

Gilgamesh

Part I

The story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu "is the story of their becoming human together". This statement is the essence and the purpose of this myth. They become human together through the bond of the love of friendship. This love of friendship developed between these two "equals" as a result of neither winning the "fight" they engaged in outside the home of the newly wedded wife of one of King Gilgamesh's subjects and of them looking in each other's eyes and seeing that they are similar one to the other.

Gilgamesh was king of Uruk, "a city set between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in ancient Babylonia". Enkidu ran with the animals of nature who "hailed him as the equal of their king".

Gilgamesh was a "a godlike man alone with his thoughts in idleness", "two-thirds God and one-third man" whereas Enkidu was half animal and half man "...ignorant of oldness and...not knowing fear or wisdom".

As Enkidu stood to block Gilgamesh's way to the house where the virgin bride was staying, Gilgamesh "lunged at Enkidu" and "their feet danced the dance of life which hovers close to death". This dance of life which hovers close to death is reflected in the fact Gilgamesh is King, presumed eternal whereas Enkidu is merely natural, presumed mortal. Gilgamesh "...stood still exhausted...turned to Enkidu who leaned against his shoulder and looked into his eyes and saw himself in the other, just as Enkidu saw himself in Gilgamesh". "They began to laugh and clutched each other in their breathless exaltation".

This "...story of their becoming human together" finds its fulfillment in Gilgamesh and Enkidu looking in each other's eyes and each "...saw himself in the other..." and then "they began to laugh and clutched each other in their breathless exaltation". To be human, therefore, is not being a king or to be a "nature" man, but to be friends, one to the other through love of one's self image in the other's image. Thus, to be human is to find the balance between the eternal mind and the mortal body each of us is composed of.

This love one of the other finds its fulfillment in Part IV wherein the blind wise one, Utnapishtim teaches Gilgamesh that to be beloved as he was through his friendship with Enkidu is to be with the loved one for eternity. Then Utnapishtim details the

nature of love as both sacred and eternal and notes that to be in the relationship of friendship is to be one with God who IS love.

Part II

The reaction of Gilgamesh and Enkidu is typical of the reaction of those who "fall in love", namely, let us now go out and "conquer" the world.

Gilgamesh wanted "to kill the Evil One, Humbaba" so they might "prove ourselves more powerful than he" - the "King" seeks to prove that friendship is more powerful than "evil" whereas Enkidu "was afraid". "... He was not as strong as Gilgamesh in argument and they were friends". "Don't be afraid, said Gilgamesh. We are together, two bound as one through love, the strongest bond on planet earth. There is nothing we should fear". But, Enkidu wanted to know why Gilgamesh wanted to "raise... Humbaba's anger?"

Gilgamesh put the proposed adventure to the vote of the "Elders of Uruk" and "their voices gave the confidence his friend had failed to give; some even said that Enkidu's wisdom was a sign of cowardice". Gilgamesh laughed and said "You see, my friend...the wise of Uruk have outnumbered you". This dramatizes the "wisdom" of men which becomes folly with the innate wisdom of the natural Enkidu as reflective of nature.

So, Gilgamesh and Enkidu go to meet with Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother who burned incense to Shamash, saying: "You inspire him to end the evil of the world which you abhor and yet he is a man for all his power and cannot do your work".

The result of this adventure against "evil" is that Enkidu is wounded by Humbaba, but Gilgamesh kills Humbaba with his ax, then Istar, the Goddess of Love and War, proposes to Gilgamesh but he rejects her. Istar then pleads with the God Anu to send the Bull of Heaven to kill both of them, however, Enkidu kills the Bull of Heaven. Enkidu, however, is dying from the wound received from Humbaba and says: "Enlil said I must die, for you are two-thirds God and should not die". Gilgamesh becomes fearful of his "own solitude" forgotten in the rush of his friendship with Enkidu: "I can't imagine being left alone. I'm less a man without my friend...Gilgamesh, though he was king, had never looked at death before". Enkidu complains that whereas "everything had life to me...the sky, the storm, the earth, water, wandering, the moon and its three children, salt, even my hand had life. It's gone. It's gone...Because of her. She made

me see things as a man and a man sees death in things. That is what it is to be a man".

Part III

"Gilgamesh wept bitterly for his friend...The only nourishment he knew was grief, endless in its hidden source, yet never ending hunger...for the heart has changed and the soul has been converted to a thing that sees how much it costs to lose a friend it loved...For being human holds a special grief of privacy within the universe that yearns and waits to be retouched by someone who can take away the memory of death". Of course, thanks to the blind man Upnaptishim, the answer to Gilgamesh's grief and loss is the fact that the love of friendship itself as a virtuous presence within Gilgamesh is also the presence of his beloved, Enkidu. So this love of friendship, thanks to which Gilgamesh and Enkidu became "human together", as a continuous and undying presence also manifests a sacred presence of God's love. Thus, in this myth, the writer(s) are saying that the love of human friendship is both the sacred presence of God as love as well as the way humans contact the God of love.

"Gilgamesh wandered through the desert alone as he had never been alone when he had craved but not known what he craved...Death had taken the direction he had gained. He was no more a king but just a man who now had lost his way...His life became a quest to find the secret of eternal life which he might carry back to give his friend...He yearned to talk to Utnapishtim, the one who had survived the flood and death itself, the one who knew the secret".

Gilgamesh met Utnapishtim, "... (who) was the only one whom he had met on his journey who did not add to his fatigue" and said to him: "My friend has died so many times in me, and yet he still seems so alive, like a younger brother, then suddenly like soft tissue, a dried leaf. I was afraid. Is there something more than death? Some other end to friendship?"

"Utnapishtim raised his hand and touched the shoulder of the younger man to put him at his ease. Two things encourage me to hope...that one can come this far to bring life to a friend and that you understand how we must borrow light from the blind...Friendship is vowing toward immortality and does not know the passing away of beauty...because it aims for the spirit. 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". This "passing away of beauty", indeed, this absence of the

beloved itself becomes that lack, that emptiness, yes, even that **yin** thanks to which the sacred presence of God (or the **Tao**) may find an opening and literally shine forth into this profane world in which humans live and die. The **Tao** of Lao-tzu also incorporates this insight, specifically tone poem #67 in which Lao-tzu credits **Tao** with having three treasures, deep love, frugality and never to be the first in the world. Of these three, deep love is the most important because:

When Heaven is to save a person,
Heaven will protect him through deep love.
Here, as in the **Tao**, tone poem # 67, "

Utnapishtim then tells his story to Gilgamesh, a story of a universal flood which destroyed all life except "...food and wine and precious minerals and the seed of living animals we put in it. My family..." (See **Genesis**, 6:5-22 for a parallel story of Abraham who lived in Canaan about 1850 B.C. and written between 700 and 500 B.C.)

Utnapishtim also tells Gilgamesh about a plant in the river: "Its thorns will prick your hands as a rose thorn pricks but it will give to you new life." Gilgamesh finds, then loses the plant to a serpent.

Part IV

"In time, he recognized this loss as the end of his journey and returned to Uruk...He entered the city and asked a blind man if he had ever heard the name Enkidu and the old man shrugged and shook his head, then turned away, as if to say it is impossible to keep the names of friends whom we have lost". So, we observe that Gilgamesh has returned to his isolation and loneliness, having forgotten the wisdom Utnapishtim reminded him of when he noted that Enkidu was present to Gilgamesh through love.