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Epic of Gilgamesh

**Introduction**

 English literature is full of legends of various gods and other powerful creatures who ruled this world and defeated different evil forces to get the common people rid of these evil forces. These legends are in various forms for example in the form of short stories, poems and sonnets. One of the very dramatic and finest examples of such a legend or poem is the “Epic of Gilgamesh”.

 “Epic of Gilgamesh” is an epic poem that is based on the ancient country of Mesopotamia. It is one of the finest works of poetry found in Greek literature. Epic of Gilgamesh is also considered to be one of the earliest scriptures written in the ancient time even before the birth of Jesus Christ. Epic of Gilgamesh is a narration about a strong and powerful king Gilgamesh, who was the priest-king of Uruk, who used to be very cruel towards the people he used to rule over.

 In the initiation of the poem or the story, Gilgamesh is portrayed as a very cruel and barbarous ruler who goes to any lengths to fulfil his evil needs. He kills people randomly, especially the young men, and takes whatever they have. He also uses their women as he wants.

*“Gilgamesh does not leave a girl to her mother”*

 He meets his twin character Enkidu, who has been created especially to fight him.

*“In the wildness(?) she created valiant Enkidu,*

*Born of Silence, endowed with strength by Ninurta.”* (Sandars)

Gilgamesh wants to seek Utnapishtim, immorality, and goes on a long and tough journey to ask for it from Gods, but returns with something much more worthy and meaningful.

**Discussion**

 Joseph Campbell in his notes about the “Epic of Gilgamesh” informs the reader about the whole narration of Gilgamesh and what he infers from the overall situations. Joseph Campbell has narrated that Gilgamesh went on a mystic journey to find Utnapishtim or immorality but he came back with something much more meaningful and lasting: wisdom. Here, the question arises that whether Gilgamesh is a real hero or not or, can he be considered a real hero. This question can be answered in a number of ways. Various dimensions arise out of this story; the character of Gilgamesh can be seen in the light of all the definitions of heroism.

 Usually, a hero is a man who is strong and powerful and faces every issue very bravely. The definition of heroism comprises of both physical valor and exceptional mental capability. If considered in terms of physical capabilities, Gilgamesh can undoubtedly be called a hero.

*“He is the hero, born of Uruk the goring wild bull.”* (Sandars)

In fact, he can be considered an extraordinary hero. He possesses all the physical qualities that a true hero should have.

“*Who can compare with him in kingliness?*

*Who can say like Gilgamesh: "I am King”?”* (Sandars)

He is tall, he is strong and he is masculine. The poet also points out towards the fact that he is also desirable. He exhibits bravery at all the points of his life. Whether it is confronting, Humbaba, the evil monster of the Cedar Forest, or killing the strong bull of Heaven, he exhibits exceptional physical strength and valor at every point.

*“Who destroyed Humbaba who lived in the Cedar Forest”* (Sandars)

 Gilgamesh is portrayed to be Priest-king who is strong and masculine, but he uses all his powers in a wrong way. He is extremely arrogant and barbarous and thinks that no one is more powerful than him. He kills people for no reason, especially the young people and uses women as he wants to please himself. In his arrogance of power and wealth, he does not realize that he is making his own substitutes against him. Just like any other cruel ruler, he wishes to have enormous power that would last forever. He comes to know that the power of immortality can only be granted to him by the Gods. So, he decides to go on a mystic journey, to meet Gods and find the secret to forever life.

*"I have come on account of my ancestor Utanapishtim,*

*who joined the Assembly of the Gods, and was given eternal life.*

*About Death and Life, I must ask him"* (Sandars)

 This journey proves to be full of hardships and challenges. Gilgamesh crosses all the obstacles in the way and meets a person named Utnapishtim, who has been granted immortality by Gods. Utnapishtim tells him that immortality is a trait only to be possessed by gods and human should keep in their mind that they have to die one day. They should always keep their death in mind. Hence, Gilgamesh returns back to his country Uruk empty-handed.

 Although, he did not carry what he intended to bring back or any other material belonging, still he brought back something that has no price; wisdom. He understood the true meaning of life and power. He realized that he is one of the very blessed humans of Gods and he should use these blessings wisely. Hence, Gilgamesh can be called a hero in spiritual; meanings as well as he realized the real worth of his powers and started using them in the service of his substitutes.

**Conclusion**

 Hence, in short, it can be concluded that Gilgamesh, the king and main lead in the poem Epic of Gilgamesh, is a true hero in every sense. His physical qualities and mental intellect prove that he deserves to be called a hero. Although, in the beginning of the legend, Gilgamesh does not use his powers wisely and greatly abuses both his physical and mental capabilities, he changes this condition as the poem progresses towards the end. He becomes a changed person, realizes the real purposes of all his powers and starts using them for the welfare of his substitutes.

Works Cited

Sandars, Nancy, ed. *The epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin, 1972.