



مؤسسة يوسف بك كرم

Youssef Boutros Karam

- Born in the town of Ehden, northern Lebanon in mid May 1823.
His father was Sheikh Boutros Karam, director of Ehden. His mother, Miriam, was the daughter of Sheikh Antonius Abu Khattar El-Ayntourini.
- He learned Arabic and Aramaic languages, as well as Italian and French. In addition to learning grammar and syntax of those languages, he enriched his knowledge by enhancing his understanding of various topics including religious, intellectual, scientific, historical and administration issues. He also mastered chivalry skills such as horse riding, hand-to-hand combat, sword and shield fighting, shooting and weapon maintenance under the supervision of Sheikh Imad Hashem El-Akouri. Young Karam lived the life of faith and fulfilled his religious duty by completing prayers as is obligatory at all times and

situations. He would attend the early morning mass, kneeling and praying the Rosary. He always wore a blessed icon of the Crucifix. Since his early days, Karam relied on a distinguished bravery, high standard of education and deep faith. He grew up as a man of faith, integrity, and literature, a standing which often exceeded his status as a man of the sword and politics in the traditional sense.

- In 1845, a 23-year old Karam proved his bravery, faith and devotion when he confronted Ottoman troops on the march to disarm the residents of the north. He did not only defeat the Ottomans, but also seized large cache of weapons and ammunition. Infuriated by Karam's resounding success, the Ottoman ruler of Tripoli announced a reward for the capture of Karam, dead or alive. When Karam learned of the reward placed on his head, he walked into the Ottoman headquarters in Tripoli, alone, and confronted the Pasha. "Are you really Youssef Karam?" Pasha asked. "Yes, I heard that you had placed a reward on my head. Here I am now at your mercy, do what you wish, but donate your reward to the poor." replied Karam. The commander asked: "Why did you revolt against the authorities?". "I heard that your army was marching to disarm our people through brutal force.

Your troops had earlier mistreated people of Keserwan where churches were violated and priests were tortured and abused. My love for my country and my resentment toward oppression and cruelty drove me to do what I did", Karam replied. The Pasha's ire turned into admiration for Karam's bravery. He shook Karam's hand, and granted him an immediate pardon.

- In 1849, in addition to his post as the director of Ehden, he was appointed executive of the Register. In the summer of 1849, a group of American Protestant missionaries rented a house in Ehden and claimed that they wish to open a school. Karam ordered them to pack up and immediately leave Ehden, saying "Ehden is the stronghold of the true Christian faith and does not need anyone to direct its people to the path of Christ."
- He founded the Lebanese Scouts with rules and teachings similar to today's scouts. The scout movement contributed to the patriotic awakening by playing an important role.
- On 8 December 1854, Karam founded the Immaculate Conception Fraternity which received the blessing of the Patriarch and the support of the people. The fraternity motto read "Blessed is the immaculate conception of our mother Mary who is clear of the original sin." He organised spiritual sessions and made sure that bad

habits are abolished and that a respectable proper dress code is worn inside the church.

- On 14 March 1857, he was assigned by the people of Ehden and al-Jibbe to be the region's ruler and was granted comprehensive administrative and judicial powers.
- Late August 1859, Karam decided to retire from politics to concentrate on the service of God by helping the clerics spread the spiritual message. However, the 1860 bloody events forced Karam to return to the political arena.
- In 1860, he was appointed the acting Christian Governor for Mt Lebanon.
- In 1862, Karam rejected the new Moutasarifeen system which was imposed by the European nations and the Ottoman Empire because it allowed a foreigner to be the ruler of Mt Lebanon. Karam's rejection earned him his first exile.
- On 12 November 1864, Karam secretly returned to Lebanon following the renewal of the term of Dawood Pasha, the foreign Moutasarif.
- He fought numerous battles against the Ottoman army with Bnachi being the biggest in which Karam and his fewer men defeated the might of the Ottoman army. The battle of Sebhel was another major battle along with

numerous other battles where Karam and his men emerged victorious.

- In February 1866, Karam agreed to leave for his second exile to spare his men and people more battles, blood and destruction. As he was leaving Lebanon's shores he stated his famous motto "I shall sacrifice myself so that Lebanon may live."
- During his long exile which lasted until his death, Karam never spared a political nor a diplomatic effort to change the oppressive regime imposed on his country and his people.
- In 1878, Karam rented a villa in Napoli, Italy, he called the "Villa Libanaise" where he distanced himself from politics in order to dedicate the rest of his life to his Christian faith. He turned one of the rooms into a small place of worship decorated with portraits of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and St Joseph, complete with a wooden altar. Karam spent hours praying.
- In his last days, Karam founded the St. Joseph Religious Association dedicated to help the poor, sick and needy and spread the word of Christ. The association's centre was located at Mar Youssef, Abra, between Zgharta and Ehden in northern Lebanon.
- On 7th of April 1889, Karam passed away in Napoli, Italy.

- On 13 September 1889, his body was brought back to Zgharta and was moved to Ehden on the next day to keep at Mar Gerges Cathedral Ehden. 123 years later, his body remains in good condition despite the fact the body was buried in Napoli and later transported by sea to Lebanon.
- On 11 September 1932, a bronze statue of Karam was erected in his memory outside the Cathedral of Mar Gerges, Ehden.