

First & Last Name

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Gilgamesh: The Struggle Between Desire and Destiny

Throughout the history of mankind, the desire of one's heart has not always lined up with one's destiny. So is the tone of the tale of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk. When the gods Shamash and Adad created Gilgamesh, they had a set destiny planned for his life. Though Gilgamesh is mostly god, he is also partly human. It is the human side of Gilgamesh which yearns for a destiny other than his own. This desire leads him down a path of discontentment and an emptiness, which he feels compelled to fill. As many people do, Gilgamesh begins hunting for the missing piece of his life which he believes is everlasting life.

Gilgamesh is destined for greatness. He was created with a perfect body, is all knowing, multi-cultural, wise, and stronger than anyone among him. This combination, which encompasses Gilgamesh, brings an aura of greed and hunger for supremacy and is highly scrutinized by the people of Uruk. They begin to cry to the gods and beg for the creation of one who is equal to Gilgamesh, and who would be able to withstand his arrogant deeds. Upon the people's requests, Enkidu emerges in the wilderness. Enkidu represents Gilgamesh's inner being. At their first meeting, Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight against each other. This encounter is similar to the tension between a person and their inner self. On one hand there is Gilgamesh, the person who is lustful, greedy, and arrogant; on the other hand there is Enkidu, the inner being who is more cautious and reserved. Enkidu is Gilgamesh's conscience.

Gilgamesh becomes restless and wishes to make his name known for all eternity so he devises a plan to ensure his name is never forgotten. Gilgamesh seeks to kill Humbaba who lives in the cedar forest as if this creature was the high school bully we all feared ourselves. Except this creature, Humbaba, was not a bully but a mountain in which Gilgamesh thought he must conquer for popularity sake. Anytime a person embarks on a journey which could lead to disaster there are people around them who try to talk some sense into them. These people to Gilgamesh were the counselors of the town and Enkidu. Nevertheless, Gilgamesh felt this was something he must do; just another way to fill a void and feel worthy of life.

Shortly after entering the forest Enkidu gets cold feet. This shows a sense of hesitance from within Gilgamesh; however, they press on to find Humbaba. Upon entering the place where Humbaba sat, Gilgamesh feels fear and uncertainty. Like a child cries out to its mother for help, Gilgamesh pleads with Shamash for assistance in killing Humbaba. As the tide starts turning against Humbaba, he begs Gilgamesh for his life. For a split second Gilgamesh ponders letting Humbaba free from harm; however, an inner voice in the form of Enkidu reminds Gilgamesh of his goal: fame, popularity, recognition. Out of pride and selfishness, Gilgamesh conquers Humbaba thinking this would be the answer to what he has been looking for.

As many people do, Gilgamesh keeps searching for something to fill this void he feels. Killing Humbaba was not as fulfilling as Gilgamesh had expected. Another area he tries to feel complete is through women. Gilgamesh is a lustful man. Ishtar, a woman in love with Gilgamesh, requests his hand in marriage; however, Gilgamesh honestly tells her he cannot be faithful and provide for her needs. After all, women are a convenience factor for Gilgamesh; they are just another weapon in his arsenal of temporary pleasure tactics. Feeling outraged, Ishtar complains to her father and requests he give her the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh and

have the ultimate revenge. Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight the Bull of Heaven and slaughter it; another accomplishment worthy feeling proud of.

Shortly after the incident with the Bull of Heaven, Enkidu has a dream of his own death. When Enkidu dies, it is as if a part of Gilgamesh dies inside. His soul is downcast and heavily burdened. One of the greatest sources of enjoyment is now gone from Gilgamesh's life. The journey he takes from there is a gravely downward spiral as he quests for meaning and seeks pleasure elsewhere.

Being a god is not enough. Having women is not enough. Conquering Humbaba is not enough. Gilgamesh still longs for something, but what? Upon Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh begins to dread his own death and once again searches for something to fill the void he has always felt, especially now that his soul has died with the passing of Enkidu. Gilgamesh has the idea of finding and possessing everlasting life; surely then he would be satisfied and content.

As Gilgamesh begins his quest for eternal life, he wanders through various terrains in search of Utnapishtim who supposedly has found this life which Gilgamesh wishes to possess. His journey is a long one with plenty of hurdles and bumps along the way as most of life's journeys are. Gilgamesh encounters the Man-Scorpion who questions Gilgamesh's intentions. Why would this god be traveling in such a manner and in such treacherous land? Why does anyone go down roads not meant to be traveled by them? Gilgamesh explains his reasoning and he continues on his journey.

Soon after meeting the Man-Scorpion Gilgamesh arrives at the garden of the gods where it is said Utnapishtim resides. Shamash finds Gilgamesh in the garden and tries to settle his soul hoping to discourage him from seeking everlasting life any further; after all, everlasting life was not Gilgamesh's destiny. Unfortunately, as most people do when searching for something better

than what has been given to them, Gilgamesh stubbornly dismisses Shamash's advice and carries on towards finding Utnapishtim and ultimately, obtaining the everlasting life he so desperately seeks.

After speaking with Shamash, Gilgamesh comes to the edge of the sea and notices Siduri, the woman who makes wine. As the Man-Scorpion and Shamash had done earlier in his journey, Siduri questions Gilgamesh as to why he has come so far and looks as weary as he does. Why would a god look so tiresome and ill-fortuned? What could Gilgamesh possibly receive from the garden of the gods which he did not already have? Gilgamesh explains his predicament and his yearning for everlasting life. Siduri tries to talk sense into Gilgamesh as the others had done. She explained that he was not only god but man who was destined to die. Set on finding everlasting life in memory of Enkidu, Gilgamesh insists on continuing on with his journey. Siduri tells Gilgamesh where he can find the only way to the place of Utnapishtim.

Urshanabi, the ferryman, approaches Gilgamesh in the forest and questions him about his presence where no mortal had come before. As he had done with all the others, Gilgamesh cites the woes of his soul and tells Urshanabi about Enkidu, Gilgamesh's reason for wanting everlasting life. Urshanabi agrees to take Gilgamesh to the place where he can find Utnapishtim; so they head out together across the water.

Encountering Utnapishtim is a bitter-sweet moment for Gilgamesh. He has finally arrived at his destination; however, Utnapishtim appears to be no different than Gilgamesh. After the usual question of why Gilgamesh has come so far from the pleasures of his everyday life, Utnapishtim begins to tell Gilgamesh about his life story and how he was able to receive everlasting life. Utnapishtim's story of the great flood resembles the lives of those who are never content with the destiny chosen for them. At a moment's notice, it can all be washed

away, and they are forced to start over wishing they had back the life they had no desire for to begin with. Gilgamesh's life was no different. Here he was searching for a destiny not meant for him while ignoring his own destiny.

With Gilgamesh begging for everlasting life, Utnapishtim issued a test which Gilgamesh would have to pass in order to obtain such a life. Gilgamesh had to stay awake for several days; however, he was unable to. As if he were a child whose balloon had been popped, he crumbled inside; he had been defeated. Gilgamesh had failed at his quest for the ultimate pleasure. Gilgamesh had no choice but to go back to Uruk; back to his old life. Soon after his return, Gilgamesh died a lonely death without ever realizing the breadth of the life he already had but never learned to fully enjoy.

His whole life, Gilgamesh yearned to fill a void he just couldn't seem to fill. No matter what he tried, whether it was showing his strength through killing Humbaba, being with numerous women, having a strong relationship with Enkidu, and even being a perfect mixture of man and god, he was never completely satisfied. Much like Gilgamesh, many people search for something better or greater than what they already possess. Wanting a destiny not meant for them is a dangerous and empty path that leads to disappointment and regret as Gilgamesh had done. Since the beginning of time, man has struggled with his desires versus his destiny. The lesson to be learned from Gilgamesh is one of contentment and acceptance for the destiny chosen for each one's life; only then can one truly experience life to the fullest!