

# Gilgamesh and death essay sample

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Death is a very large theme in the “ The Epic of Gilgamesh.” Being that this epic largely represented the Sumerian and Mesopotamians idea I believe the feeling of Gilgamesh himself on death and it’s aftermath would be very much the same for most of the society in the time that it was written. Gilgamesh was largely afraid of dying and did everything he could to avoid this inevitable fate.

The first major sign we have of Gilgamesh’s fear of dying comes when his friend Enkidu dies. At first Gilgamesh cannot even accept his death, he does not even bury the body until maggots start to appear in Enkidu. Eventually, he realizes that he too must face death one day. This fear is clearly indicated when Gilgamesh states “ I am afraid of death” (The Epic of Gilgamesh, 70.) This fear prompts Gilgamesh’s trip to the East to see the immortal Uta-napishti, to discover a way to immortality for himself. This again shows his willingness to fight a dangerous trip to what is considered the end of the world. The scorpion-man advises Gilgamesh of the danger of this trip (The Epic of Gilgamesh 71-73) but this did not stop Gilgamesh for his desire for immortality far exceeded his fear of the dangers of the journey.

Gilgamesh’s fear of death again becomes evident when he reaches the sea shore. He is warned by the tavern-keeper that there has never been a way across the ocean and that “ the crossing is perilous, it way full of hazard, and midway lie the Waters of Death, blocking the passage forward,” (The Epic of Gilgamesh 78.) Again, Gilgamesh presses on for his fear of dying is too great to give up.

The next part of his journey he is instructed to get material to construct a boat to cross the Waters of Death (The Epic of Gilgamesh 82.) After he crosses these perilous waters he finally reaches the man he truly wants to see, the immortal Uta-napishti.

It seems that Gilgamesh has already gone through so much to try to gain immortality. It is his fear of death that has motivated him through all of these tiresome tasks. Uta-napishti is given immortality by the gods because he was the one man to survive the Deluge. These floods are a one time event and will never happen again, therefore Gilgamesh can not earn immortality the same way. After hearing the story of how Enkidu died and the grief it put Gilgamesh through, Unanapishti formulates a way for him to earn immortality. Unanapishti suggests he go six days and seven nights without sleeping.

Gilgamesh failed this task very quickly. Uta-napishti's wife, Ur-shanabi felt bad for Gilgamesh as indicated by her saying " You come here, O Gilgamesh, by toil and by travail, what do I give you for your homeward journey?" (The Epic of Gilgamesh 98.) This shows her sorrow for Gilgamesh. She convinces her husband to tell him of a prickly plant at the bottom of the ocean that will rejuvenate him if it is in his possession. Gilgamesh attained this plant only to have it stolen by a serpent while Gilgamesh rested and bathed in a Welcoming Pool.

Gilgamesh then gave up on his work to try to defeat death and despite his long hard journey, returns to Uruk no closer to immortality than he left. His fear of ending up dead like his friend Enkidu has finally become an inevitable

reality and he has the ferryman part the waters of the Euphrates to make his tomb. It seems in the end that despite his failure, Gilgamesh has a new appreciation for life. Maybe he learned not to take it for granted, or maybe he realized that in a sense death was his first step toward eternity. He could now spend eternity in the afterlife with Enkidu.

The entire story of Gilgamesh changes drastically once Gilgamesh is faced with Enkidu's death and his own immortality. In a sense Gilgamesh the mighty hero is transformed into Gilgamesh the broken mortal. He is haunted by Enkidu's death so severely that he undertakes great tasks in an attempt to become immortal.

If Gilgamesh is supposed to be a representation of men in the Sumerian and Mesopotamian culture then through his epic it would be quite evident that they were a culture who greatly feared dying and death. For a man to go through the amount of turmoil he did just seeking a way to get around death shows his desperation to avoid death.

I believe all cultures have a certain fear of death. There seems to have been a quest in every time period, in every part of the earth for either the fountain of youth, or a gift of eternal life. The Sumerians and Mesopotamians are no different in their cultures fear of death, and their epic of Gilgamesh is a poetic portrayal of their own cultures beliefs and fears.