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Narrative and Descriptive Writing

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The Epic of Gilgamesh

We, as humans, strive for perfection, love, friendship, beauty, youth and even immortality in a way. We find humanity, imperfection, love, anger, friendship, arguments, beauty, ugliness, and we grow old and die. We want to avoid the bad, but without our mistakes and bad fortune we cannot learn to appreciate or accomplishments or the good fortune. We cannot become good imperfect humans.

Gilgamesh was perfection created by the Gods as noted in the text, “The God of Wisdom brought his stature to perfection, He was perfection in height, Ideally handsome”. But yet he was a serial rapist taking any woman he wanted including wives on their wedding night. He was so awful his people prayed for the gods to create a partner for him so that they could have some relief, “Let her create a partner for Gilgamesh, mighty in strength, let them contend with each other, that Uruk may have peace.” They created Enkidu, “She created the valiant Enkidu...Shaggy with hair was his whole body...He dressed as animals do. He fed on grass with gazelles...With wildlife he drank his fill of water”. What is interesting to me here is that Gilgamesh, who is part human and part God, is supposed to be perfection but he is an awful person and his subjects need relief from him. The solution is Enkidu, who is created like an animal --- someone who can teach Gilgamesh how to be calm, and how to expend his energy in less damaging ways to others. When I was in grade school (age 7 or 8), I was upset and grumpy due to a poor grade. Mom, not wanting to deal with *Grumpy Sheri*, said to me, “You go in your room, put your head under your pillow, and scream until you are

rid of *Grumpy Sheri*! Then you can come back out here with the *Happy Sheri* that I love so much!” Being the very literal child that I was (and still am as an adult), I did exactly as she requested --- and it worked! As I grew, my pillow screams, became deep breaths (which I taught my boys), and the older I became I added asking questions to understand what caused the imperfect grade or situational outcome. I still do that in life, and school to this day. What my amazing mother did was to teach me how to accept my imperfections, and learning from them was more important than the perfect grade. It seems that’s similar to what Enkidu taught his friend Gilgamesh.

Ishtar is the very definition of a woman scorned if you ask me! Her reaction to Gilgamesh’s very rude rejection of her advances made me think the old saying *Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned*. In the text she says “Gilgamesh’s been spouting insults about me...Father, pretty please, the Bull of Heaven, So I can kill Gilgamesh...” And, when that didn’t work and Gilgamesh killed the Bull with Enkidu’s help, she was further enraged. She did get her way after all, since Enkidu did suffer and die for killing the Bull with Gilgamesh, and that caused Gilgamesh great pain and heartache. Think of the movie *Fatal Attraction* released in 1987. When Dan finally rejected his mistress, Alex, she didn’t immediately try to kill him...oh no...that would be much too easy of a punishment for him! She tortured him by hurting his family, starting with boiling his daughter’s pet bunny. Even now, thirty years later, in the 2018 movie *Acrimony* the rejected wife begins with going after her partners new love, not him, at first. It seems even back to the very first story women would go after the loved ones of the person that scorned them.

I really liked the very vivid description of how he reacted to Enkidu’s death, “He touched his heart but it was not beating. The he covered his face like a bride’s...He paced to and fro, back and forth, Tearing out and hurling away the locks of his hair...” I can see this visual in my head. His reaction to his friend’s death was very deep and visceral. This shows he was changed by Enkidu into a man capable of truly caring for another human being. However, it also made him aware of and

terrified of his own immortality, “ Shall I not die too? Am I not like Enkidu?...I have grown afraid of death...” This is a fear of many people to this day. Yet, we all know that none of us are getting out of this alive. Maybe the fear is not knowing when or how we will die? Maybe it is fear what of the unknown after death? Gilgamesh is determined to find immortality but settles for the root that brings back eternal youth. We all know immortality it not an option. We are human and by definition, we are mortal. However, we DO have a quest for the “fountain of youth”. We color our hair because gray hair ages us...guilty as charged but, in my defense, I have been going gray since I was 26 (almost 23 years now!). We wear make-up. I resemble this remark. I just can't go without it and show off my purple under eye bags to the world, and you're thankful---trust me. Liposuction, Botox, plastic surgery, human growth hormones and many more, could all be considered our roots that bring back eternal youth.

So, was Gilgamesh really created perfect? His subjects would argue that he was not. He certainly thought he was until he realized the harshness of mortality, or maybe imperfection is how he thought of it. He was taught a lesson by Ishtar, by killing Enkidu, much like life will teach us lessons. He was determined to find that “perfection” he believed he once had. As many of us do when we realize that maybe our life plan is not what we had imagined it would be. In searching for perfection, he realized that it was his humanity/imperfection that made him a better person. As many of us learn that it is our mistakes we have made, that have created the person we are today, and most of us are a better person because of them.