
Reflection on the Epic of Gilgamesh

A quest is a search or longing for something, it is a journey that has to be taken in order to find what you are yearning/looking for, it is a goal; it is something in which you pursue. In this story Gilgamesh goes on many quests, searching for what he desires, whether it is physical or mental, and he does not stop until he finds what he is yearning for.

Gilgamesh was a King in the city of Uruk, Mesopotamia in the historical era; he was also seen as a hero. The epic of Gilgamesh was one of the earliest epics recorded in the world of literature which focuses on civilization and political and social organizations as well as cultural and social influences. Gilgamesh was fearful of death and yearned immortality; he wanted a lifetime of living and did not want to be forgotten. In the epic, feelings, emotions, and personalities are put to the test; quests are taken to find comfort, friendship, and clarity. Gilgamesh was born and raised in a very manly dominated area surrounded by power and strong beings.

In this story of Gilgamesh, civilization is very visible as it refers to how many different individuals live in the city and the way they live, it indicates how they get by, it explores their views, cultures and behaviors. The city they live in could be seen as a polytheistic society because there are many rulers/Gods such as priests, warriors, kings and nobles. In this story each of the Gods forms and shapes people by playing an important role and influences their choices in their daily life. There are also many characters that play their part in this story with many different personalities and opinions on each other but also try to influence where they can and leave a mark.

A character who was close to Gilgamesh was Enkidu; he was seen as a best friend and a companion, someone who stood by his side to encourage him in life on all his adventures. Shamhat was the temples prostitute/sex worker who seduced Enkidu and achieved it; she only cared about the good/lavish things in life. An important character was Anu; he was the father of the gods, the one above all, and the god of the sky. The parents of Gilgamesh were Lugulbanda who was the King of Uruk and his mother Ninsun who was seen as the goddess filled with wisdom. Ishtar was the goddess of love and war, and Ut-Napistim was a survivor of the flood. Shamash was seen as a personal god to Gilgamesh. Two 'bad' characters were the Bull of Heaven who tried to attack Gilgamesh and Enkidu and the main enemy was Humbaba, he was a demon and the most feared.

The father of Enkidu viewed Gilgamesh as the strongest person and saw him as mighty and undefeatable. Shamhat was ecstatic when she mentioned Gilgamesh to Enkidu for the first time, she spoke of his strength and how he overpowered others, she praised his appearance as

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well his traits and portrays him as the greatest there ever was. At first, Enkidu despises Gilgamesh and was not of him at all, they had a fall out and fought against each other but later gained respect for each other, they became close friends. Gilgamesh's parents praised their son especially his mother, she nurtured him and always cared about his wellbeing especially when he went on dangerous quests, she always wanted him to be safe.

An adventure/quest Gilgamesh went on was to slay Humbaba, the ferocious demon and takes Enkidu along with him, Enkidu however doubts their ability and makes excuses to not proceed with it. Gilgamesh did not want to feel or be seen as weak, he would even risk dying as long as his legacy would live on and he was remembered as a hero. Enkidu put thoughts in his head and Gilgamesh was seeking for advice and the one person he knew he would value their opinion was Ninsun. Ninsun prayed to the gods for them to be protected at all costs, to be safe, even though Enkidu was not even her son she wished for him to survive this quest, she was very fearful and against what Gilgamesh was planning to do, but hoped success came out of it.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu then started their journey to the Cedar forest but as Gilgamesh laid there each night in the darkness, dreams consumed his mind, this is when Gilgamesh starts to feel less powerful and not like the strong person he is known to be. Enkidu and Gilgamesh's friendship is then tested and Enkidu lifts up his spirit and encourages him. As they faced Humbaba, he pleaded to Gilgamesh not to kill him and begged, trying to get inside Gilgamesh's head but it did not sit well with Enkidu as they came to do one thing and that was to kill Humbaba and so they did.

As Gilgamesh returned home, he returns as a hero and Ishtar throws herself at him claiming that he should marry her but he sees through her motives, he refuses to be one of her puppets just like every other man she has been with. He feels she would be of no use and he would gain nothing from being with her, Ishtar feels rejected and threatened and plots to end Gilgamesh, and gets access to the Bull of Heaven and uses it to her advantage. She summons the Bull to attack Gilgamesh but his friendship is too strong with Enkidu and they bond as one, together they kill the Bull and cut its heart out and horns. After all the journeys Gilgamesh has taken with Enkidu by his side, he realizes their friendship was actually also like a quest, as they discovered each other.

Enkidu has a dream that he is going to die but Gilgamesh will live on, he then reaches out to everyone, as twelve days go by, his condition gets worse and he eventually passes away. Gilgamesh reflects on everything Enkidu has taught him, he had an impact, and their friendship will forever be valued. Enkidu helped Gilgamesh on his own quest with himself, helping him find his inner strengths and building him up when he needed it, he yearned to be a hero and Enkidu motivated him to do so. The one person who influenced him is now gone and he feels as if all his quests were meaningless and all for nothing as the one person who was right beside him

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while doing so is gone forever. His last words to Gilgamesh were “I do not die like one who falls in a battle. I feared the battle, but to die in bed is worse. My friend, the one who falls in combat makes his name, I die in shame”.

After his best friend’s death, Gilgamesh sets himself to go on a quest to find eternal life and to do so he needs to cross the waters. He meets Utanapishtim who survived a flood and the significance with this flood is that it can be compared to Noah’s Arks in the Bible. Utanapishtim tells him that he was granted eternal life and this is all that Gilgamesh yearns for, he tries to gain immortality by going nights without sleep but fails and this is one of failures that are evident. He craves immortality in a way that he would do anything to please the Gods but once he fails to do so, he feels weak. This shows aspects of the physical part in the story, Gilgamesh is only human and just like everyone else, and he is not a super human although he is seen as one.

Gilgamesh is formed by the society, everyone shapes him into who he is and what he should be, he is seen as a hero and King and so this is the way he should act at all times, an image of him was painted and he should uphold to it. Throughout his life there were any influences, people making decisions and choices for him, him following the norms and rules to please everyone else. The way he acted and did certain things were public to the eye and anyone could approve or judge him for the own personal choices he made, he was created and portrayed in a way that he is undefeatable which is how some people in our own modern day society does to others as well. There are many comparisons that could be made in relation to many other stories about powerful leaders and or the everyday person, how society forms the person you are and who you should be.

In the epic, there are successes and failures Gilgamesh faces, he gains friendships, and becomes a better person because of it but also suffers and mourns the death of Enkidu, he feels lost and worthless. The one thing more than anything in the story that Gilgamesh made a mission to gain was immortality, he was obsessed with the idea of it, he yearned to be immortal and feared death itself. Although he does not gain immortality in physical form, his fame became immortal and the tale of it will forever be a legacy left behind for him to be remembered by.

In the process of beating his enemies and becoming a hero, he suffered a loss as well, so there are always two sides to a story. Death is inevitable and no one can escape it, not even someone with power like Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh gained more strength through the quests he went through, maturity is evident, he grew up as a person mentally and was taught important life lessons, and he understood his city and what they wanted from him as a person. It shaped him into who he was, in the beginning he was just seen as a hero but now he is a hero with gained traits that he can stand

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by because he has experienced and explored the quest of love and friendship and maturity.

He used his power for good and not bad, he had authority but did not take advantage of it, instead he chose to open up and be vulnerable to those around him. Despite the main epics and quests he went on fighting and battling, it was an internal battle and personal journey to find himself as well.

In conclusion, the epic of Gilgamesh taught me that death is in fact inevitable and no matter who you are or what you did, you will never be immortal so instead live life and learn lessons because the only thing you will leave behind is your legacy and a handful of memories and accomplishments as well as failures for everyone to remember you by. In life, in order to succeed you have to fail a few times too, just like they say, you need to walk before you can run.

Life throws curves at everyone and just like Gilgamesh, you are prone to fight, as quickly as life can begin, it can end as well.

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