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Friendship: A Life Changing Experience

The tale of Gilgamesh is one of triumph, but not in the normal sense of the word. Although Gilgamesh is very triumphant in his actions as king, the revelation he has over his only failed journey is however the most important victory of the story. Gilgamesh is originally a quite selfish leader who often lacks foresight in many of his decisions, and the love shown to him by Enkidu enlightens him to a life full of care and affection. Enkidu is designed as Gilgamesh’s equal, something the world had been unaware of prior to the discover of him. This equality acts as a balance for Gilgamesh and his rash decisions, thus showing him a way of life that was otherwise irrelevant to the king.

Gilgamesh prior to Enkidu’s appearance was an incredibly unjust ruler. He is incredibly powerful, as no other king has been able to defeat him, described as “two-thirds divine and one-third human” (Mitchell, 71). With such power, Gilgamesh has taken over many cities, while also controlling his own city like one that he does not respect. He treats the city and its’ people like nothing more than slaves who he can force things upon against their will. As an example of this, he oversteps his boundaries as a king, and takes from his people, taking a man’s daughter and using her or taking a man’s bride on their wedding day; and once the people of Uruk had had enough, the cries to the God’s created Enkidu (Mitchell, 73). Enkidu is sent to be Gilgamesh’s balanced half, to act as the reasoning and peaceful side of Gilgamesh.

The friendship that becomes of Gilgamesh and Enkidu is something unlike many people experience, in that it is true and unadulterated friendship that they share. Something that Gilgamesh has never truly known until Enkidu’s arrival. Enkidu offers many things to Gilgamesh. Being another man of similar stature, he now has twice the power of before, but must rationalize his decisions beyond the reasoning of just because he can. When Gilgamesh shows interest in taking over the Cedar Forest by killing Humbaba, Enkidu attempts to persuade Gilgamesh to leave Humbaba alone as he is not bothering anyone in the forest. Once returned after this mission, Gilgamesh is eager to get back to his luscious lifestyle (Mitchell, 130). However, when returning from a similar journey without Enkidu, he has nothing but the utmost respect and pride in the people of Uruk. Without the mutual love and respect shown between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Gilgamesh would have never come to the realization that other people matter more than simply what they can be used for.

Enkidu’s death as a result of killing a bull sent by the Gods is portrayed as punishment for disobeying what they had intended, though it is arguable that the original purpose for Enkidu was achieved by this very act. Enkidu was sent to the forest to be found and taken to Uruk, to be the balance of Gilgamesh’s rule, which is exactly what was achieved through his death. Gilgamesh vows to forever honor Enkidu by building a shrine in his name, putting all his finest materials into it to show his dedication to their friendship. During the mission to find the secret to immortality, Gilgamesh weeps for his sorrow over Enkidu while wishing for nothing but the return of his friend. An unselfish action that is nothing like the Gilgamesh the city of Uruk knows, which only changes more over the struggle to finding immortality. The real change of heart shown in Gilgamesh is upon his empty-handed arrival to Uruk, his first failed mission. Returning to his kingdom, rather than focusing on his riches and palace like before, Gilgamesh stops to appreciate the sense of community within Uruk. The city is no longer his accomplishment, but the work and dedication of those beneath him from the peasants to the people by his side. Gilgamesh’s pride now lies in the sense of community amongst all people, in the gorgeous land they inhabit, the groups that gather in the marketplaces and town squares (Mitchell, 199). Gilgamesh transformed from a power hungry and selfish man into one who cares about others and appreciates the many smaller things that go into forming a successful community.

Enkidu has shown Gilgamesh the way of caring for others, in such a subtle way that the reader does not notice such a drastic change in a character until the end of the story. The simple act of being a friend to Gilgamesh transformed such an unjust person into one that is honorable and genuine. (continue).