

History of the epic of gilgamesh philosophy essay

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All of the events that transpired throughout the text created an unbreakable bond between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. This friendship is developed through all of the near-death experiences and solidified even more after Enkidu's death. Their friendship can be described as complex. One could argue that their friendship was almost necessary for Gilgamesh's life. What is so important about their friendship is that it is able to bring animal, humans, and even gods together. Throughout the text it is easy to follow the character development of Gilgamesh. When at first he was a selfish and immature god, he eventually becomes a better person which leads to him being a better ruler. While it seems that Gilgamesh receives the majority of the benefits, Enkidu also benefits from the friendship. His life is very much enriched afterwards. Enkidu was created to balance out Gilgamesh and he is able to successfully complete his purpose. These two become very close and actually grow to love each other. Gilgamesh is described as being "two thirds... god and one third man". Before Enkidu, Gilgamesh was a horrible ruler and man but powerful, nonetheless. So Enkidu was created to be Gilgamesh's "equal...as his own reflection, his second self".

Throughout the story, the gods are called, and they intervene whether it be in a positive way, such as creating Enkidu, or in a negative way like Ishtar creating the Bull of Heaven out of pettiness. There are some similarities between the Bible and this text. The epic mentions a family that survived a massive flood and were granted immortality. While the Bible does not mention immortality but does mirror the whole great flood with the story of Noah. There are many gods in the story, as opposed to just one in the bible. These gods tend to be specialized in just one area of authority. Gilgamesh

himself is a god, so when he decides to turn down Ishtar's advances, he does so with impunity. Ishtar, who is also a goddess, acts in a vengeful manor and creates the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh. However, it is Enkidu who further instigates the events by disrespecting Ishtar and throwing the dead bull parts at her. After this, the gods decide that Enkidu would be marked for death. These events show the true nature of the gods, they are vengeful and unforgiving gods. Something that The Epic of Gilgamesh can tell us about ancient Mesopotamian society is that there was a god-like status for its accorded kings. Because Gilgamesh is two-thirds god, no one dares to challenge his reign of terror. It's only when the gods themselves intervene that Gilgamesh finally changes his ways. This tells a lot about the Mesopotamian society and the values the people exemplified. The Mesopotamian people turned to their gods, rather than their rulers, to make wrongs right. While kings, whether they are good or bad, can rule however they want, only the gods are able to bring justice. They do this through the direct, or indirect, interference in the human affairs. So, the punishment of evil people would ultimately land in the hands of the immortal gods.

The goal of this epic is for the hero achieve wholeness to restore the balance of power and community. Women in this tale represent not only wisdom but also temptation and power. The women in the text are an integral part in Gilgamesh's full circle moment. An example of this is after Enkidu's death when Gilgamesh is seeking immortality, and he meets Siduri. When he explains to her what he is looking for, she questions his judgement and explains what would be best for him. She says, "when the gods created man they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping".

These words depict the wisdom of women and their encouragement. With these words Siduri is trying to get Gilgamesh to open his eyes and see all the good he has in his life and not run away from death, which is a natural thing declared by the gods. While Gilgamesh does not take her advice, she still played the important role of wisdom that he needed. The other way women are portrayed in this epic is that of a destroyer. By this description women are fearsome and try to tempt and test the hero. If the hero is able to overcome all of the tests and is able to prove his spiritual growth, then he becomes worthy to inherit their power. Ishtar is an example of this goddess-destroyer type. When Gilgamesh returns victorious after killing Humbaba Ishtar declares her intentions of marriage. She says, "Come to me Gilgamesh, and be my bridegroom; grant me seed of your body, let me be your bride and you shall be my husband." With this Ishtar offers to make Gilgamesh wealthy and make his kingdom fertile promising descendants which would gain him the respect of the world. However, Gilgamesh does not fall for her temptations. Instead he turns her down and says, "If I take you in marriage, what gifts can I give in return?... as for making you my wife - that I will not. How would it go with me? Your lovers have found you like a brazier which smoulders in the cold...Which of your lovers did you ever love for ever? What shepherd of yours has pleased you for all time?". This response is very important because it shows that Gilgamesh is aware of his limitations and mindful of Ishtar's lustful and vengeful nature. He follows by reciting every lover she had before and their fates after they were unable to please her. Gilgamesh understands that whatever pleasure Ishtar can give would only be short-lived. This interaction is important in the tale because it

gives the audience an idea of the great ruler Gilgamesh could be if he continues to stay focused.

It is important for people in this current century to read the Epic of Gilgamesh. Not only for its literary importance, but because some of the themes are still relevant in today's modern world. While sure, there are no gods running around putting curses on people, what they represent is important. Gilgamesh's struggle with power and temptation is not that different from the struggles some individuals face today. Gilgamesh began as a horrible person and a even worse ruler, but through trials he was able to change. He became a much more complex person who was focused and smart. This character development is important because if a god can change and be better, well simple mortals should be able to achieve the same.