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Summary of “Gilgamesh” Tablets 6-11

The last 5 tablets of the epic poem “Gilgamesh” details the ending of Gilgamesh’s story, growing as a person through the experience of profound grief and fear. The second section of the epic the readers meet Ishtar, a goddess in Uruk, trying to persuade Gilgamesh into marriage, but is quickly dismissed and made fun of. Though tablet 6 is mostly filler, the reader gets further insight on their relationship as they “sat down like brothers, side by side” after slaying the Bull of Heaven (Mitchell, 72). Everything seemed to be going alright, until suddenly Enkidu started having dreams foreshadowing him falling ill and eventually dying. The god Anu called for someone to be punished for murdering the sacred Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. The dreams end up becoming true, Enkidu falling fatally ill, and in seven days time fully dead in Gilgamesh’s pleading presence. After Enkidu’s death, Gilgamesh falls into a deep state of grief and despair, needing to stay by the body until filled with worms, then finding a way to memorialize and honor Enkidu to aid in the safe passage of death. At the end though, Gilgamesh decides to leave Uruk, going into the wilderness, setting up the stage for what I define as the final act of the poem. Gilgamesh considers the death in his life and wants out, so it becomes his mission to “find the one man whom the gods made immortal, [and] ask him how to overcome death.” (Mitchell, 80). He goes through multiple hard tasks from running for 12 hours straight to cutting down hundreds of trees to find Utnapishtim and try to obtain eternal life. Eventually Gilgamesh meets an older man who turns out to be Utnapishtim and puts him to the final test to see if he’s worthy of the

secret to youth, staying awake for 7 days in a row. Unfortunately Gilgamesh falls asleep within the first few minutes of the challenge, realizing that he has ultimately failed obtaining in his mind the only antidote for Enkinu's death and the looming death around him. When Gilgamesh thought all hope was lost, Untanpishtim's wife convinces her husband to give him at least something for the long hardships; therefore, Untapistism gives Gilgamesh a guide to find the secret of youth. Of course he immediately obtains the secret plant, but as all three are on the journey back to Uruk, a snake eats the fruit right from under Gilgamesh's nose. Instead of being distraught from learning about the incident, he takes both Untapistism and his wife to see the great land of Uruk showing the golden gates and star studded architecture. To me the biggest part of the ending of Gilgamesh is the relatability between himself and his grief. In his mind, the only thing that'll make him feel better is finding immortality. He puts himself through agonizing pain and impossible challenges, and ultimately finds out that he just needed the community and his people to move past the grief. This type of hyperfixating to the very end for a certain answer to "end" the suffering is extremely common when one loses someone extremely important to them. I lost my grandfather a couple years ago and went through a month-long phase researching and cutting out every product that had even a slight speculation for causing cancer because I was afraid to die the same way, I craved some type of control in my life since I couldn't control myself getting cancer or death. The only thing that helped my grief over my grandfather was sitting in that feeling with my family members and having a sense of belonging with people. Even though both Gilgamesh's and my story are completely different, the underlying strand of grief pushing ourselves to our limits then eventually finding community to heal is essential to the final tablets of the epic poem.