

Epic of gilgamesh: a hero essay



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People have been fascinated by tales of heroism for centuries.

In ancient Mesopotamia, heroes give people hope and comfort, and fill them with strength. Ancient Mesopotamia is filled with tales of heroes- mighty warriors battling monsters, men ready to risk life and limb to save their true love or to fight for their nation. Still, there is a great difficulty that lies in defining what a hero truly is. Strength alone does not make a hero; nor does intelligence.

Moreover, the Epic of Gilgamesh truly defines the definition of a hero. Gilgamesh is portrayed as a true hero through his skill, intelligence, willingness to die, reverence, and his respect for death. Throughout the entire epic, Gilgamesh demonstrates outrageous skill as a warrior and leader. " Gilgamesh is strong to perfection.

" " He is an awesome beast with unmatched strength and a chant that fosters armies. " He leads his tribe into battle fearlessly and defeats everyone they come into battle with, it is said that, " Gilgamesh's tribe is invincible, and aroused by small insults. " This shows his remarkable leadership ability, in that his tribe is eager to fight knowing that their King will not let them down. He shows his great strength by fighting the mighty beast Humbaba.

Even such an enemy was still no match for Gilgamesh's extreme skill. He was able to slay the beast and return home safely. Again he shows his fighting skills when he makes Ishtar mad at him and she tells Anu to release the might bull to go and trample Gilgamesh. Again Gilgamesh was

triumphant in battle and in an attempt to rid his city of the harmful bull he, “ plunged his sword into the throat held fast by Enkidu.

” Yet again, Gilgamesh shows his strength during his journey to Utnapishtim when he climbs the double cliff up Mt. Mashu. When he reaches the top, the poison scorpion guard said to him: “ No mortal man has ever come to know what you seek here. Not one of your kind has come so far. ” The scorpion guard was so amazed by his amazing strength and skill to climb the cliff that he let him pass through the gate and wished him, “ Godspeed! ” Gilgamesh displays his mighty strength again when he rows the boat across the sea. He rows so hard and fast that he says, “ Half way through all that pulling, Gilgamesh had worn the oars to bits.

” Even Utnapishtim could not believe what he saw and says, “ I do see, but I am blind. I do know, but cannot understand how he behaves like the beasts of here and there. ” All of these things prove that he has the skill of a warrior and leadership ability beyond imagination, but that is not all that is required to be a hero. Intelligence builds the basis of a heroic individual, as well. Gilgamesh was a very intelligent leader. He shows throughout the entire epic a sense of foresight that keeps him safe and his city powerful.

It is known, that a good leader must prove that he is powerful, and that he can defend his people in the best way possible. Gilgamesh knew that by fighting the terrible beast Humbaba he would prove to his people that he was strong and powerful and could outwit even the strongest beast. He tells Enkidu that, “ All glory will be ours if now we conquer this unprecedented foe and risk the woe that frightens others. ” He also shows foresight by

respecting his mother's wisdom when she told him that Enkidu was his true friend.

Additionally, throughout the entire epic Gilgamesh looks to his mother, " who is wise and worries not," for advice and counseling on things to do and the right paths to take in his life. Looking to those who are wise and more intelligent, is one of the most intelligent things a person can do. It was said that he, " Acted nobly in the way one should to lead and acted wisely too as one who sought no fame. " The fact that he acted as one who sought no fame is a very important factor. A true leader is one who seeks the best for his whole kingdom and not just himself.

An intelligent leader is one who is always seeking for wisdom. This is why Gilgamesh sought knowledge from Utnapishtam about becoming immortal. When he finally found the plant of eternal life, his first thought was to take it back to the aged men of his kingdom; then he would take it for himself. This is another example of how he thought more about his kingdom than he did of himself.

Intelligence is one of the most important parts of being a hero. Moreover, willingness to die for what one believes is one of the most outstanding characteristics of a hero. If one is not willing to give their life for the cause which they support, then nobody would look up to them. People will think of their heroic figure as a coward or a phony.

Gilgamesh shows his willingness to give himself for his kingdom numerous times throughout the epic. When he fights Humbaba, he knows he could very likely die, but to rid the world of this terrible beast and make his people safe

he knew it was worth more than his life. The same thing is true when he kills the bull sent from the sky. It says that, " An earthquake fixed a grave for nine dozen citizens of Uruk. Two or three or four hundred victims, maybe more than that, fell into hell. " Gilgamesh could have easily fled to save his own life but instead he stayed and defended his people when they needed him the most.

He knowingly risked his life so that no more of the innocent citizens of Uruk would be killed. When Gilgamesh went in search for the plant of immortality, he faced many dangerous situations, but he knew if he could find the secret to immortality he would be able to lead his kingdom longer. Also the elders in his village would be able to council him for many more years to come, and everyone in his city would become wiser. Furthermore, every true hero knows that he did not get to where he is by himself.

He consistently gives credit to other people or divinities for his accomplishments. Gilgamesh was always quick to give respect and thanks to his god Shamash. After he had slain the bull from heaven it says, " They butchered and bled the bull and then cut its heart to offer as sacrifice before Shamash. Then Gilgamesh and Enkidu retreated from the altar itself and stood afar in deep respect as they did pray. " Just before he fought the bull Gilgamesh told Enkidu, " Let's kill it if we can right now.

Be unrelenting and hope that God gives us the strength. " These two quotes illustrate the reverence he had for the divinities and his knowledge of knowing he could not defeat the beast himself; he knew he needed the gods help. He also knew that his great status as a leader did not come by chance.

He gives credit to other people for his leadership ability as well as his strength and fighting skills. He tells Enkidu that he was, “ the finest clothes he ever wore, the ones that made me look vest in the eyes of the world.

” Gilgamesh knew his friend helped him through all of his troubles, his battles against wild beasts and helped to keep him calm through trying situations. Gilgamesh shows an outstanding deal of reverence for the ones that help throughout his life. More importantly than Gilgamesh’s reverence for others, is his respect for death. Being willing to die and being afraid to die are two totally different subjects. Gilgamesh demonstrated great willingness to die for his kingdom, but was he afraid to die? Every true hero looks at death with open eyes. He sees it as something that must happen and happens to everyone.

Gilgamesh showed a respect for death while not fearing it at the same time. He says, “ Only Gods live forever with Shamash, my friend: for even our longest days are numbered. ” This illustrates how he casually views death as an everyday thing that he never really thinks about. Utnapishtim told Gilgamesh that “ No man has ever seen Death. No one ever heard Death’s voice but Death is real and Death is loud. ” While Gilgamesh was seeking knowledge he found wisdom on death and then he could understand it without fearing it.

The most important characteristic of a hero is his view of death. He can be the most skilled, reverent person on earth but if he fears death, he will not be able to put his skills to work because of the fear of dying. In conclusion, it is clearly apparent that Gilgamesh holds all of the characteristics of a hero.

He goes fearlessly into battle to rid the world of harmful beasts and travels to distant lands to find answers that will help the people of his city.

He looks to God for his strength during battle and shows respect for everyone he meets along his journeys. Gilgamesh's friendship with Enkidu shows his loyalty to people who show respect for his city and for himself. He is skilled as a warrior, is an intelligent leader, and is willing to die at any moment for his kingdom. He gives credit to others for his great accomplishments and shows a fearless respect for death.

Gilgamesh has proved himself as a true hero, as he shows all the characteristics and meets the Heroic Code.