

# Similarities in the epic of gilgamesh and siddhartha

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Similarities in The\_ Epic of Gilgamesh\_ and Siddhartha As portrayed by an unknown author and Herman Hesse Both Siddhartha and Gilgamesh believe in themselves, they do not let others define them or make decisions for them. Siddhartha demonstrates that he has strong will from the very beginning of the novel. He is taught by the Samana even though the teachings he received up to this point in his life say that the Samana's way is the wrong religion. "It is not fitting for a Brahmin to speak angry and violent words/But indignation moves my heart/I do not wish to hear that request a second time from your lips"(Hesse, 9).

Siddhartha wants to make his own decision to study with the Samana, therefore, he needed to go against his father's judgment and demand leave to travel with the Samana. This clearly shows Siddhartha's strong will by wanting to study with the Samana strongly enough to disobey his father. Siddhartha also demonstrates determination when he does not fall prey to the temptations of Sublime one's teachings. Siddhartha believes you do not need a teacher or scriptures to be taught how to achieve Nirvana. He abandons the Buddha and also his friend with hope of finding the way to Nirvana on his own.

Gilgamesh on the other hand is the ruler of Uruk. In order to be able to keep his people alive he needs to be level headed and strong willed. Gilgamesh is so strong willed he seems arrogant, he believes he is one of the Gods and immortal and forgets that he is only 2/3 God. The villagers of Uruk say that "[Gilgamesh's] arrogance has no bounds by night or day"(tablet 1, 62). Although his strong will is mistaken for arrogance on numerous occasions,

Gilgamesh changes through the course of the novel. After meeting Enkidu he seems less arrogant to the people of Uruk and becomes their hero.

Gilgamesh's strong will helps him through the trials he must face to reach immortality. He faces the battle with Hambaba, the death of his friend, he passes through the mountain pass, rows across the waters of death and then return to his people. Gilgamesh did not give up during his journey because he did not want to let the people of Uruk suffer an illfate. The thought of his people gives him courage and his strong will is what allows him to continue. Gilgamesh and Siddhartha are two men from different times but they still share the same quality of being strong willed.

The importance of loyalty is conveyed through Siddhartha's and Gilgamesh's loyalty to their friends. Siddhartha is loyal to every person he meets during his journey, but his most trusted friend is Govinda. They start their journey together; Govinda is in love with Siddhartha and therefore follows all his wishes. After meeting the Sublime One Siddhartha feels as though he has wronged his friend by bringing him along on his journey, because they have not found Nirvana: Govinda, my friend, now you have taken this step, now you have chosen this path.

Always, oh Govinda, you've been my friend, you've always walked one step behind me. Often I have thought: Won't Govinda for once also take a step by himself, without me, out of his own soul? Behold, now you've turned into a man and are choosing your path for yourself. I wish that you would go it up to its end, oh my friend, that you shall find salvation! Siddhartha wants only

the best for his friend so he waits for Govinda to decide to leave him instead of sending him away. Siddhartha wishes Govinda well, even though he knows later on he will feel lonely without his friend.

Siddhartha and Govinda meet each other after they depart on two other occasions. On each meeting they speak as though they had never left one another's side. Friendship thus plays a key role in Siddhartha as well.

Gilgamesh initially does not seem like a loyal person because of his arrogance, however, when he meets Enkidu, Gilgamesh becomes a loyal friend. At the beginning of their relationship, Gilgamesh's loyalty seems questionable, but after the death of Enkidu the reader can see the great love he has for his friend. "[. . .] seven days and seven nights he wept for Enkidu" (Tablet, 96).

Following the death of his friend, despite Gilgamesh's vow to walk with him in the neverlands (valley of death), he leaves on a journey to find immortality because he does not want his people to suffer the way he has. Despite his journey to find immortality Gilgamesh comes to realize that immortality will not bring his friend back from the dead. He discovers that he must live his life the way Enkidu would have wanted him to; without grief. Gilgamesh decides to stay loyal to his friend and walk in the neverlands with him after his own death.

Gilgamesh and Siddhartha are loyal to their closest friends and they only wish the best for them. Through their loss they were able to achieve impossibilities. Siddhartha and Gilgamesh never truly experience grief until

the death of the ones they love. Their experience with grief is similar because it helps them evolve as people and it changes their lives. After the death of Kamala, Siddhartha is enlightened and is able to experience the grief of this world as well as see the grief he inflicts on his father the day he leaves.

Kamala's death leaves Siddhartha with the responsibility of raising his son, who hates living as a ferryman. His son wants to return to the town but his father does not let him. " I hate you you're not my father/even if you were her lover ten times over. " (Hesse, 108). Siddhartha feels grief at that moment for not being loved by his son, but it is through grief that he can understand Nirvana. Gilgamesh has everything he has ever wanted and he has never had an occasion to understand or feel grief. He would have never felt grief if he did not enjoy the company of Enkidu.

The death of Enkidu is the turning point in The Epic of Gilgamesh, because Gilgamesh, in order to forget his grief, sets out on his journey to find immortality, in his attempt to resurrect Enkidu, also to shelter his people from grief. For Gilgamesh and Siddhartha, grief is the turning point in their lives, because it helps them move forward. Siddhartha discovers Nirvana and Gilgamesh finds that you can't escape reality with immortality. While writing Siddhartha and The Epic of Gilgamesh the authors would have been influenced by the beliefs of the society in which they lived.

Siddhartha follows the Buddhist belief that you can find Nirvana through teachings and meditation. Nirvana is a state of mind which is completely at

peace and with complete clarity and lucidity without thoughts of volitional formation (Bhikkhu Bodhi). Herman Hesse wrote the novel Siddhartha during his time in India and China, where the central religion is Buddhism. It is unknown to this day who the author of The Epic of Gilgamesh really was. First the story was found on tablets years after it was written and secondly the tablets state that Gilgamesh himself had written the novel.

The reason people do not believe it was Gilgamesh who wrote this novel is because it is written in the third person. But we do know that The Epic of Gilgamesh is influenced by the Babylonian's beliefs of dream interpretation and the cosmic. Since the epic is found in Babylonian ruins, archeologists assume that the epic is written by the Babylonian's who also believed in astrology. The novel states that it is written during the age of the Taurus, also Gilgamesh sacrifices a bull, which is a custom among the Babylonians (Tony Crisp).

Both novels are influenced by the place they were written but also during the era they are written in. Siddhartha is written in 1922 by a German named Herman Hesse who studied the Buddhist religion during 1910-1922. Around the time that Hesse wrote Siddhartha, his wife was suffering from mental instabilities and his son was seriously ill. Hesse stayed positive and strived for spiritual self-realization. Hesse states that " There is no reality except the one contained within us"(Hesse, 1919), this is a concept found within the novel Siddhartha.

The difficulties and trials Hesse has to face helped make his novel one that's praised around the world. The Epic of Gilgamesh has no official author because it is written on stone tablets that were discovered in the mid nineteenth century by Austen Henry Layard. They believed the tablets to be written around 2000 BCE but the actual date is still argued. The tablets were found in ancient Mesopotamia, where they discovered 12 incomplete tablets. More tablets with a Syrian script have been found as far away from Mesopotamia as Syria and Turkey. Richard Hines) Both novels were written as a work of fiction but in reality they are both written using the name of an actual historical figure. Siddhartha of Gautama is known as the "Awakened one" or the Buddha throughout Asia; Hesse's story does not follow closely to that of the Buddha. The journey they follow is different but the path they take to find Nirvana is the same. They both end up finding Nirvana through meditation and self teachings. the tablets on which The Epic of Gilgamesh is written tell the true tale of the historical figure, Gilgamesh, fifth king of Uruk. Water is the sign of purity and rebirth, but in order to be reborn in water you must emerge from its' depths. (Didier Coiffard) During Siddhartha's attempt to escape his life as a merchant, he runs away and decides to commit suicide near a river bank. While under the water he sees the word OM in front of him and finds himself unable to commit suicide. He emerges from the water a renewed man with renewed knowledge. "The new Siddhartha felt a deep love for this flowing water and decided that he would not leave it again so quickly" (Hesse, 81).

He then meets the ferryman and becomes his apprentice in order to study the water and relearn his skills as a Brahmin and Samana. Siddhartha learns to listen to the river and becomes friends with it. With the help of the ferryman and the river Siddhartha finds Nirvana. He also relearns his skills of fasting, thinking and waiting. It is with the help of the river that Siddhartha is able to become a renewed and awakened person. Gilgamesh was also fortunate enough to find rebirth near water. Gilgamesh ends his initial quest near the river of death and retrieves a magic plant.

In order to reach the plant Gilgamesh needs to submerge himself in the river. Once he emerges from the water he finds new hope in the magic plant, knowing that he could help his city. On his way back to Uruk Gilgamesh falls asleep and a snake steals the magic plant. For whom have I labored? For whom have I journeyed? For whom have I suffered? I have gained absolutely nothing for myself, I have only profited the snake, the ground lion! Gilgamesh goes back to Uruk to be with his wife and children, he realizes that he is only human and will keep his promise with Enkidu and walk in the neverlands with him.

Both Siddhartha and Gilgamesh follow higher powers during their lives. Buddhists do not believe in a high power so Siddhartha follows the idea of spiritual awakening and a spiritual leader within himself. Siddhartha hears from his spiritual being when he leaves the Buddha and meets a woman that he desires but “[. . .] upon hearing his innermost voice, and the voice said, no” (Hesse, 47) He immediately gives up on the woman and leaves her. He hears from his guide more than once through his journey. He hears the voice



at the river and sees the word OM which is what gives him emotional strength.

Like Siddhartha, Gilgamesh also follows a spiritual guide except for Gilgamesh believes in the gods. Until having met Enkidu, Gilgamesh has given his respect to the gods by sacrificing women and animals as well as building temples and shrines. After meeting Enkidu, he takes his fate into his own hands and kills Humbaba, but Enkidu dies by the will of the gods because he was not supposed to kill Humbaba. Gilgamesh has been touched by the gods since birth as his father, Utnapishtim is a god, which would make him 2/3 God and 1/3 man.

The lives of Siddhartha and Gilgamesh are touched by a spiritual presence that helps them through their journey to find the meaning of life. In the beginning Siddhartha and Gilgamesh do not understand the meaning of life because they have never experienced anything outside of their cities. Siddhartha does not understand all aspects of life and therefore cannot experience nirvana. So his spiritual voice sends him on a journey to find and experience life. Through his journey he finds that there is no such thing as time, " Nothing was, nothing will be, everything has reality and presence" (Hesse, 87).

Without his journey into life he would have never found this wisdom and with knowing and understanding that time is irrelevant, he would have never found Nirvana. Gilgamesh is much like Siddhartha because he has not experienced anything outside of Uruk. After the death of Enkidu he realizes

that he is not immortal and will die one day. This realization scares Gilgamesh so he sets out on his journey to find immortality. After meeting his father, Gilgamesh realizes that becoming immortal is impossible, so Gilgamesh acknowledges that one day he will die because he is only human.

With this knowledge he goes back to Uruk and strives to be a good king for the rest of his life. Siddhartha learns that only through life experiences can the spiritual self be understood and Gilgamesh learns that even though one day everything will die, you have to do what you can at the present time.

Herman Hesse and the Babylonian text are stories that will always be loved by many readers. They are stories that can be passed down to future generations and taught for years to come because they show the true meaning of existence. Gilgamesh learns to appreciate his life as a human being as opposed to a god, and not wish for immortality.

He also finds that he is only capable of so much. Siddhartha learns that life is meant to be experienced in order to find nirvana and be at complete peace. The stories tell the reader that they do not have to be perfect or have everything to be truly happy with the life they have. Siddhartha and Gilgamesh are two fictional characters very similar in nature, despite having been written in two different times; ancient history and the twentieth century. The morals and ideas that these books hold true to this day, in order to find our spiritual selves we need to go on a journey to the depths of our souls and find the peace within us. Tomb of Gilgamesh believed found. " BBC News. 23 April 2003. Water a source of inspiration. Cite expo l'eau pour tous. 9 January 2008. " Nirvana. " Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 7

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