

Gilgamesh's quest for immortality and the mean of life

[Experience](#), [Meaning of Life](#)



This epic poem was originally found in the Sumerian language, written down with cuneiform characters on clay tablets found at Nippur in Mesopotamia and dating back to around 2,000 BC. The author of the version we have today is unknown because the story was crafted and reworked by various Mesopotamian cultures. The Epic of Gilgamesh tells the story of a man, two-thirds god and one-third human. After the gods take his friend, Enkidu, Gilgamesh begins a quest to gain immortality. On his journey he meets Utnapishtim, a man who obeys the gods and was saved by them from the Great Flood. Utnapishtim gives Gilgamesh many tests, which he all fails. He then is eventually sent away by Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh realizes he must face his mortality and find meaning to his life despite the inevitability of death. Once he returns to Uruk, which is modern day Iraq and he has his story inscribed on stone tablets. This story contains parts where gods play a very influential role but there are also human traits seen throughout the story. Gilgamesh is only a third human he is still able to possess human and civilized characteristics. Some human characteristics he possesses are companionship, need for power and having a fear of death. While reading the story I began to question if Gilgamesh being able to possess these traits will cause him to change his feelings about the meaning of his life. As humans we cannot survive and live long, happy lives without companionship. We need friendships, relationships and people around us to help keep ourselves sane. In the beginning of the story Gilgamesh is a cruel king. He has a strong control over his subjects and he completely abuses it, raping any women he wants and using forced labor to accomplish his building projects. When the gods had finally had enough they decided to step in. They

send Enkidu, the wild man to keep Gilgamesh in check. The two end up becoming friends and set off the find adventurers together. When they get themselves into too much trouble the gods punish Enkidu with sickness. As Enkidu lays in his sickness he says to Gilgamesh, " O my brother, so dear as you are to me, brother, yet they will take me from you. I must sit down on the threshold of the dead and never again will I see my dear brother with my eyes. " (89) You can feel the strong bond between the two of them. They thought of each other as not just companions but brothers. The loss of Enkidu, Gilgamesh's only companion, sparks the idea to become immortal so he doesn't have to die like Enkidu did. While Gilgamesh's quest to become immortal starts with Enkidu's death it also feeds his need for power. He wants to conquer the impossible task of immortality, which no one has done before. Gilgamesh's need for power starts out much smaller. Being the King of Uruk he is entitled to some power but instead of being a good, humble king he inflicts power in miserable ways. When Gilgamesh becomes friends with Enkidu, his need for power seems to increase. The two of them set off to find Humbaba the guard of the Cedar Forest, and kill him for his wood. "Humbaba's mouth is fire; his roar the floodwater; his breath is death. Enlil made him guardian of the Cedar Forest, to frighten off the mortal who would venture there. But who would venture there? Humbaba's mouth is fire; his roar is the floodwater; he breathes and there is death"(71). After hearing this description of Humbaba, many people would turn the other way and abort their desire to fulfill this mission. However, this only seems to motivate Gilgamesh even more. His ambition to find this beast and kill him was simply just another attempt to display his power. This same power he puts towards

his quest for immortality. Gilgamesh's drive to obtain immortality is also fueled by his fear of death. Every human, weather they admit it or not, fears death at some point in their life. After his beloved friend Enkidu died, Gilgamesh does not want the same fate. He becomes very depressed and completely renovates his life. This causes Gilgamesh to begin to question his purpose of living. Since he is two-thirds god, Gilgamesh already possesses the strength of the gods. He decides that the only thing separating him from the god is their immortality and his ability to perish. Gilgamesh finally begins his quest for ever-lasting life. It is a long, hard journey and despite all his efforts Gilgamesh fails. He is unable to achieve immortality. When he comes across a magical garden Gilgamesh is given some very good advice. " As for you, Gilgamesh let your belly be full, Make merry day and night. Of each day make a feast of rejoicing. Day and night dance and play! Let your garments be sparkling fresh, your head be washed; bathe in water. Pay heed to a little one that holds on to your hand, Let a spouse delight in your bosom. " (102) This was said by Siduri, the wine maker of the gods. She helps Gilgamesh see that he shouldn't worry about being immortal but he should just embrace what he has and live his life. It is his loss of a companionship, need for power, and fear of death that leads Gilgamesh to his quest for immortality. Even though Gilgamesh did not achieve immortality I feel he gained a much more valuable lesson. He got so caught up in wanting power and being scared of death, that after losing Enkidu he lost sight of what it was really like to just live. He seemed to believe that he needed to be the strongest and the most powerful for his meaning in life to be fulfilled. Instead of attempting to make a positive impact on the lives around him, or

attempting to be a good king for his people, he was too focused on his own selfish problems. In a way I feel as though his journey to seek immortality humbled him, it proved to him that he was not invincible, and like every other human, death for him was also inevitable.