agrees to respond to questions about what separates birth and death. Almitra opens the question-and-answer session, and the responses inspire others to seek guidance about things close to their hearts. Almustafa's responses are all delivered to the whole citizenry of Orphalese, but each is also tailored to the individual questioner, the sincere and the cynical.

There are twenty-six questions regarding various aspects of life. Addressing each question individually, Almustafa exhibits a general tendency to show, through allusions to nature and everyday activities, the interrelatedness of life. He rejects many of the formalities and restrictions characterizing such human institutions as law and religion. He dismisses common views about marriage dissolving the spouses' individuality, molding children to the parents' preconceived ideas about their futures and prayer being about intercession in time of need, want or sorrow. Nudity, a significant taboo among all the peoples of the Middle East, is used several times as a symbol for natural purity and to question formalized views on morality. Generosity can result in good or evil, depending on the motivations of the giver and the receiver. Many aspects of life are seen as two sides of a single coin. Almustafa urges the people to see even in life's negative aspects some spark of good, and he urges the people, young, old and middle-aged, rich and poor, male and female, to appreciate the unity of life under God and behave accordingly.

As evening falls, Almitra signals that the interchange has ended by blessing the day, the city and Almustafa's sage words. He objects that he has drawn from them more than he has provided. The crowd follows Almustafa tearfully to the docks, where he delivers a moving and lengthy farewell oration, thanking and encouraging the people he has loved and tried to serve, justifying his methods and urging them to seek excellence in all things and wait patiently for the hidden things in life to be fully revealed. Almustafa remains encouraging, challenging, hopeful and - above all - enigmatic to the end, promising, "A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me," words Almitra takes to heart as she alone remains to watch the empty sea.



# "The Coming of the Ship"

## "The Coming of the Ship" Summary

Almustafa, the chosen and beloved, waits twelve years in Orphalese for a ship to take him home. When he sees the ship from the hillside, he feels bittersweet about boarding, but he cannot remain. He envies the mariners, who enjoy peace and freedom. As people flock in from the fields to see him off, Almustafa wonders what he can give them now and muses about what he has been to them: harp, flame, seeker of silence and guardian of the night. He cannot speak his innermost secret. The elders beg him to remain and priests and priestesses proclaim their love. Tears keep Almustafa from speaking until Almitra, a seer, says that she understands his longing for his homeland but asks for posterity's sake that he tell the truth about what separates birth and death. Almustafa maintains that he can speak only of what moves within their souls.

## "The Coming of the Ship" Analysis

The background to *The Prophet* is briefly set up, introducing Almustafa the Prophet who has visited from afar and Almitra, a local seer who believes in him. She convinces him to submit to a series of questions to bring out the meanings he has discovered in life and death.



# "On Love"

## "On Love" Summary

Almitra asks Almustafa to talk about love, and he declares that love beckons them along hard, steep ways. Love must be allowed in and believe in, even when it shatters one's dreams. Love crowns and crucifies, grows and prunes, ascends and descends, gathers, threshes, sifts, grinds, kneads and forms people into sacred bread for God's feast. Knowing this, the people become fragments of Life's heart. It is better not to seek only peace and pleasure in love. One must laugh and weep, but empty one's self to neither. Love neither gives nor takes. It neither possesses nor is possessed. Love is self-sufficient. People should strive to be in the heart of God and let love direct their course. Love seeks only to fulfill itself, melting, singing, knowing the pain of excessive tenderness, bleeding willingly and joyfully, giving thanks for each new day of loving, resting at noon, meditating on love's ecstasy, returning home with gratitude and sleeping with prayer for one's beloved and praise on one's lips.

## "On Love" Analysis

The first question concerns love, which Almustafa shows as suffusing all of life but requiring balance. The heart of God, where love most perfectly resides, is to be the people's goal. Like everything in life that Almustafa will discuss, love brings together radical opposites and binds those who live by it. The theme that moderation is necessary in everything begins to develop.



# "On Marriage"

## "On Marriage" Summary

Almitra asks the master about marriage, and Almustafa replies that people are born together and shall be together forever, even after death, in the silent memory of God. Marriage should leave personal space - like the strings of a lute, pillars of the temple and trees in the forest - and never bind. Marriage should give one's heart into the hand of Life.

## "On Marriage" Analysis

Marriage, which is eternal in the mind of God, must not be controlling in order for its mystery to be in harmony with what God and man have established as ideals. The use of imagery like the strings of a lute, pillars of the temple and trees in the forest, drawn from everyday life, will be encountered frequently throughout Almustafa's teachings.



# "On Children"

## "On Children" Summary

A nursing mother asks Almustafa about children, and he declares that a couple's children are not their own, but Life's longing for itself, coming through but not from them. Parents may give children their love but not their thoughts, for they have thoughts of their own. Children's souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which parents may not visit even in dreams. Parents must not seek to make them like themselves, because life does not go backward. Children are living arrows sent forth into the infinite, swiftly and far. The archer loves both arrows and bow.

## "On Children" Analysis

After two questions from Almitra to get things rolling, as it were, people with vested interests voice their concerns. A nursing mother wants to know about children, and the crowd hears that children are individuals, not to be controlled by parents but allowed and encouraged, moderately, to develop personally. This is a radical view in the Middle East and in the U.S., where Gibran has settled when *The Prophet* is published in 1923.





# "On Giving"

## "On Giving" Summary

A rich man asks about giving, and Almustafa explains that only when one gives of him or herself does one truly give. People guard their possessions for fear they will need them tomorrow, but this is foolish, for fear creates need. Some give to receive recognition, but their gifts are unwholesome. Others own little but give it all, and because they believe in life, their coffers are never empty. Those who give with joy are rewarded with joy. Those who give with pain are baptized in that pain. Those who give with none of these motivations make God smile on the earth. It is good to give when asked, but it is better to give when unasked, open-handedly, withholding nothing. Give now, rather than leaving it to heirs to give. Some argue that one should give only to the deserving, but Almustafa says the trees give fruit without such thought, for otherwise they perish. Those who are worthy of life itself are worthy of people's gifts. Recipients should not be stripped of their pride, and givers must be worthy of being instruments of giving. Recipients should assume no weight of gratitude, which is heavy on both, but rather soar alongside the giver. Preoccupation on debt is doubt of the donor's generosity. Again, moderation is in order.

## "On Giving" Analysis

Almustafa's views on giving are less radical, showing that there are many motivations and that even the least noble of these carries reward. More striking is his contention the recipients have an obligation not to appear too grateful because it is not healthy spiritually for the giver.



# "On Eating and Drinking"

## "On Eating and Drinking" Summary

An aged innkeeper asks Almustafa to talk about eating and drinking. He wishes people could live on fragrance and air, but humans must kill to eat. Therefore, killing should be an act of worship, acknowledging the victim is purer than man. The killer must confess that he too will be consumed someday by a mightier hand. Eating an apple, one should confess that its seeds live in his body and will blossom in his heart. Man and apple shall rejoice in all seasons. In autumn, gathering grapes, man must realize he too is a vineyard destined for the winepress and bottling in eternal vessels. In winter, drinking wine, one should have a song in one's heart, remembering all that has gone into the cup.

## "On Eating and Drinking" Analysis

Almustafa says nothing about gluttony, which one might expect in discussing eating and drinking. Instead, he emphasizes the wholeness and interconnectedness of nature and its relationship to living in harmony with the seasons.



# "On Work"

## "On Work" Summary

A ploughman asks about Work, and Almustafa replies that work helps one keep pace with the soul of the earth, while the idle are strangers to the seasons and too proud to submit to the infinite. Work is not, as many say, a curse and misfortune; it is the fulfillment of part of earth's dreams and shows one's love of life. Some say birth is an affliction and the flesh a curse, but Mustafa counters that only the sweat of one's brow washes away what is written. Some criticize the darkness and weariness of life, but Almustafa objects that darkness creates a blind urge for knowledge, attained only by work. Working with love binds people to themselves and to God. Weavers should think of the beloved who will wear the cloth, builders of the beloved who will live in the house and farmers of those who will eat their produce, for workers leave their own spirit in the things they do. The arts are not superior to manual labor. Work is love made visible. Those who work with distaste for it might as well become beggars. Indifferent bakers bake bitter bread that leaves the eater hungry. Grudging winemakers distill poison. Unloving singers only impede their hearers.

## "On Work" Analysis

The discussion of work continues the theme of being in harmony with all creation. Almustafa recognizes the ancient view that work (including giving birth) is a curse, but he refutes this as a means of motivation. Work - of whatever sort - becomes noble when the worker remembers with love whoever will benefit from the product. Without love, the results are not merely neutral, but poisonous. This is one of the few situations in which Almustafa allows no moderation.



# "On Joy and Sorrow"

## "On Joy and Sorrow" Summary

A woman asks Almustafa to talk about joy and sorrow, and he replies that joy is sorrow unmasked. The deeper sorrow carves into one's being, the more joy one can contain. The cup that holds one's wine is burned in the potter's oven, and the lute that soothes the spirit is made of wood hollowed by knives. The joyous should look inside to see the sorrow giving joy, and the sorrowful should see that they are weeping for past delight. People debate whether joy or sorrow is greater, but Almustafa declares them inseparable. People are suspended on scales between them and balanced only when empty.

## "On Joy and Sorrow" Analysis

Joy and sorrow balance, mirror and complement each other, just as love unites many opposites. The suffering of inanimate cups and lutes in their formation is perhaps farfetched, but this personification makes a case for accepting sorrow to attain a greater good.



# "On Houses"

## "On Houses" Summary

A mason asks Almustafa about houses, and he expresses preference for country over urban living. The house is one's larger body and is never without dreams. If he could, Almustafa would scatter houses in forests and meadows that people might enjoy the fragrance of the earth in their clothing. This may some day happen, but not yet. Fearful ancestors gathered behind walls, which separate the people's hearts from their fields. He asks whether bolted doors give them peace, memory and beauty, or just the comfort for which they lust. Comfort arrives as a guest but quickly becomes the host and ultimately master, tamer and puppeteer. It lulls to sleep and jeers at the dignity of the flesh, mocks sound senses, murders the passion of the soul and walks grinning to the funeral. Children of space should not be trapped or tamed; houses should be masts rather than anchors. People should not be fearful to enter, hit their heads or breath freely. They should not accept living in tombs. No matter how grand one's house, one should look to the boundless mansion in the sky.

## "On Houses" Analysis

Almustafa is suspicious of urbanization, which has limited and debased human life, even if its origins were well intentioned. He concentrates on criticizing comfort in fine homes as a danger to enjoying the pleasures intended in creation. Again, Almustafa speaks without equivocation.



# "On Clothes"

## "On Clothes" Summary

A weaver asks about clothes, and Almustafa declares that clothing conceals beauty but fails to hide ugliness. Privacy becomes a harness and chain. He wishes the sun and wind would meet skin rather than raiment. Shame is the loom on which the north wind weaves clothing, and modesty is but a shield against the unclean eyes. The earth delights in bare feet, and the winds delight in playing with one's hair.

## "On Clothes" Analysis

All of Almustafa's hearers must have been surprised to hear Almustafa exalt nudity rather than decry the distinctions of social rank that clothing defines or speak against exorbitant luxury in clothing, as the Hebrew prophets and Jesus often do. Earlier he advises weavers to weave with love of the future wearer, but his preference appears to be putting them out of work by allowing everyone to return to the nature he routinely promotes.



# "On Buying and Selling"

## "On Buying and Selling" Summary

A merchant asks about buying and selling, and Almustafa declares that people will not want provided that they know how to fill their hands. Exchanging the gifts of the earth brings abundance and satisfaction, provided it is done in love and justice. Otherwise, it results in greed and hunger. In the marketplace, farmers and artisans must ask the master spirit of the earth to sanctify the scales and allow no one to come in empty-handed. Singers, dancers and musicians have useful gifts to sell, along with gatherers of fruit and frankincense. No one should leave the marketplace empty-handed, for this keeps the master spirit of the earth from sleeping peacefully.

## "On Buying and Selling" Analysis

Love, which Almustafa has already declared must fill all products destined for the marketplace, and strict justice must reign for commerce to be in harmony with the world. These are fairly standard admonitions in any ethical system.



# "On Crime and Punishment"

## "On Crime and Punishment" Summary

A judge asks about crime and punishment, and Almustafa declares that wronging another wrongs oneself and delays entering the gate of the blessed. Like the ocean, one's god-self is forever undefiled and soars and shines like the sun rather than burrowing into the earth. The god-self dwells inside man's being, even while he is still a shapeless, sleepless pigmy searching to awaken. Neither pigmy nor god-self is involved in crime and punishment. Many call criminals strangers and intruders, but people can rise or fall no farther than those around them. As the whole tree knows when a leaf turns yellow, so too does society participate in all wrongdoing. When marchers leading a parade stumble over a stone, this warns those behind, and when those far behind stumble, those who fail to remove the stone are to blame. Victims often share guilt with their attackers, and sometimes those condemned bear the burden for the guiltless and unblamed. The just and the unjust can no more be separated than black and white threads broken on the loom; the whole loom has to be examined. A husband's part in a wife's infidelity must be weighed. When the righteous want to cut down an evil tree, they should look at the roots, where goodness and badness are entwined. What should judges do with people outwardly honest but thieves in spirit? What should judges do about deceivers and oppressors who are wronged? What should judges do when remorse is greater than the evil committed? Is remorse not what the law seeks to serve? Remorse cannot be forced on the innocent or lifted from the guilty. Justice demands all deeds be viewed in the full light, and the realization all stand as one between the night of pigmy-self and the day of god-self. The cornerstone of the temple lies no higher than the lowest foundation stones.

## "On Crime and Punishment" Analysis

Almustafa's answer postulates a dualist makeup in human beings, labeled the pigmy-self and the god-self, and only in the center of the balance can humans commit crime and be rightly punished. Even then, the Prophet does not absolve society of blame for the aberrancy of crime, even in the case of adultery, which all Middle Eastern societies deal with in summary fashion. Justice must be administered openly, cautiously and scrupulously. The cynic will see naivety in Almustafa's trust in remorse as a true, virtually infallible, measure of justice.





# "On Laws"

## "On Laws" Summary

Answering a lawyer about laws, Almustafa observes that people delight in laying down laws and more so in breaking them, like children building sandcastles and then smashing them with glee. The ocean, however, brings in more sand and laughs with the innocent. To those who view life as a rock, the law is a chisel for carving their own likenesses. Consider cripples who hate dancers and oxen that love the yoke and consider wild animals vagrants. Consider the old serpent that cannot shed its skin and condemns others' nakedness and shamelessness and the person who comes early to the wedding feast, overeats and goes away condemning feasts as illegal. These stand in the sun with their backs turned, so they see only their shadows, the laws. They bend over to trace these. When one faces the sun, images drawn on the earth mean nothing, and when traveling with the wind, one needs no weather vane. Those who break their yoke on the prison door, who are free of anyone's chains and who leave their garment in no one's path fear no laws. Drum and lyre can be silenced, but the skylarks cannot.

## "On Laws" Analysis

Laws ought to be the foundation of crime and justice, but Almustafa belittles law through absurd examples of motivation for legislation and points out that the law is needed only when avoiding the light of day, which he earlier says is where crime and punishment must be adjudicated. Once again, nature (represented by the sonorous skylark), trumps human constructions (drum and lyre) as a measure of truth and righteousness.



# "On Freedom"

## "On Freedom" Summary

An orator asks about freedom, and Almustafa observes that he has seen them worshipping freedom like slaves do a tyrant. Freedom is a yoke and handcuff. It makes Almustafa's heart bleed to see freedom regarded as anything but a goal and fulfillment. People are free not when their days are carefree and their nights are want- and grief-free. Rather, they are free when they can rise above their physical concerns. One cannot do so without breaking at dawn the chains that fasten around the understanding at noon. What people call freedom is a strong, glittering chain, fragments of one's self that one is willing to discard in order to be free. People write unjust laws on their own foreheads and cannot erase them by burning law books or washing the foreheads of their judges. Despots cannot be dethroned without destroying the throne that people erect within themselves, for tyrants cannot rule the truly free and proud. The cares one chooses cannot be cast off, nor fears dispelled once planted in the heart. Everything moves within one's half-embrace, and light and shadow cling in pairs. When shadows fade, the lingering light becomes a shadow to another light. Unfettered freedom becomes a fetter to greater freedom.

## "On Freedom" Analysis

Almustafa has suggested before that people are their own worst enemies, but not with the force shown in this answer to a professional speaker. The search for security in a dualistic world leads people to enslave themselves to laws and tyranny and leaves no one else to blame. Removing the chains and looking to the light in which justice must be administered is the key to freedom.



# "On Reason and Passion"

## "On Reason and Passion" Summary

The priestess speaks again, asking about reason and passion. Almustafa likens the soul to a battlefield where reason and judgment fight passion and appetite, and he wishes he could be a peacemaker, turning discord into melody. Reason and passion are the rudder and sails of the soul. If either breaks, one drifts or goes nowhere. Reason confines while unattended passion destroys. The soul must exalt reason to the height of passion, let it sing and direct passion to become like phoenix rising from its own ashes. Judgment and appetite should be treated like guests in one's house. If either is more honored than the other, the love and faith of both are lost. Sitting in the shade on a hill, one must say in silence, "God rests in reason." When a storm rolls through, say, "God moves in passion." As a breath in God's sphere and leaf in God's forest, one must rest in reason and move in passion.

## "On Reason and Passion" Analysis

The reason/passion dichotomy threatens constantly to fly apart, and each element must be used to make the most of the other. Almustafa again uses nautical imagery to suggest the mortal danger and the myth of phoenix to suggest how the flame of passion can be manipulated to bring positive results. He again suggests how one ought to meditate on whatever is going on in nature to get the most out of reason and passion.

# "On Pain"

## "On Pain" Summary

A woman asks about pain, and Almustafa defines it as the breaking of the shell enclosing one's understanding. One must know pain in order to see the wonder in the daily miracles of one's life. One must accept the seasons of one's heart as one accepts the seasons in nature and be serene in the winters of one's grief. Much of one's pain is self-chosen: the bitter remedy that heals when accepted in silence and tranquility. The physician's hand may be heavy and hard, but the tender hand of the Unseen guides it. The cup burns the lips but is moistened by the Potter's sacred tears.

## "On Pain" Analysis

Pain, like work, helps one find harmony with nature, and like law and freedom, it is largely self-imposed. Almustafa shows God ("the Unseen" and "the Potter") guiding the physician and weeping over the sufferer.



# "On Self-Knowledge"

## "On Self-Knowledge" Summary

A man asks about self-knowledge, and Almustafa declares that people's hearts know in silence the secrets of day and night and that their ears thirst for the sound of their hearts' knowledge. People do well, wanting to put their thoughts into words and touch the naked body of their dreams. The wellspring of the soul must flow to the sea for the depths to be revealed. The depths of knowledge cannot be measured any more than the sea. One ought not to speak about finding *the* truth, only about finding a truth and of meeting the soul walking on one's path rather than finding the path of the soul. The soul walks upon all paths and not on a line. The soul unfolds like a lotus flower having countless petals.

## "On Self-Knowledge" Analysis

Almustafa declares absolutely that people know their aspirations without speaking about them, but he denies they can find absolute truth because life is too profoundly diverse to measure. Nature again provides rich images to consider, and nudity is again exalted.



# "On Teaching"

## "On Teaching" Summary

A teacher asks Almustafa to talk about teaching, and he says that one can reveal only that which lies half-asleep in the dawning of people's knowledge. Teachers transmit faith and lovingness and lead students to the threshold of their own mind. Astronomers can talk of space but not give anyone their understanding. Musicians can sing but not grant anyone an ear or voice. Physicists can talk of weights and measures but not conduct anyone away. One person's vision cannot give another person wings. Everyone stands alone in God's knowledge and must be alone in his knowledge of God and the earth.

## "On Teaching" Analysis

Self-knowledge, Almustafa now says, is the only directly accessible knowledge. Experts can talk about their specialties but not imbue them in their pupils without the pupils themselves tapping into God's vast store of objective knowledge of how the natural world operates.



# "On Friendship"

## "On Friendship" Summary

A youth asks about friendship, and Mustafa answers that a friend is one's needs answered, a field to sow with love and reap with thanksgiving, a table and fireside and the source of peace when one is hungry. When a friend speaks honestly, one fears saying neither yea nor nay. Friends can be silent and yet share their thoughts, desires, expectations and joy. When one parts from a friend there should be no grief, because the friend will be clearer absent, as a mountain climber sees the plain more clearly than those who stand on it. The only purpose of friendship is deepening the spirit, because love that wants anything beyond disclosing its own mystery is not love and becomes unprofitable. Reserve the best for the friend. Do not go to a friend when you have time to kill. Go when you have hours to live. The friend's job is to fill your need, not your emptiness. Laughter and shared pleasures belong in friendships, and little things refresh the heart.

## "On Friendship" Analysis

Almustafa seems to accept the youth's sincerity about wanting to understand friendship and exalts it with fewer qualifications than love and marriage. He makes clear how to behave selflessly in order to be a true friend.

# "On Talking"

## "On Talking" Summary

A scholar asks about talking, and Almustafa says that one speaks when one ceases to be at peace with one's thoughts, when one can no longer dwell in the solitude of one's heart. One finds diversion in sound. Much of one's talking leaves thinking half-murdered, because thought is a bird of space and words are cages. Many seek out the talkative because they fear being alone and seeing their own nakedness. Some reveal truths that they do not understand when they speak, while others have truth within them but do not express it in words. Rhythmic silence lives in them. When one meets a friend, one should let the spirit direct their lips and tongue to speak the truth of the heart as the taste and color of wine are remembered after the vessel is gone.

## "On Talking" Analysis

Almustafa takes the scholar, like the teacher and other professionals, with a grain of salt and suggests that most talking in life is merely giving in to the fear of being silent. Only true friends can talk meaningfully, and even they must exercise care in saying nothing that they will later regret. It is evident that Almustafa has not done a great deal of talking during his twelve years in Orphalese, and the reason is now clear. Most talk is fruitless.





# "On Time"

## "On Time" Summary

An astronomer asks about time, and Almustafa says it is measureless and immeasurable, but people want to direct the course of the spirit by hours and seasons, as though it were a flowing stream. The timeless within a person is aware of life's timelessness and knows that yesterday is today's memory and that tomorrow is today's dream. Everything that exists has existed since the stars were first scattered into space. Who does not feel at the center of his being that the power to love is boundless? Time is undivided and spaceless like love. Vow to let each season encircle all the others and embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing.

## "On Time" Analysis

*The Prophet* is written in the time Albert Einstein's revolutionary views of time and space are being published, and it is not inconceivable that Almustafa's relating time and space to love reflects the great physicist's well-known claim that he wants only to understand how God has ordered the universe. Having already declared that love most perfectly resides in the heart of God, Almustafa advises the people to embrace all of nature in love and - most profoundly and elegantly - to treat past and future as inseparable.



# "On Good and Evil"

## "On Good and Evil" Summary

A city elder asks Almustafa to speak about good and evil, and he answers that he can speak only of good because evil is only good tortured by its own hunger and thirst. To be good is to be one with oneself, and to be evil is the opposite. A divided house is not a den of thieves, just a divided house. A ship without a rudder may wander endlessly but not sink. One is good when one strives to give of oneself and evil when one seeks personal gain. Striving for gain is like a root clinging to the earth, and the fruit cannot tell it to become ripe and give the way it does. For the fruit, giving is a need, and for the root, receiving is a need. One is good when fully awake in one's speech and evil when one's tongue staggers without purpose, but even stumbling speech may strengthen a weak tongue. One is good when one walks boldly and firmly to a goal and evil when one limps away, but even those who limp do not go backward. The strong and swift must not limp before the lame, thinking they are being kind. People are good in countless ways and not evil when they are not good, simply lazy and loitering. Stags, unfortunately, cannot teach turtles to run swiftly. One's giant self lies in goodness. When some long for this, it is like a torrent rushing to the sea, carrying along the secrets of the hillsides and songs of the forest. For others, it is a flat stream. The torrent must not criticize the slowness of the lingering stream. The truly good do not ask the naked or the homeless what has happened to them.

## "On Good and Evil" Analysis

Almustafa's exposition of good and evil recaps several earlier themes. Like joy and sorrow, good and evil are two sides of the same coin. Giving, he now declares, is good or evil depending on motivation. Almustafa mollifies his earlier words on reason/passion and talking by saying that even evil (or rather, non-good, because evil is but defective good) has positive elements that ought not to be dismissed, mocked or condemned. In the striking image of the stag and turtle, he reiterates his views on the ultimate impossibility of teaching. As always, nature is the guide, and it contains both fast- and slow-moving streams. True goodness (like true givers) is just and sensitive.



# "On Prayer"

## "On Prayer" Summary

A priestess asks about prayer, and Almustafa advises people to pray not just in distress and need, but also in the fullness of joy and abundance. Prayer is but the expansion of oneself into the "living ether," bringing comfort and delight. If one cannot help but weep when the soul gives the summons to prayer, the soul should continue until one laughs. When one prays, one rises into the air to meet everyone praying at that moment - including people one can meet only in prayer. Temple visits are for ecstasy and sweet communion, not to ask for anything for oneself or others. It is enough to enter the "temple invisible." Almustafa cannot teach how to pray in words, for God hears only those words he utters through human lips. Nor can Almustafa teach the prayer of seas, forests and mountains, because only those born there can find appropriate prayers in their hearts by listening in the stillness of the night and confessing that God is their winged self, willing in them what they should will. God's desire in people does the desiring, urging people to turn nights into days, all belonging to God. God knows people's needs before they themselves do, and God is everyone's need and the giver of all.

## "On Prayer" Analysis

Almustafa begins with a discourse on prayer and then shifts into an actual prayer addressed to God, confessing that true prayer occurs when God, who knows and provides for everyone's needs, puts words in their mouths and touches their souls to bring them to the temple. Therefore, having tacitly admitted that most people are motivated to pray by distress and need, he declares in his opening exposition that supplication is out of place, because prayer exists for ecstasy and communion with God and all of humankind.



# "On Pleasure"

## "On Pleasure" Summary

A hermit on his annual visit to town asks about pleasure, and Almustafa says it is a freedom-song but not freedom, the blossoming of one's desires but not their fruit, a depth calling to a height but neither the deep nor the high, a caged bird flying but not a space encompassed. Almustafa wishes people would sing the freedom-song wholeheartedly without losing their hearts in the singing. It is wrong to judge and rebuke youth for seeking pleasure as if it were everything. Let them seek and find, together with pleasure, her seven more beautiful sisters. Digging for roots can yield treasure. Some elders regret pleasures they recall, but regret only clouds the mind without chastising it. It is better that they remember their pleasures with gratitude. If it comforts them to regret, however, let them be comforted. Some stand by age between seeking and remembering and fearfully shun all pleasures lest they neglect or offend the spirit, but for them foregoing is pleasure. They too find a treasure. Who can offend the spirit - the nightingale, firefly, flame or smoke? The spirit is not a still pool that a staff can trouble. Often when people deny themselves pleasure, they only store the desire in their being for some tomorrow, but the body knows its heritage and will not be deceived. The body is the harp of the soul, able to produce either sweet music or confused sounds. How can one distinguish the good from the not-good in pleasure? Learn from the bee gathering honey. The flower's pleasure is to yield its honey to the bee as the fountain of its life, and to the flower, the bee is a messenger of love. Both give and receive of pleasure as a need and an ecstasy. The people should be like flowers and bees.

## "On Pleasure" Analysis

Almustafa is liberal, accommodating and reasonable on the subject of pleasure - that is, sex. He acknowledges that the questioner's ascetic views meet his particular needs, but he advises everyone else to make the most of their situations. Youths may seek pleasure because it is natural to their stage in life. They should, however, realize that there is more to life than pleasure. The elderly should embrace old memories rather than condemn youthful indiscretions. Everyone should refrain from being judgmental and stop hiding from the inescapable fact that sex is attractive and natural. Nature, Almustafa declares clearly, cannot be tricked, and the best path, he continues to show, is just to harmonize with it.



# "On Beauty"

## "On Beauty" Summary

A poet asks about beauty, and Almustafa asks how one can find beauty except by making beauty one's way and guide. One cannot speak of beauty unless beauty is the weaver of one's speech. The injured and aggrieved say "beauty is kind and gentle, like a young mother half-shy of her glory." The passionate disagree and say that beauty is a thing of might and dread, like a storm. The tired and weary say beauty whispers softly to their spirit and yields to silence. The restless claim to have heard beauty shouting in the mountains with the sounds of wild beasts. At night, watchmen say beauty will rise with the dawn. At noon, workers and sailors say they have seen beauty "leaning over the earth from the windows of the sunset." In winter, the snow-bound claim beauty will leap upon the hills come spring. In summer, the reapers say they have seen beauty dancing with both autumn leaves and snow in her hair. All of these address not beauty but unsatisfied needs, and beauty is an ecstasy not a need. Beauty is a heart enflamed and soul enchanted. Beauty is neither an image nor a song with eyes or ears open. It is a "garden forever in bloom and a flock of angels ever in flight."

## "On Beauty" Analysis

Almustafa is particularly poetic in telling the poet that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Many err, however, by looking beyond the beauty of the seasons to what will come next. Almustafa's description of beauty as ecstasy instead of need recalls his views on prayer, and his characterization of beauty as eternity gazing at itself in a mirror takes up the theme of how many things in life are but two sides of the same coin.



# "On Religion"

## "On Religion" Summary

An old priest asks about religion, and Almustafa asks what else he has been speaking about today. Religion is all deeds, reflection or wonder and surprise springing in the soul. Faith cannot be separated from actions or belief from occupations. One cannot apportion things between God and oneself or between soul and body. All of one's hours are wings that beat through space from self to self. Those who wear morality as their best garment are better off naked. Those who define their conduct by ethics imprison the songbird in a cage, and the freest songs come not through bars and wires. Worship is a window, which can be open or shut. Daily life is one's temple and religion, and one must take in everything one owns: plough, forge, mallet, lute and everything fashioned in necessity or for delight. One cannot rise above one's achievements or fall lower than one's failures. All people should be taken in, for in adoration one cannot fly higher than another's hopes or humble oneself lower than another's despair. One cannot know God while being a solver of riddles. Rather one should watch God playing with one's children, see God walking in the clouds, reaching out in the lightning and descending in the rain. One should see God smiling in flowers and waving arms in trees.

## "On Religion" Analysis

A cleric finally asks the ultimate question about religion, and Almustafa recapitulates what he has been saying about the unity of all life. All human institutions limit the enjoyment of life. All people and the actions of their lives are interlinked, and God reveals himself in everything good and beautiful.



# "On Death"

## "On Death" Summary

Almitra asks about death, and Almustafa replies that people can know death's secret only by seeking it in the heart of life. Owls are blind in daylight and cannot unveil the mystery of light. Life and death are one, just as the river and sea are one. One's hopes and desires contain a silent knowledge of the beyond, like seeds dreaming beneath the snow of spring. Trust your dreams, which hide the gate to eternity. The fear of death is like what happens when a king honors a shepherd by laying his hand on him. As the shepherd fills with joy, he is all the more mindful that he is trembling. Dying means standing naked to the wind and melting into the sun. The cessation of breathing frees the breath from restless tides that it may rise, expand and unencumbered seek God. Drinking from the river of silence allows one to sing. Only on the mountaintop does one begin to climb. Only when the earth claims one's limbs can one truly dance.

## "On Death" Analysis

Almitra returns to ask the ultimate question. Almustafa declares that "death is the other side of the coin of life" and an integral part of the natural world. The fear of death apparently embarrasses the people of Orphalese. Almustafa declares it is natural but that death ought also to engender joy because it frees the soul to approach God.



# "The Farewell"

## "The Farewell" Summary

When evening falls, Almitra blesses the day, the place and Almustafa's words, but Almustafa claims he has also been a listener. He descends from the temple with the people following and reaches his ship. From the deck, he tells the people that the wind bids him to leave, and he must go. Wanderers seek the lonelier way, never ending a day where they begin it. They travel while the earth sleeps. They are seeds of a tenacious plant that the wind scatters. Almustafa's days in Orphalese have been brief, and the words he has spoken briefer still. He promises to come on the tide with richer heart and lips. Death may hide him, but from the silence, he will seek their understanding. Truth will reveal itself more clearly in words more akin to their thoughts. Almustafa will go with the wind but not down into emptiness. People's needs change, but neither their love nor the desire to love should satisfy their needs. Mist and dew rise and gather into clouds to fall as rain, and Almustafa has been like mist. The people's heartbeats are in his heart, and their breath on his face. He has known them all, their joys and pains. He has been like a lake among the mountains, mirroring the summits in them. To him in silence, their children's laughter has come in streams, and their youths' longing has come in rivers. When they reach his depth, the streams and rivers still sing.

The boundlessness of the people of Orphalese has been most important. They are cells and sinews in a Vast Man, whose song is a soundless throbbing. In beholding the Vast Man, Almustafa has beheld and loved them. Love crosses vast distances. Visions, expectations and presumptions cannot outsoar that flight. The Vast Man in them is like a giant oak covered with apple blossoms, binds them to the earth, lifts them into space on his fragrance and makes them deathless in his durability. The people have been told they, like a chain, are as weak as their weakest link. Almustafa holds this is a half-truth. They are also as strong as their strongest link. To measure their smallest deed is to reckon the power of ocean by the frail foam. To judge them by their failures is to cast blame on the seasons for their inconstancy. The people of Orphalese are like an ocean, on which they can float heavy ships but cannot control the tides. They are like the seasons. Spring can be denied but still arrives and is not offended.

Word knowledge is a shadow of wordless knowledge, and the people's thoughts and Almustafa's words are both waves from a sealed memory that records their yesterdays and the ancient of days when the earth did not know them and of nights when the earth was still filled with confusion. Other wise men have brought them wisdom, but Almustafa has come to *take* their wisdom and has found something greater than wisdom. He has found a flame-spirit in them while they worry about the grave. There are no graves here, but a cradle and stepping-stone. Whenever they pass the fields where their ancestors are buried, they will see themselves and their children dancing hand-in-hand. They often make merry without knowing it. Others have come with golden promises greater than Almustafa's, but the people of Orphalese have been more generous in their gift to





him. They have given him a deeper thirst for life that turns life into a fountain, and Almustafa finds that the living water drinks him while he is drinking it.

Some have deemed Almustafa proud in not accepting their gifts, and he agrees he is too proud to receive wages. He is not too proud to accept gifts, though. The people's loving mindfulness of his days and nights have made food sweet in Almustafa's mouth and filled his sleep with visions. He blesses them for giving much without knowing they have given at all, for the good deed that calls itself by tender names becomes parent to a curse. Some have called Almustafa so aloof and drunk with his aloneness that he talks to trees rather than people, sitting on hilltops and looking at the city. How could he see them, Almustafa asks, except from on high and at a distance? One can see near only from afar. Others have called him a stranger and lover of unreachable heights and asked why he seeks the unattainable. Why will he not be one of them and eat and drink with them? If their solitude were deeper, Almustafa says, they would know he has been seeking the secret of their joy and pain, hunting for their larger selves. The hunter, however, is also the hunted, and many of his arrows have struck his own breast. The flier has been a creeper, and the believer has been a doubter. Almustafa has stuck his finger into his own wounds in order to have greater belief in and knowledge of them. Almustafa declares that they are not enclosed in their bodies or confined by houses or fields. They dwell in light on high and fly the winds. Their spirit is free and envelops the earth. These words may seem vague, but that is the beginning of all things.

Almustafa wants to be remembered as a beginning. Life is conceived in mist, not crystal. Perhaps crystal is mist in decay. Whenever they remember him, Almustafa wants the people of Orphalese to remember that what seems most feeble and bewildering in them is the strongest and most determined. Breath creates and strengthens their bones. Dreams have built their city. He wishes they could see the tides of that breath and nothing else and hear the whispering of the dream and nothing else. They do not see or hear, however, and that is fine, because the hands that wove it will lift the veil, and the fingers that kneaded it will pierce the clay filling their ears. The people will see and hear and still not deplore having been blind and deaf. All hidden purposes will be revealed, and they will bless the darkness as they do the light.

Almustafa sees the pilot standing at the helm, ready to sail, and declares that his captain is overly patient. Winds, sails and rudder want to sail, but the captain waits for Almustafa to fall silent. Almustafa is ready. The stream has reached the sea and been gathered to its breast. Almustafa promises to return, when his longing will gather a new body and be born of another woman. Time has passed like a dream. Almustafa has spent his youth among them, but noontime is upon them, and they look to a fuller day. In the twilight of memory, they will meet and speak again, and Orphalese should sing him a deeper song. If their hands meet in another dream, they will build another tower.

Almustafa gives a signal to the sailors, and they are off eastward. The people's cry rises and wafts out to sea. Only Almitra is silent and remains when the others have dispersed, remembering Almustafa's saying, "A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me."



## "The Farewell" Analysis

The shipside farewell oration describes how Almustafa evaluates his twelve-year sojourn in Orphalese, defending behaviors some have criticized and promising to return to them. He admonishes them to seek excellence and wait patiently for the hidden things in life to be fully revealed. Almustafa remains encouraging, challenging, hopeful and - above all - enigmatic to the end.



# Characters

## Almustafa

The chosen and beloved Prophet around whom the story revolves, Almustafa has spent twelve years of his youth in Orphalese, serving as the people's harp, flame, seeker of silence and guardian of the night. Much of his time has been spent in the hills, watching and listening to their lives. The people have generously met his physical needs, but some criticize his aloofness. Now the ship he has been watching for to take him home arrives, and Almustafa comes down from the hills to the temple, bittersweet about leaving. Almustafa wonders tearfully what he can say to the loving people that flock to see him off, knowing he cannot speak his innermost secret. On the prompting of the seer Almitra, who believes in him, Almustafa agrees, for posterity's sake, to answer their questions about what separates birth and death. Almustafa responds to a series of twenty-six questions. In allusions drawn from nature and everyday activities, he urges them to appreciate the unity of life under God. Departing the temple at dusk, he leads the crowd to the pier, where he delivers a long and moving farewell oration, thanking and encouraging them and promising enigmatically to return in another incarnation.

## Almitra

Almitra is a seer in the temple of Orphalese who believes in Almustafa during his twelve-year sojourn and convinces him to tell the townspeople about what separates birth and death before he sails away for home. Almitra opens the questioning by asking about love and marriage before others grow bold enough to put forth their own concerns. After a priest asks about the meaning of religion, allowing Almustafa to summarize his views on life, Almitra speaks up again to ask the ultimate question about the meaning of death. When the answer is complete, as evening falls, Almitra blesses the day, Orphalese and Almustafa's words, listens to his long farewell oration on the docks, tearfully watches his departure and remains when the crowd has dispersed. She meditates on the Prophet's promise, "A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me."



# Objects/Places

## Orphalese

The long-established, fortified seaside city in which *The Prophet* is set, the main setting in Orphalese is the temple, where Almustafa addresses the people and which is attended by a male and female priesthood. The town also has a thriving, bustling marketplace; stalls for a rich variety of artisans; at least one school (including an astronomical observatory); a court of law; places accommodating poets and orators; and individual homes for residents rich and poor. Around Orphalese stretch abundant fields and orchards irrigated by slow-moving streams, cut by rapid torrents and dotted with quiet ponds. It is nestled beneath the majestic hills where a hermit spends most of his time practicing asceticism. From the summit, Almustafa has meditated on life and watched for the ship that will bear him home.

## The Ship

Orphalese has been awaiting the ship that will bear him home, and as he leaves he promises to be reborn. The ship may symbolize passage from the earthly plane of existence to the next. That is, it may symbolize death.



# Themes

## God

God in *The Prophet* is a personal, willing and compassionate being. In the heart of God, love most perfectly resides. Marriage is eternal in God's mind, and he intends it not to be controlling. God smiles when people give unreservedly and with interest in reward. People should silently meditate on God both as resting in reason and moving in passion. Unseen, God guides the physician's hand and weeps over whatever heavy treatments are required to heal disease. God knows each person individually and must be known by each individual. God is man's winged self, willing in each person what he or she should will and desiring in each person what he or she should desire. Everything belongs to God, and he knows each individual's needs before he or she becomes aware of them. God is both everyone's Need and the Giver of all. One cannot apportion things between God and one's self any more than one can apportion things between one's body and soul. One cannot know God as a solver of riddles, but one can know God by watching God at play with one's children, walking in the clouds, reaching out in the lightning or descending in the rain. God can be seen smiling in flowers and waving his arms in trees. Death prepares people to rise, expand and seek God without life's encumbrances, and in the end, God will lift the veil of mystery he has woven, clear the ears he has plugged and allow people see his hidden purposes. Then, they will bless the darkness as they do the light.

## Humanity

*The Prophet* views humanity as a "Vast Man," a giant oak covered with apple blossoms, singing a soundless throbbing, binding every individual human to the earth, lifting them into space on his fragrance and making them deathless in his durability. Humans may well be as weak as their weakest link, but they are also as strong as their strongest link. Individually, humans are cells and sinews in this Vast Man, and each human's "Giant Self" lies in goodness. Humans sense at the center of their being the boundless power of love, and they are good when they strive to give of themselves and evil when they seek personal gain. Humans are good when they walk boldly and firmly to a goal and evil when they limp away. Humans can be good in countless ways but are not rendered evil by failing to be good. They are then simply lazy and loitering. People should visit the temple for ecstasy and sweet communion, not to ask for anything for themselves or others. For humans, pleasure is a freedom-song that they should sing wholeheartedly without losing their hearts. It is dangerous and futile to deny one's self pleasure, because the body is the harp of the soul, able to produce either sweet music or confused sounds. Each human consists of an undefiled "god-self" that soars and shines and a shapeless, sleepless "pigmy-self" that fights for control. Humans can rise or fall no farther than those around them, and the wise realize goodness and badness are entwined at every person's roots. All stand as one between the night of pigmy-self and the day of god-self.



Humans do many things that unnecessarily restrict their freedom. Spouses control one another. Parents hinder their children's free development. Humans ought to be able to live on fragrance and air alone, but they should at least acknowledge the sacrifice of the pure animals and fruit they consume when they fall short of the goal. People ought to live in forests and meadows, but they dwell fearfully behind walls, seeking comforts that lull them to sleep and jeer at the dignity of the flesh. These false comforts mock sound senses, murder the passion of the soul and walk grinning to the funeral. Human labor, of whatever sort, becomes noble when the worker remembers with love whoever will benefit from his or her product. Humans delight in laying down laws, and more so in breaking them, but worship freedom like slaves do a tyrant. The soul is a battlefield in humans where reason and judgment fight passion and appetite. Humans must know pain - often self-inflicted - in order to see the wonder in the daily miracles in life and accept the seasons of their heart as they do the seasons of the year. In every season and in every occupation, humans should acknowledge and strive to live in harmony with creation. People ought not to speak about finding *the* truth, only about finding a truth. The human soul unfolds like a lotus flower having countless petals. Friendship is the greatest human gift and should fill need instead of emptiness. When humans talk, they often leave thinking half-murdered and do so out of fear of being alone and seeing their own nakedness.

## Nature

*The Prophet* uses nature to help people understand how to live. Everything that exists has existed since the stars were first scattered into space, and time is as undivided and spaceless as love. People should vow to let each season encircle all the others and "embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing." In autumn, gathering grapes, people should realize that they too are a vineyard destined for the winepress and bottling in eternal vessels. In winter, drinking wine, they should have a song in their hearts, remembering all that has gone into the cup. The laws people promulgate are no more lasting than children's sandcastles before the onslaught of the relentless ocean. Skylarks cannot be silenced like people's drums, lyres and voices. The wellspring of the soul must flow to the sea for the depths to be revealed, and the depths of human knowledge cannot be measured any more than the sea. The human soul unfolds like a lotus flower having countless petals. Striving for gain is like a root clinging to the earth, and the fruit cannot order it to become ripe or give the way it does. For the fruit, giving is a need, and for the root receiving is a need. Stags, unfortunately, cannot teach turtles to run swiftly. The longing for goodness is like a torrent rushing to the sea, carrying along the secrets of the hillsides and songs of the forest. For others, the longing is a calm stream. The spirit is not a still pool that a staff can trouble. Beauty is neither an image nor a song with eyes or ears open, but rather a "garden forever in bloom." One can know God by seeing him walking in the clouds, reaching out in the lightning, descending in the rain, smiling in flowers and waving his arms in trees. Death is like standing naked to the wind and melting into the sun, being set free from restless tides, drinking from the river of silence and being free to climb the mountaintop, sing and dance. All of these comparisons tell the reader to seek truth in nature.



Almustafa sees himself as a mountain lake mirroring the summits of the Orphalese. Their children's laughter has come to him in streams and their youths' longing in rivers, and reaching his depth, they still sing. The people of Orphalese are like an ocean, on which they can float heavy ships but not control the tides. Seafarers are like seeds of a tenacious plant the wind scatters. Try as human may, they cannot prevent spring from arriving - or offend it by their efforts. The people of Orphalese have given Almustafa a deeper thirst for life, and he finds the living water itself thirsty, drinking him even as he drinks it.



# Style

## Point of View

*The Prophet* narrates the leave-taking of Almustafa after twelve years living in the port city of Ophalese. The narrator briefly sets up the arrival of the ship that will bear Almustafa home and his bittersweet departure. In between, the narrator quotes Almustafa's responses to a series of twenty-six questions about life and death posed by the local citizenry in an attempt to gain from him all the wisdom they can for posterity. The narrator knows no more than he sees and hears and presents it as an objective chronicle of a painful day of parting.

## Setting

*The Prophet* is set in the temple and on the docks of the port city of Ophalese as the whole town gathers to bid farewell to Almustafa, whose ship has finally arrived to bear him home after a twelve-year sojourn among them. Ophalese appears to be a small but prosperous city at the center of an agricultural community. Its fields and woods stretch to the foot of the majestic hills, where Almustafa has spent much of his time observing the people from afar. Ophalese has the feel of the Middle East and could well be in Gibran's native Lebanon; the geography fits perfectly. Even so, *The Prophet* can be set in nearly any historical era in a never-changing land, up to the point when sailing ships give way to steam powered ones.

## Language and Meaning

The body of *The Prophet* is written in graceful, flowing and highly symbolic English plain verse reminiscent of the style of the Hebrew Bible. Prose narration at the beginning of the ship's arrival, the gathering of the townspeople to see Almustafa tearfully off to home and the actual boarding and departure at the end are no less lush than Almustafa's answers to twenty-six questions about the meaning of life and death. The text is full of metaphor and simile, as Almustafa draws his answers and meanings from nature. Quite prominent is the parallelism common to Arabic and Hebrew literature, whereby a statement is made twice in succession, not as mere repetition but with the second statement subtly altering the first to bring out a more profound meaning. Allusions to Hebrew and Christian scriptures are frequent, but the philosophy the Prophet Almustafa expounds differs from Christian orthodoxy. Gibran's mystical drawings, which are interspersed with the text - and include two explicit crucifixions - notwithstanding, *The Prophet* cannot be considered an allegory of the ministry of Jesus Christ.



## Structure

*The Prophet* consists of a brief description of the port city of Orphalese that Almustafa is leaving after a twelve-year sojourn and fairly brief answers to a series of twenty-six questions posed by various city dwellers about the meaning of life and death. It concludes with a description of the final farewell.



## Quotes

"Almustafa, the chosen and the beloved, who was a dawn unto his own day, had waited twelve years in the city of Orphalese for his ship that was to return and bear him back to the isle of his birth." *The Coming of the Ship*, pg. 3.

"Love one another, but make not a bond of love:

"Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls." *On Marriage*, pg. 15.

"Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

"For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable." *On Children*, pg. 18.

"The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.

"They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish." *On Giving*, pg. 21.

"Work is love made visible.

"And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy." *On Work*, pg. 28.

"Forget not that modesty is for a shield against the eye of the unclean.

"And when the unclean shall be no more, what were modesty but a fetter and a fouling of the mind?" *On Clothes*, pgs. 35-36.

"Like the ocean is your god-self;

"It remains for ever undefiled.

"And like the ether it lifts but the winged.

"Even like the sun is your god-self;

"It knows not the ways of the mole nor seeks it in the holes of the serpent." *On Crime and Punishment*, pg. 39.

"You delight in laying down laws,

"Yet you delight more in breaking them.

"Like children playing by the ocean who build sand-towers with constancy and then destroy them with laughter." *On Laws*, pg. 44.



"I would have you consider your judgment, and your appetite even as you would two loved guests in your house.

"Surely you would not honour one guest above the other; for he who is more mindful of one loses the love and the faith of both." On Reason and Passion, pg. 51.

"Much of your pain is self-chosen.

"It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self." On Pain, pg. 52.

"And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit.

"For love that seeks aught but the disclosure of its own mystery is not love but a net cast forth: and only the unprofitable is caught." On Friendship, pg. 59.

"You are good when you are one with yourself.

"Yet when you are not one with yourself you are not evil.

"For a divided house is not a den of thieves; it is only a divided house." On Good and Evil, pg. 64.

"Have I spoken this day of aught else?

"Is not religion all deeds and all reflection,

"And that which is neither deed nor reflection, but a wonder and a surprise ever springing in the soul, even while the hands hew the stone or bend the loom?" On Religion, pg. 77.

"For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

"And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?" On Death, pg. 81.

"It is in the vast man that you are vast,

"And in beholding him that I beheld you and loved you." The Farewell, pg. 85.

"And in this lies my honour and my reward, -

"That whenever I come to the fountain to drink I find the living water itself thirsty;

"And it drinks me while I drink it." The Farewell, pg. 88.

## Topics for Discussion

How, overall, does Almustafa rate his ministry to Orphalese?

How does Almitra figure in *The Prophet*?

How does Almustafa view nudity?

How are ships used symbolically in *The Prophet*?

How does Almustafa relate to cities?

What is the function of human labor?

What is God's function in *The Prophet*? Is God a creator, provider or savior, or does God serve some other function?

Does Almustafa's enigmatic promise to return through reincarnation fit in with his teachings on human nature?