

# Many epic heroes struggle to return home

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The following essay is a comparison analysis of the circumstances of the exile and return of the main characters from TheOdyssey, Genesis 4 and Ramayana. The three men differ in motivation but are all led by a spiritual power.

Odysseus is a complex main character. The king is not only a brave, intelligent warrior who is highly respected by the gods and mortals, but he has obvious negative qualities; making it difficult at times for the reader to sympathize with him.

Odysseus' complex character and poor judgment causes him to partake in dangerous adventures; prolonging his return. One example is when he sails to Ismarus and battles the Cicones. Once chased back to sea; Odysseus arrogantly announced his name to Polyphemus as he sailed away. This announcement creates another battle for his life; once Polyphemus identifies Odysseus as the man who took his sight to his father Poseidon and a plan for revenge on Odysseus is made.

Odysseus did not however have to establish himself as a hero. He was considered a hero before leaving for Troy. It was not the desire to be a hero that drove him to his many adventures and battles; it was victory which motivated Odysseus.

Cain, unlike Odysseus, is not perceived as a hero. He is responsible for his fate of exile when he takes the life of his brother and lies about the murder to God. Cain is not considered noble or heroic for his choices in life. In contrast, in Ramayana, Rama can be perceived as a noble man. Rama does not question his father's order of banishment. Rama lives according to his

Dharma, which is evident through his actions. An example of his noble actions is when his step-brother Bharata finds out about his mother's sinister acts which led to Rama's banishment and Bharata becoming king.

When Bharata approaches Rama in the woods, Rama refuses to go back to the kingdom and claim his rightful throne, because it would be against his father's orders. Odysseus while heroic would not be considered noble because of his deceitful and selfish ways. Self-righteousness, thievery and dishonesty caused Odysseus to continuously engage in dangerous adventures. Rama was not flawed in character and did not put himself or his companions in harm's way due to selfish behavior; he was an honest and selfless man.

The return of both Odysseus and Rama are similar; unlike their exile. Both men return to their kingdom to successfully carry out their rule. Their homecoming differs however; Odysseus returns with vengeance, asserting his authority; killing the suitors who had caused so much grief in his absence. Odysseus' exile and return are influenced heavily by the gods. Once reunited with his father, the suitors' families come for revenge. It is only with the influence of Athena that civil war does not break out. Rama's return is a more joyous and celebrated return. He returns to become the rightful king and has a successful rule, where the people of his kingdom are very pleased.

All three stories, Ramayana, The Odyssey and Genesis 4 involve divine intervention and spiritual influence. The lives of the three main characters, Odysseus, Rama and Cain are influenced by a higher power. The gods are

heavily involved in the events taken place in The Odyssey; especially Athena. Rama lives his life before, during and after exile according to his Dharma and Cain is in a spiritual exile from God and prosperity.

Selfishness and deceitfulness are similar characteristics in both Cain and Odysseus. Cain lies to God when asked of the whereabouts of his brother. Odysseus lies continuously throughout The Odyssey. Both men are responsible for their exile, with the exception of Odysseus' original reason for leaving his kingdom; the war in Troy. Rama is not responsible for his exile however; it is his step-mother who demands his banishment.

All three men struggle to return to their homes. Odysseus' struggle is primarily physical; he has many battles to be won before returning home. His character does not, for the most part, grow emotionally. Rama, while following his Dharma, struggles emotionally with the disappearance of Sita and does have some physical battles with the rakshasas during his exile. Cain's struggle is spiritual; after being exiled by God, he is forced to live destitute, with barren land and without God's grace.

In conclusion, Odysseus, Cain and Rama all differ in character; it is only Rama that continues to act righteously during exile while the other two men act in self-righteousness; causing their predicaments. They all however seek to be home; Odysseus and Rama seek their kingdoms and Cain seeks the good graces of God.

## **References**

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