

# Fellowship in the epic of gilgamesh



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As human beings, we are inclined to crave human interaction and acceptance. These two concepts eventually lead to friendship—a token cherished by all of us, including the main characters of The Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu and Gilgamesh. Throughout the epic, the theme of friendship is portrayed between these two characters through many different instances: traveling together, helping one another change positively, as well as empathizing with and grieving for one another. Though the relationship of Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu is unique, it is also an instructive example of the true meaning of friendship.

In The Epic of Gilgamesh, the relationship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu starts out rocky. Gilgamesh, the leader of Uruk, was feared by his own people. One of his many less-than-admirable acts is what eventually led him into meeting the man who would take the place as his best friend and brother. This initial encounter, though, is not how most would assume a friendship to arise. Gilgamesh decided that he would engage in affairs with a man's new wife before he does. When Enkidu hears about these plans, he becomes angry and takes it upon himself to go to Uruk and block off the bed of the wife, prohibiting Gilgamesh from being within her reach. The two begin to brawl, eventually dragging one another to the floor, where they completely forget about their disagreements. They embrace, and from then on, Gilgamesh and Enkidu become the best of mates.

Instances such as the eventual personality changes of the two characters show the balancing dynamic of Gilgamesh and Enkidu's relationship.

Although these men grow as characters together, Enkidu may be considered the more responsible of the two, as he has helped Gilgamesh become a

more compassionate, understanding and fearless leader and man in general, while Gilgamesh molded Enkidu into a noble man like himself. The concept that opposites attract is highly visible in the friendship of these two, as their opposing yet complementary personalities tend to balance one another like yin and yang. “ No, Enkidu cried; it is the journey that will take away our life. Don’t be afraid said Gilgamesh. We are together.”—their friendship grew so strong that they were eventually stronger together than apart. Such strength in harmony is exhibited through their ability to conquer the invincible monster Humbaba, who is the guard of the Cedar Forest, a place that is taboo to mortals. Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel together for many days, coming across obstacles that they help one another to overcome. Together, the two were able to slay Humbaba and bring his head back to Uruk as a trophy to flaunt to all the city. The push and pull of their opposing personalities is truly what allows them to possess a friendship of such strength.

One of the most notable parts of Gilgamesh and Enkidu’s friendship is the effect that Enkidu’s death has on Gilgamesh. The goddess of love, Ishtar, falls in love with Gilgamesh but is rejected. This repudiation angers Ishtar; as a result, she calls upon the Bull of Heaven. The bull eventually curses Gilgamesh. He and Enkidu decide to kill together once more, this time directing their prowess towards the bull. This killing further enrages the gods and they conclude that punishment is deserved, leading to the slow, painful death of Enkidu. Gilgamesh watches his best friend and brother die, a process which is the spark to his downfall: a common characteristic of every epic hero. Enkidu’s death has a dramatic effect on Gilgamesh, since he has

conceptually lost a part of himself because of how close their relationship was. This loss and pain are accurately depicted through the quote, “ A constant flood of tears did wash the face of Gilgamesh. His soul could find no place to rest, since painful grief did prick his heart.” The absence of Enkidu, the more rational half of Gilgamesh, causes Gilgamesh to go about on the illogical journey to achieve immortality. The loss of Enkidu also triggers Gilgamesh to expose a character trait that was never before shown—fear. Death becomes surprisingly possible now to Gilgamesh; knowing that he will one day die gives him great discomfort, and he will do anything to avoid a possible demise. In turn, this shift reveals a moral that is evident in friendships today. Although Gilgamesh grieves for his friend, he still eventually begins to think of himself. Humans are inevitably selfish, and powerful people like Gilgamesh are no exception.

Gilgamesh would not have searched low and high to find the answers to immortality if he had not experienced the loss of his best friend. These searches become a vital part of who Gilgamesh is as a character by the end of the story, proving that his friendship with Enkidu truly was life-changing. Without the companionship of Enkidu, Gilgamesh would have never evolved as the person he is by the end of the narrative. Likewise, Enkidu would have never gained the new knowledge and strength that he had by the end of his life, had he never decided one day that he would challenge Gilgamesh. Although presented within an ancient tale, the relationship of these two holds strong morals that can be applied to modern society today, and still resembles many twenty-first century friendships.