

## CHAPTER One

### *Mythos, Logos and Gilgamesh*

The contemporary occidental view of *myth* contrasts with the Greek third century B.C. view of Aristotle within his *Me ta phusica*, literally, *beyond*, or *after*, the *physics*, contemporarily translated as *Metaphysics*. But, the relevance of Aristotle's view to contemporary society clarifies when we relate it to the 5000 year old Oriental, Sumerian *myth* of Gilgamesh.

Myth expresses a reality which exceeds the grasp of the human mind to know through concepts.

...it was their curiosity that first led men to philosophize and that still leads them. In the beginning, they were curious about difficulties close at hand. Then they progressed little by little in this respect and raised difficulties about matters of greater consequence; for example, about behavior or the moon and the sun and the stars and of all *becoming*. But whoever is perplexed and wonders thinks himself ignorant. Hence, even the lover of myths (*thaumazein*) is in a way a lover of wisdom (*philosophhein*), for a myth (*muthos*) is made up of wonders. Therefore inasmuch as men philosophized in order to escape ignorance, it is evident that they learned in the pursuit of knowledge, and not for some useful end. (*Book Alpha*, 982b10-22)

This *wonder* which provokes both the *lover of myth* and the *lover of wisdom* is about that which is *primary*, Aristotle tells us, is of *that which is first*, as the *cause of being itself*, the *source of life itself*. The Greek word here is *arche aitia*, the *first principle*, or, *first cause*. The knowledge of this *first principle*, as the *principal being* about which humans seek *knowledge (episteme)* *for its own sake*, not for some practical use. Aristotle describes the search for such knowledge *lady wisdom*, as *sophia* or *myth*, as *mythos*. But, in both cases, this knowledge is prompted by ignorance and sought out of love, a specific kind of love as *philos*, that is, the *love of friendship*, a friendship with *sophia*, *lady wisdom*, so Aristotle calls this science *First Philosophy*. Thus, according to the Greeks (and in this case, specifically according to Aristotle), the *love of myth* and the *love of wisdom* have the same end, namely, the desire to know the *first cause* of all the beings we humans experience through our senses.

A fascinating fact faces us within the Greek language relative to *mythos* and *logos*. Both of these expressions mean *word*, whether the *mythical* word or the *logical* word. The difference, however, reflects the fact that Greek culture recognized that human beings not only were *speech* animals and, thus, produced language through *logos*, but that a spiritual reality existed which exceeded reason's ability to grasp conceptually and could only be acknowledged through *mythos*. So, the Greeks recognized *myth* as the *word by which humans express the reality experienced of an incomprehensible presence*, whereas *logic* as the *word which humans express to themselves and to others of their experience of a comprehensible reality*.

This fascinating fact takes on a further dimension if we view it from the perspective of the word the Greeks (including Plato and Aristotle) used to express what we translate as truth, namely, ***alethein***. This Greek word has four meanings plus the meaning of what is called the *alpha privative*, that is, the prefix ***a***. This prefix ***a*** means not; the Greek verb ***lethein*** means: to forget, to hide, to bury and to cover up. Thus the Greek word which we translate as a positive term truth, actually has four negative meanings: not to forget, not to hide, not to bury and not to cover up.

Using this Greek view of truth as our basis, they viewed myth as the word (or story). That is, they used

**The Greek word *mythos* expresses in word a reality whose presence is as sacred as it is invisible and incomprehensible.**

***mythos*** as the word to express in a story the meaning of that which they could not grasp through conceptual knowledge, but had experienced in their search for the meaning of life. Myth, then paralleled science in that myth acknowledged a reality within nature which transcended the human understanding of nature whereas science intellectually grasped the understandable, or intelligible realities. Myth, therefore, and science alike (as the celebrated drawing of the atom by Neils Bohr) create paradigms and uses those paradigms to explain what human beings can not feel, taste, touch, see or hear, paradigms like “atoms”, like “gravity” and so many other “scientific” terms, yes, even within the esoteric world of mathematics the paradigm of the infinite, calculus - a Latin word coming from the Greek word ***xale***, meaning a small stone, thereby indicating a number so small that it is infinite.

Thus, mythology became an alternative to what the Greeks called philosophy. Both mythology and philosophy, therefore, were equivalent in their attempts to understand the first principles of being. Camus comments on this Greek use of myth within his Myth of Sisyphus, specifically, the essay, The Myth of Sisyphus: “Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them”. Camus echoes the second chapter of ***Genesis*** wherein the sacred writer describes ***Yhwh*** as breathing life into dust and thereby creating man, then woman in ***Yhwh***’s image and likeness. The Hebrew word is ***zelem*** and means image of the spiritual source. So, to Camus, myths allow humans to breath a life of meaning into the varied and apparently chaotic world of being which we perceive and, thereby, enable us to understand what we can not grasp through conceptual knowledge. The Sumerians breath just such life into human existence through the myth of Gilgamesh.

The Jesuit biblical scholar, author of The Two-Edged Sword, A Study of the Old Testament, comments in Myths and Realities, Studies in Biblical Theology:

In these (Egyptian and Mesopotamian) religions, then, natural forces were personalized; and the great gods of these religions were nature-gods. As far as the history of religions can trace the idea of the divine, the simplest and most primitive apprehension of the existence of powers which are uncontrollable by man is formed from the perception of natural forces... The philosopher is not theistic because he does not share the modern concept of nature as a closed and unified system... But he realizes that he is still in the

presence of a force which he cannot control. He cannot locate this force within the limits of observed natural forces and so must go beyond them, beyond the limits of the material universe; he must conceive a deity which is transcendent, and find a rational solution of the antinomy of a closed system, observed by the natural sciences, and a transcendent agent, postulated by the primary principles of reason. So Aristotle describes his Prime Mover, and so St. Thomas describes God in his Five Ways. In modern philosophy, as in the religion of the ancients, man still goes to God through “nature”. (pp. 88 & 90)

Yet, Aquinas adds an interesting twist to our understanding of religion in

**The denotative meaning of the word “religion” is: to re-read, to re-choose and to re-bind.**

general. Agreeing with Cicero, Aquinas reflects upon the linguistic origins which Cicero speculates about within his *De Natura Deorum*, *On the Nature of Gods* about the Latin word *religio*. Aquinas assigns three roots to be part of the Latin word *religio*, coupled with the same prefix, *re*, meaning, *again*. Those three roots are verbs *lègere*, *to read*, *legère*, *to choose* and *ligère*, *to bind*. So, Aquinas observes that the essential meaning of this word religion is that humans *reread* the book of nature in relation to the *source of life itself* (as well as their own lives), *re-choose* the relationship they have to this *source of life itself* and then, *rebind* themselves to that *source of life*. Aquinas calls this the *natural virtue of religion*, resulting from what he calls the *passive relation* resulting from the creative act of *Yhwh* as described within the first two chapters of *Genesis*.

Religion, in other words, is not closed-ended. A truly religious person continuously re-reads, re-chooses and re-binds self to *the source of life itself*. As with any other commitment involving love within human life, religion is a continuous daily, even hourly recommitment of ourselves to *the source of life*. Any other “kind” of religion, namely, denominational religion, he comments, results from man, citing the Jewish religion, originating from Moses’ understanding of *Yhwh’s* instructions and, yes, even, Jesus Christ, the “Word made flesh”, whose Divine Nature communicated through His Human Nature. Even the friendship with and then death of Enkidu requires Gilgamesh to re-read, re-choose the meaning for life and then he re-binds himself to this new found meaning the blind Utnapishtim brings Gilgamesh to understand.

*Gilgamesh* is the earliest *myth* the occidental world has uncovered thus far and is of *oriental* origin. The question is: what does this first *oriental myth* tell the Sumerians about the meaning of the world over seven thousand years ago? Well, diverse sources answer this question differently.

The *Grolier Encyclopedia* states: “The Epic of *Gilgamesh* is a long Akkadian poem about a human being’s futile quest for immortality”. Various language scholars and archaeologists describe *Gilgamesh* differently: “...a revolt against death...” (Professor Thorkild Jacobsen); “...a Babylonian creation inspired by the search for an answer to questions about the goal of human existence.” (John H. Marks). *Epic*, from the Greek word *epos*, means *word*, or *story*. All scholars, however, agree on two points: first, that this is the oldest epic the *occidental* world thus far has found, being more than fifteen hundred years older than the Homeric *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Secondly, this epic is fragmented,

perhaps, even several different poems scholars have pieced into what we now call *Gilgamesh*. I would add two things: first, this is the first oriental African, black cultural epic which the occidental world has accessed; secondly, it is the first oriental “religious” work we have available for study.

**Gilgamesh seeks immortality through the love of friendship.**

Theodore Gaster calls *Gilgamesh* “...the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* of the ancient Near East” and Alexander Heidel calls it “...the *Odyssey* of the Babylonians”. This *epic* is a story coordinated from five different poetic origins surviving from Sumerian literature as old as three thousand years and a civilization which thrived as long ago as five thousand B.C. The *Gilgamesh* stories were originally discovered in the ruins of Nineveh, Assyria on 3, December 1872 at an excavation site first begun in 1849. These five separate poems describe some five different accounts of Gilgamesh: *Gilgamesh* and the Bull of Heaven; the Death of *Gilgamesh*; *Gilgamesh* and Agga of Kish (a city in northern Babylonia); *Gilgamesh* and the Land of the Living; *Gilgamesh*, Enkidu and the Neither World. The Sumerians did not write these five events into one poem, so what we now read as one epic is the result of occidental scholars working from some fourteen separate cuneiform tables uncovered in 1872 from a library cite of the seventh century B.C. built by Assurbanipal, the last great king of the Assyrian Empire. These five different stories reflect some five different ethnic groups which geographically occupied the area.

Assyria originally was the name of the territory east of the Tigris river, Babylonia being the country in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley, extending from the present Baghdad, Iraq to the Persian Gulf. Thus, Assyria was within the area now occupied by Iran and Iraq on current maps. By 6000 B.C., villages stretched from Assyria along a fertile plain just below the Armenian hills to the Euphrates River and beyond; about 5000 B.C., the occupation of Babylonia began by people who started at the Persian Gulf and gradually moved up river. About 3100 B.C., this became the city of Sumer, lasting until 200 B.C. About the same time, Assyrians took over the eastern part of northern *Mesopotamia* ( a Greek word meaning literally, *between the rivers*). Assyrian civilization peaked under Ashurnasirpal II, between 883-59 B.C. and with the ascendancy of Ashurbanipal, between 668-26 B.C., declined so that by 621 B.C., the Medes and Babylonians destroyed Nineveh, ending the Assyrian Empire.

The order of events within this epic as now arranged is uncertain, however, the order of episodes seems consistent. These cuneiform (*cuneus*, and *forma*, Latin, meaning *wedge* and *shape* respectively) tables were written by five different oriental ethnic groups: Sumerian, Babylonian, Parthian (Iranian), Persian (Iraqi) and Assyrian all living in ancient Mesopotamia, in or near the Sumerian city of Uruk (the *Old Testament* calls it Erech; we presently name it Warka), about 156 miles southeast of today’s Baghdad, Iraq between five thousand and fifteen hundred B.C.

One of the fourteen, the eleventh tablet, written about 2000 B.C. and found in the seventh century B.C. library of Assurbanipal, king of the Assyrian Empire, contains a description of a “deluge”, paralleling the famous flood found within the *Old Testament*, (*Genesis, Chapter 6, vs. 9-Chapter 8 vs. 22*) written after the Babylonian Exile of the

Jews ended in 538 B.C. To date, archeology finds that five cities were named as existing before this Deluge. After this catastrophe, “Kingship once more descended” from the gods to men - again, this parallels the *Old Testament*, *Book of Samuel* where Hannah sings in thanksgiving for being pregnant with Samuel, the anointed King sent by *Yhwh* to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Covenant (*1 Samuel 2:11*).

**Gilgamesh as King is two-thirds divine and one-third human and Enkidu as peasant is one-half animal and one-half human.**

So, the *Gilgamesh* epic provides a second and separate account of some devastating flood upon the earth as does the *Old Testament*. A semi-historical “Sumerian King-List”, written about 2000 B.C. lists Kish as the first dominant city, but then Uruk defeated Kish and assumed supremacy. *Gilgamesh* is named in this King-List as the fifth ruler of the first post-diluvial dynasty of Uruk. Although Sandars’ edition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is an improvement over the Mason edition, neither probes the five different stories within the *Epic* from a comparative *mythology* viewpoint, so neither presents a coherent view of these stories in relation to the *epic* itself. Actually, the five different stories become coherent if we view the *epic* from the perspective of the *myths* to which the five ethnic groups refer. Claudius Aelianus, a second century A.D. Roman author writes:

When Seucchorus (Enmekar, king of Uruk) reigned over the Babylonians, the Chaldeans said that the son who would be born of his daughter would wrest the kingdom from the grandfather. At this he was alarmed and, expressing it as a joke, became an Acrisios (King of Argos, Greece) to the girl; for he guarded (her) closely. But without his knowledge - for fate was more ingenious than the Babylonian - the girl became a mother by an obscure man and bore a child. (Her) guards, in fear of the king, threw it from the acropolis; for it was there that the aforementioned girl was imprisoned. But an eagle quickly saw the child fall and before the infant dashed upon the ground, got underneath it and received (it) on (his) back, and carrying it to an orchard, he set it down cautiously. The caretaker of the place, seeing the beautiful child, loved it and reared it; it was called *Gilgamos* and reigned over the Babylonians. (*De Natura Animalium*, xii. 21)

The five stories find unity through this *Gilgamos*, or *Gilgamesh*, a king, as the royal character and his friendship with Enkidu, a “nature-boy”. The setting, however, is very important, since Uruk is a city situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in ancient Babylonia. This setting is one productive and supportive of life, plant, animal and human, surrounded by the dry desert scorched almost lifeless by the sun. Indeed, just as the Jesuit, McKenzie wrote, “In modern philosophy, as in the religion of the ancients, man still goes to God through ‘nature’”, so this myth implies both in ancient and contemporary times the awareness of God as love comes to man through nature, that is, through the friendship between riches (royalty, the *sacred*) and poverty (peasantry, the *profane*) - recall here Plato’s myth of *Poros* and *Penia*! *Myth* is the human being’s acknowledgement of the presence of the *sacred*, God, within and through the *profane*! Of course, most interesting is the final line of the first section of *Gilgamesh* wherein the

writer(s) comments: “They looked upon each other and became human”. One reflection upon this comment is that becoming human occurs through the love of friendship and this love of friendship manifests a *sacred* presence within the *profane* world wherein both the royalty of a king and the animality of a peasant life.

**This myth dramatizes the struggle to be human, both immortal and mortal.**

This mythic story ends the first paragraph with a statement which provides the clue in the interpretation of the Gilgamesh myth and the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, namely, “It is the story of their becoming human together”. Of course, this relationship is one of friendship, so this story concerns how the love of friendship relates to becoming human as well as how this love of friendship, as the blind Upnapishtim reveals to Gilgamesh manifests the presence of the sacred and, thus, becomes the place wherein humans “meet” the source of life, or, what we might call “God”!

*Gilgamesh*, as the King of Uruk lives on a life-giving plain surrounded by a death dealing desert. *Gilgamesh* has the Goddess *Ninsun*, the wife of the God *Lugalbonda* as his mother, but “the high priest of *Kullab*” as his father, so *Gilgamesh* shares in mortality and immortality, being two-thirds god and one-third human - perhaps this “god man” presents us with the results of what Thomas Aquinas calls a “promise” of the *New Testament* revelation wherein Christ receives His divinity from *Yhwh* and His humanity from Mary. So, as king of Uruk, *Gilgamesh* shares in the divine power of the gods, yet, he becomes an arrogant person because of this divine power and tyrannizes the citizens of Uruk. He disregards the value of human life and tramples even upon the rights of newly married persons because *Gilgamesh* requires that he make love to the new bride prior to the husband, until, that is, *Gilgamesh* meets Enkidu, perhaps indicating the humanizing aspect of the love of friendship. *Gilgamesh* has two dreams and his Goddess mother, *Ninsun* interprets *Gilgamesh*’s dreams as foretelling his meeting with Enkidu, “...your friend...who will lift you out of tiredness”. Of course, tiredness was not the least of *Gilgamesh*’s experiences. As the first part of the text indicates, *Gilgamesh* lived a life without direction and, thus, treated his people in an arbitrary manner and a life of boredom and, thus, asserted his royal right to sleep with any virgin before her marriage vows might be fulfilled by her husband. Enkidu also experienced a certain exhaustion, as a result of “becoming a man” by sleeping with the prostitute and thereby lost his unique personal relationship with the animals with whom he drank water, ate food and ran “wild”.

**Gilgamesh, the mythical human struggles with the presence of transcendence within himself living within a mortal body.**

The king meets Enkidu on his way to pick a wife as his princess; they wrestle, but Enkidu,

a nature-man whom the plants and animals consider their natural leader, forces the powerful king, Uruk’s divine leader to a draw and so this divine-man and this human-animal experience the equality of humanity and become friends. They work together through two separate adventures, the entry into the forest of Humbaba to cut down the cedar tree and, as a result of Ishtar’s wrath, the effort to defeat the Bull from Heaven. After the Bull from Heaven is killed, Enkidu flaunts the goddess Ishtar who then causes

him to die from the wounds he received in his fight against the Bull. Enkidu's death changes the heart of *Gilgamesh* since his "...soul has been converted to a thing which sees how much it costs to lose a friend (he) loved". The arrogance of royalty dissolves into the humility of friendship. *Gilgamesh* then sets out "...to find the secret of eternal life which he might carry back to give his friend". *Gilgamesh*, therefore, initially seeks eternal life only as a means to bring back his friend Enkidu from the dead.

Although every translator and editor of this epic claims that it is the story of *Gilgamesh's* search for immortality to avoid death, I do not agree, notwithstanding the fact that the Mason translation/edition uses the word death some sixty-three (63) times. Indeed, after the wounded Enkidu kills the Bull of Heaven and is dying, the text reads:

*Gilgamesh*, though he was king, had never looked at death before...Tears filled his eyes as he appealed to Ninsun, his mother, and to the Elders not to explain (death) but to save his friend...(pp. 6-7)

On the contrary, the divine-human, *Gilgamesh* feels the mortality he sees his friend, Enkidu lose and begins the search to recover that immortal love of friendship he shared with Enkidu. So, the third part (III) of Mason's text describes *Gilgamesh's* search as follows:

His life became a quest to find the secret of eternal life which he might carry back to give his friend.(p.8)

This same purpose is repeated four (4) more times, until Utnapishtim, a blind wise man comments to *Gilgamesh*:

Friendship is vowing toward immortality and does not know the passing away of beauty...because it aims for the spirit.

Then again, Utnapishtim says:

I think love's kiss kills our heart of flesh. It is the only way to eternal life which should be unbearable if lived among the dying flowers...

*Gilgamesh*, as king, was consumed with his power and wealth, so he lived by a "heart of flesh". Yet, *Gilgamesh* did seek out the blind wise one, Utnapishtim. Now, the love of friendship awakens *Gilgamesh* to his spiritual nature, his divine part so, although Utnapishtim criticizes *Gilgamesh* for seeking for his friend externally by asking if people had seen Enkidu by "naming" him, Utnapishtim also credits *Gilgamesh* for seeking the friendship he experienced in Enkidu by asking a "blind" wise person:

Two things encourage me to hope, he said; that one can come this far to bring life to a friend and that you understand how we must borrow light from the blind. (p. 11)

Therefore, *Gilgamesh* must stop looking for Enkidu outside through his “heart of flesh” by the light of his eyes and turn within to find that friendship in his “heart of spirit”.

*Gilgamesh*, as friend,  
tasted mortality as a result of  
the death of Enkidu, but that

**Gilgamesh had tasted the immortality of  
friendship through Enkidu.**

taste was bitter sweet, since that taste awakened the awareness of spirituality and, therefore, sweetness of immortality through the love evoked within him by his friendship with Enkidu. Henceforward *Gilgamesh* lived from a “heart of spirit”. This experience of love became a participation in the eternal which *Gilgamesh* had sought to find so he might reawaken his natural, dead friend Enkidu - just as that friendship had reawakened the arrogant King *Gilgamesh*’s awareness of being human. Thus, the Old Man, Utnapishtim redirects *Gilgamesh* from this “outside” loss of Enkidu to an “inside” search for life’s meaning through the awareness of the love of friendship and the death of the love of self-importance, saying:

Many years ago through loss, I learned that love is wrung from our inmost heart until only the loved one is and we are not.

Yet, *Gilgamesh* did not yet understand, as he gives way to the exhaustion resulting from his search and sleeps for seven days. Although the life of friendship was available as natural and internal to him, yet he was dead to such a life until he was awakened to it by Enkidu. Then, Utnapishtim sent *Gilgamesh* back to Uruk, telling him about the “...plant in the river”. *Gilgamesh* recovers the plant, only to lose it to the serpent because he again succumbed to his tired mortality. Even when *Gilgamesh* returns to Uruk, he seeks to reawaken his love of Enkidu by asking a blind man if he remembered Enkidu’s name, but he did not. *Gilgamesh* then loses himself in the external, physical achievements of his citizens “...and for a moment - just a moment - all that lay behind him passed from view”. But, let us return to the beginning. Remember that the setting of this over 7,000 year old myth is between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, a sacred place because life originates and thrives here, thanks to the nurturing of its fertile soil. The myth has two central characters, *Gilgamesh*, the king of Uruk, two-thirds god and one-third man and Enkidu, the animal-man. “It is the story of their becoming human together.”

This story is called a myth. Myth is a Greek cognate, meaning word (from mythos); the Greek cognate logic (from logos) also means word. However, the characteristics of these “words” are very different and represent to the Greeks the abilities and limitations of human reason. The logic word delivers knowledge, that is, the ability of human reason to grasp meaning, and, thereby, to categorize and express that meaning to self and to others. The mythic word, on the contrary, names a presence which eludes the grasp of human reason and, although present, can not be known by human reason. Immediate examples would be “truth”, “goodness” and “beauty”. The presence of such realities are discovered indirectly by reason, “truth” by the fact that humans recognize error, “goodness” by the fact humans see bad, or evil, “beauty” by the fact humans discover the ugly - so when humans pronounce an error, evil or the ugly, they are making



a comparative judgment according to a standard which human reason recognizes to be present but which reason can not appropriate as knowledge.

*Gilgamesh*, therefore, is a myth, a story unveiling the presence of a sacred reality within the mundane or profane

**Just as the *Old Testament* specifies that the love of *Yhwh* is written in the hearts of humans, *Gilgamesh* finds divinity written in his heart through friendship.**

lives of the King of Uruk and the “wild” Enkidu. That sacred reality appears through the love of friendship thanks to which the mortality of being human participates reveals the immortality of being divine. This sacred presence is found within the human person, as dramatized by *Gilgamesh* and as described by Utnapishtim, the blind wise man who sees what physical human eyes can not see.

Many years ago through loss I learned that love is wrung from our inmost heart until only the loved one is and we are not.(Part III)

Whereas *Gilgamesh* proceeded to travel throughout the world in search of someone who might bring back the dead Enkidu, Utnapishtim reveals that his search should be directed within where the presence of Enkidu exists because of the presence of this love called friendship. Such a presence made “time and space...uneventful now” because this love is immortal and manifests a union with the divine which lasts forever.

I think compassion is our God’s pure act which burns forever and be it in Heaven or in Hell doesn’t matter for me because Hell is the everlasting gift of His presence to the lonely heart who is longing amidst perishing phantoms and doesn’t care to find any immortality if not in the pure loneliness of the Holy One, this loneliness which He enjoys forever inside and outside of His creation. It is enough for one who loves to find his Only One singled in Himself and this is the cup of immortality. (Part III)

Thus, Utnapishtim directs *Gilgamesh* to the awareness that the love of friendship which as the King, God and man he found through Enkidu, the animal man, he has found the presence of the sacred, God as the source of love itself within himself - so this epic seems to reiterate the text within *Deuteronomy* (6:4-13) wherein *Yhwh* states that the presence of *Yhwh* is written in the hearts of humans.

So, the myth authors contrast *Gilgamesh*, as two-thirds god and one-third man with Enkidu, the human animal. Scholars suggest that *Gilgamesh* typifies the civilized, Enkidu, the natural human being. *Gilgamesh* appears to be aware of being “more” than natural, whereas Enkidu is happy to be as he is. A conflict exists in *Gilgamesh*, a conflict which requires “proof”, verification, so *Gilgamesh* challenges Enkidu. Several theories are proposed to explain this conflict between *Gilgamesh* and the “forest” one, Enkidu. However, one theory which scholars thus far have not mentioned is that this conflict is a symbol of the human being struggling within him or herself, specifically, the mind struggling with the human body.

If we look at this myth of *Gilgamesh* as the mind, *human royalty* struggling with the body, *human embodiment*, we see

**So, the Wise balance the presence immortality with the reality of mortality.**

*Gilgamesh* as a *myth* calling for humans to come to terms with the search for some absolute within this world of embodied relativity. Coming to terms with this human situation means simply to accept the incarnation of spirituality within this material world, that is, the spiritual soul within an enlivened human body. This interpretation is reasonable because the noble human mind (participating in immortality) finds within its human embodiment an appetite for values such as truth, goodness and beauty which it cannot achieve because whatever is within the human mind comes through the lowly human senses( and thus, participates in mortality). So, as the noble human mind struggles with its human embodiment until an equality, or balance is reached, mutual respect is found and friendship results. This truth which human beings desire transcends anything which the human senses can provide for the mind's knowledge and participates in something more than the mind can achieve. So, as the mind wrestles with the body and the struggle turns into a draw, the mind and body befriend each other and a bond of friendship develops, the mortal evoking the immortal and the immortal embracing the

Sometimes, however, a jealousy develops between the human desire for Truth (the immortal and the unchangeable) and the human mind's dependence upon the senses within the human body (the mortal and the changeable). A battle ensues between the mind and the body, between thinking and sensing, between knowing and feeling. Yet, the lowly human body (*Enkidu*) wins precisely because the kingly human mind (*Gilgamesh*) depends upon the senses of the human body and the two become fast friends. Death, however, takes the human body (*Enkidu*) and the mind within the soul, as immortal (*Gilgamesh*) wanders about mourning the death of the human body with which the soul had established a friendship. The irony of this search, as the Old Man, *Utnapishtim* tried to tell *Gilgamesh*, is that the presence of the soul within the body, just as the presence of the love of friendship within *Gilgamesh's* soul, means that the body and *Gilgamesh* share in the eternal. Thus, despite the death of the body and the death of *Enkidu*, neither dies absolutely but love transcends both, notwithstanding the fact of mortality and the consequent inevitability of death.

**The human dilemma is: whether life can be lived without mortality and whether mortality exists without immortality?**

This mythic conflict compares to the contemporary conflict alleged between the mind

and the body, science and myth, reason and the senses. Of course, this alleged conflict is nothing new from the so-called "enlightenment" period to our contemporary times. Yet, the *Gilgamesh myth* manifests something old and continuous, that is, the inability of human beings to accept the "mixed" life, namely, the mind's dependence upon the body, the dependence of knowledge upon the senses, reason's dependence upon the human experience and even reason's dependence upon myth to explain a presence which conceptual knowledge can not grasp and experimentation can not capture for empirical analysis.

Humans seek to control reality through knowledge, yet, face the fact that the very knowledge humans achieve results from principles no rational method can deduce and seeks *Truth* which no human can master. In other words, the human faces the fact that s/he faces an ever present mystery, which it can never control or resolve. So, the one persistent problem which hounds the human being is the reality of difference within self and the world versus the urge to achieve unity not through knowledge but through love, a reality humans can not grasp through knowledge but can only live through actions - no writer portrays this human difficulty better than Albert Camus within his *Myth of Sisyphus*. written in 1942.

The mind's first step is to distinguish what is true from what is false. However, as soon as thought reflects on itself, what it first discovers is a contradiction...The mind's deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his soul..The truism "All thought is anthropomorphic" has no other meaning. Likewise, the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought..If thought discovered in the shimmering mirrors of phenomena eternal relations capable of summing them up and summing themselves up in a single principle, then would be seen an intellectual joy of which the *myth* of the blessed would be but a ridiculous imitation. That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama. But the fact of that nostalgia's existence does not imply that it is to be immediately salified. For if, bridging the gulf that separates desire from conquest, we assert with Parmenides the reality of the One (whatever it may be), we fall into the ridiculous contradiction of a mind that asserts total unity and proves by its own assertion its own difference and the diversity it claimed to resolve. (*Myth of Sisyphus*, Chapter One, *An Absurd Reasoning*, pp.12-14)

Indeed, Camus personalizes this quest of what he calls "absurd reason" and even describes the search *Gilgamesh* makes after the death of Enkidu. *Gilgamesh* "knew" what he felt between himself and Enkidu, however, the search to recapture this "knowledge" returned to the heart within him, to that love of friendship which does not die with death:

Of whom and of what indeed can I say: 'I know that!' This heart within me I can feel and I judge that it exists. This world I touch and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge and the rest is construction. For it I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume, all those likewise that have been attributed to it, this upbringing, this origin, this ardor of these silences, this nobility or this vileness. But aspects cannot be added up. This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my

existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. (*Myth of Sisyphus*, Chapter One, “An Absurd Reasoning”, pp. 14-15)

This citation of Camus’ description of this human dilemma

**Anu, the God of the Heaven and the Heart holds power over all being and gives birth to Ea, the Goddess of Earth and of Wisdom!**

certainly sheds light upon the struggle between *Gilgamesh* and *Enkidu* as well as provides a contemporary commentary upon the struggle of *Gilgamesh* to understand himself and his feelings throughout the epic. Utnapishtim, the “blind” wise person sums up *Gilgamesh*’s search for immortality through the love of friendship by describing love:

You have known, O Gilgamesh what interests me, to drink from the Well of Immortality which means to make the dead rise from their graves, the prisoners from their cells, the sinners from their sins. I think love’s kiss kills our heart of flesh. It is the only way to eternal life which should be unbearable if lived among the dying flowers and the shrieking farewells of the overstretched arms of our spoiled hopes. (p. 11)

Utnapishtim centers his trust and his life in the “heart of spirit”, the “Well of Immortality”. Furthermore, Utnapishtim even describes *compassion* to be “God’s pure act which burns forever...” and states “It is enough for one who loves to find his Only One singled in Himself and that is the cup of immortality”. So, this 5,000 B.C. *Gilgamesh* myth equates love of friendship with *compassion* as “God’s pure act which burns forever...” and identifies such love with the “cup of Immortality”.

Indeed, Camus’ use of Sisyphus provides us a Greek example of the black Assyrian *Gilgamesh*:

Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put Death into chains. Pluto could not endure the sight of his deserted, silent empire. He dispatched the god of war, who liberated Death from the hands of her conqueror.

It is said also that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife’s love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 119-20)

Originally then, the Greek God *Hermes*, literally, *messenger* (of the Gods), later the Roman God *Mercury*, God of commerce and a messenger of the gods, at once quick-

witted and rapidly changeable, who sent the immortal God Sisyphus to earth as a man who became wise in the ways of men. But when Death recalled him, Sisyphus decided to stay because he came to love the warm sun and the beautiful land. Sisyphus faced his immortality as a god and his love of mortal reality as a man, leaving the former in favor of the latter, yet, ultimately, he had to face the consequence of his choice.

Thus, Sisyphus gives us insight into *Gilgamesh*, since the comments of Camus allow us a basis from which we may study the *Epic of Gilgamesh* so we may realize that this poem is younger than 5000 B.C. Therefore, when we look at our reflections within a mirror, recognize the immortality of the *Truth* we seek and the love we find, yet, see the mortality which we face, we can consider *how we love* so we may face death without regret.

One explanation remains, that is, the parallel between the Assyrian Bull of Heaven and the Greek God Dionysus, son of Zeus. The Assyrian *Anu*, the God of the Heart held the power over all being and begot *Enki* or *Ea*, the Goddess of Wisdom who provided water to bring forth life on the earth. It is quite reasonable that *Ishtar* persuaded *Anu*, the father of gods to send the Bull of Heaven, as the “death giver”, since *Anu*, beginning with the primeval sea, gave birth to the cosmic mountain, 08/01 consisting of *heaven*, *An*, and *earth*, *Ki*, separated by *Enlil*, God of the Air. Thus, a drought occurred to punish both *Gilgamesh* and *Enkidu* for invading the life-giving rain forest and, perhaps for wasting the gift of life which is friendship for oneself.

The Greek God *Dionysus*, son of Zeus was a “horned child”, thus, paralleling the Bull of Heaven. *Dionysus* became alternately a goat, a stag, a bull or a ram according to the place of his worship. *Dionysus* spread the “vine”, both wine vines and beer hops about the earth, over Europe, Asia and North Africa, to India by way of Persia, a symbol, perhaps of the immortal taste of a divine beverage as compared to mortal (indeed, at that time) death-dealing water - historically, water has resulted in more human deaths than all plagues and diseases! One of *Dionysus*' titles was *Dendrites*, literally, tree-youth and was celebrated as the Spring Festival when the trees burst into leaf and the whole world is intoxicated with desire, celebrating the liberation of life from winter's death grasp. *Dionysus*, furthermore, appeared as three animals, a Serpent in the Winter, a Lion in the Spring to be killed and eaten as a Bull, a goat or a stag in the Summer, as the people shared in the life nature gave to them. Obviously, the oriental city of Sumer and the “occidental” city of Athens shared their views of nature's and human's views of mortality seeking immortality through the love of friendship in the myths they sang at the feasts where they gathered to celebrate the rebirth of life in Spring from the death of Winter!