

The Epic of Gilgamesh, the Teachings of Siduri and How Siduri's Ancient Advice Can Help Guide Us to a Happier Life, Third Edition

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Important note on copyright: The original text from “The Epic of Gilgamesh” was created, transmitted and written down by multiple anonymous contributors around 3,000-4,000 years ago. All translations used in this book were either by the author (Peter Dyr) or are in the public domain. Public domain translations of the original cuneiform include those of Morris Jastrow and Albert Clay for their translations in "An Old Babylonian Version of the Gilgamesh Epic on the Basis of Recently Discovered Texts" by Morris Jastrow and Albert T. Clay (New Haven: Yale University press, 1920). The author has also extensively re-written the prose of Bernarda Bryson Shahn's translation in "Gilgamesh: Man's First Story" by Bernarda Bryson (Henry Holt & Company, 1966) to fit within the same shortened poetic form of the original Old Babylonian stanzas, and then used these reconstructed verses to fill in the gaps in the Old Babylonian texts. All additional writing, analysis and commentary is by Peter Dyr.

Dedicated to Morris Jastrow, Albert Clay and Bernarda Bryson for their tireless work translating these ancient tablets, and to my wife and daughter for their love, support and inspiration.

This book contains the complete text for the Epic of Gilgamesh based, as much as possible, on the original Old Babylonian tablets. It also discusses both the teachings of Siduri and how Siduri's ancient advice may help guide us to a happier life.

Chapter 1. Prologue, Introduction and Analysis



King Gilgamesh, from the Epic of Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the first great work of literature. We are extremely fortunate to still possess fragments of the original Old Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh thanks to the methods the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia used when they first invented writing. The Sumerians made wedge shaped letters in soft clay that we call cuneiform. This was originally invented around 5,000 years ago as a method for keeping track of taxes paid, in the form of grains and livestock, to the central city temples.

The Sumerians and their ancestors created the Epic of Gilgamesh, a story of gods, kings, battles, friendship, loss, the fear of death, the search for immortality and advice on how one should live life. It is probable that this story had been verbally transmitted for a very long time before the invention of writing, but we have no way of knowing the exact date when the story actually originated or how many original contributors there were. What we do know is that the story encompassed a large number of concepts, ideas and philosophies and was considered important enough that it was told from generation to generation for hundreds of years, before being immortalized in clay around 1,800 BC. Unfortunately, the original “Old Babylonian” version of the Epic of Gilgamesh is incomplete, making it difficult for us to piece together the exact story our ancient ancestors considered so important. However, several important fragments of the original Epic have been recovered and differ in significant ways from later more complete versions. One of the most fascinating of these original fragments is the Sippar tablet which was discovered near the city of Sippar, on the Euphrates river upstream of the Babylonian region in present day Iraq. The tablet is comprised of two fragments, one of which is currently located in the British Museum in London (BM 96974) and the other in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin (VAT 4105). The Sippar tablet contains the earliest recorded advice (found on the larger VAT 4105 fragment) given to Gilgamesh by a beautiful young girl called Siduri, on how we should live our lives. Interestingly, in a later version of the Epic of Gilgamesh (referred to as the “Akkadian” version) Siduri’s advice was removed from the Epic and much of her original role was given to Utnapishtim, an immortal wise old man. One theory for the diminishment of Siduri’s role is that Siduri being young, female and working class (wine maker), and Utnapishtim being old, male and high class (wise man/immortal) may have played a role, and may suggest possible cultural differences between Sumerian culture and Akkadian culture. Specifically, this change may highlight a degree of ageism, sexism and/or classism in Akkadian culture, and the removal of Siduri’s advice could represent the first recorded case of censorship.

Siduri’s words were recorded long before any other religious text, including the Bible, the Koran or any eastern philosophies (including Buddhism) and represent a very different perspective to the religious texts

used today. Siduri was pro-wine, pro-feasting, pro-music, pro-dancing, pro-joy, pro-sex and pro-family. Wouldn't the world be a better place if more people today would heed Siduri's ancient advice?

In this book I have re-introduced Siduri's teachings, and the original Old Babylonian fragments into the Epic of Gilgamesh, while using the later Akkadian text to fill in the gaps in the original story. I have tried to remain faithful to the original events, concepts and philosophies our ancient ancestors found so important. I have also included a discussion of Siduri's teachings and how we can, if we so wish, live our lives according to Siduri's original ancient advice.

In this updated Third Edition I have re-written the Akkadian prose to more closely resemble the shortened poetic verse of the Old Babylonian texts, added additional analysis of the rest of the Epic and included a new section at the end of the book that contains various informative discussions, from multiple contributors, regarding Siduri's philosophies and underlying concepts within the Epic of Gilgamesh. Discussions of Siduri and her philosophies are included in a few very short chapters at the beginning of the book, analysis of the rest of the Epic is incorporated into Chapter 6, the complete text for the Epic of Gilgamesh is contained within Chapters 7 to 9, and Chapter 10 contains the epilogue and the new multiple contributor discussions section.

Chapter 2. Who Was Siduri?



Stone Relief of Siduri as a Goddess

To the ancient Babylonians Siduri was a Goddess of wine, merry-making and wisdom. She lived in a tavern on the shore of the sea, beyond which was the "Land of Life". Siduri is referred to in the Epic of Gilgamesh as "the Refresher" or "the girl whose drinks refresh the soul". However, despite being given the status of a Goddess, it is probable that Siduri was just a regular girl who lived in Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago, and who's message resonated so strongly with so many people that over the hundreds of years between her advice first being introduced into the Gilgamesh Epic and it actually getting recorded in cuneiform on the Sippar tablet (following the first invention of writing by the Sumerians) that she became increasingly seen as a supernatural God-like entity. Some refer to her as a "Prophet" as an honorary title due to the impact her words have had on them and a "Sidurian" is simply one who tries to live their lives according to Siduri's ancient advice.

Siduri's teachings form the basis for Sidurism, the Church of Siduri and contemporary Sidurianist philosophy. In addition to discussing Siduri and her teachings, this book also includes the complete Epic of Gilgamesh (contained in Chapters 7-9) which provides the background story which acted as a vessel

verbally carrying Siduri's words from person to person through pre-history until they could eventually be recorded in clay.

Chapter 3. Sidurian Philosophy I: What is Sidurian Philosophy?

We know very little about Siduri except that her message was considered important enough to verbally transmit for hundreds of years, from generation to generation, before the invention of writing, over 5,000 years ago, and finally get recorded, in clay, on the Sippar tablet around 4,000 years ago, in the original Old Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh. What was her message, and why did it get included into our earliest recorded literature? It was a message about accepting our mortality, living a life full of joy and ultimately focusing on family "*Look at the child that is holding your hand, and let your wife delight in your embrace. These things alone are the concern of men*". Sidurian philosophy is the careful analysis and interpretation of Siduri's ancient advice and how they might help guide us to a happier life, and Sidurians are people who try to follow Siduri's ancient advice.



The Sippar Tablet that contains Siduri's teachings

Chapter 4. Sidurian Philosophy II: The Teachings of Siduri

The following is a translation of the original teachings of Siduri as recorded on the Sippar tablet (pictured above) representing the earliest recorded advice on how we should live our lives:

*Beside the sea Siduri lives,
the woman of the vine, the maker of wine;
Siduri sits in the garden at the edge of the sea
And where she sits she sees Gilgamesh coming towards her,
the flesh of the gods in his body,
but despair in his heart,
she barred her gate against him.*

*But Gilgamesh called to her,
"Young woman, maker of wine,
why do you bolt your door
for I am Gilgamesh
who seized and killed the Bull of Heaven,
I killed the watchman of the cedar forest,
I overthrew Humbaba who lived in the forest,*

and I killed the lions in the passes of the mountain.”

Then Siduri said:

*“If you are that Gilgamesh
Why is despair in your heart
and why do you come here wandering over the pastures
in search of the wind?”*

Gilgamesh answered her,

*“Despair is in my heart,
Enkidu my brother
whom I loved,
the end of mortality has overtaken him.
I wept for him seven days and nights
Because of my brother I am afraid of death,
because of my brother I stray through the wilderness
and cannot rest.*

But now

*young woman, maker of wine,
since I have seen your face
do not let me see the face of death
which I dread so much.”*

Siduri said,

*“Gilgamesh, whither are you wandering?
Life, which you look for, you will never find.
For when the gods created man, they let
death be his share, and life
withheld in their own hands.
Gilgamesh, fill your belly,
Day and night make merry,
let days be full of joy,
dance and make music day and night.
And wear fresh clothes,
And wash your head and bathe.
Look at the child that is holding your hand,
And let your wife delight in your embrace.
These things alone are the concern of men.”*

Chapter 5. Sidurian Philosophy III: Deconstructing and Interpreting the Teachings of Siduri

Siduri's words come to us from the beginning of recorded history, but what exactly was her message? How we deconstruct the brief text on the Sippar tablet is open to individual interpretation, and a major caveat of the following section is that it represents my analysis of her words, and I respect that others may reach different conclusions. In my perspective, the three core concepts of Siduri's philosophy are: Understanding, Joy and Family.

Understanding. Siduri tries to understand Gilgamesh, his motivations, his pain at the loss of his brother and his dream for immortality, and she advises him to understand that we must all eventually die and must accept our mortality. Siduri teaches us first to try to understand others in our lives, what their motivations are and can we see things from their perspective. If we wish to follow Siduri's ancient teachings, we should make every effort to live with understanding in our lives, and make sure that our colleagues, friends and family feel that we appreciate their point of view.

Dale Carnegie elegantly developed this concept of Understanding in his extremely popular book "How to win friends and influence people" and one of his key suggestions was that we should look to understand and sincerely appreciate other people and their perspectives. Carnegie advocated sincere appreciation but was extremely disapproving of flattery, which is at its core insincere. If we can find nothing to sincerely appreciate then perhaps we are not looking hard enough! Siduri and Carnegie teach that we should make every effort to find common ground that will genuinely interest us and let us understand the world through the eyes of our friends, colleagues and family. The Sidurian concept of Understanding is one of most important abilities we can possess and represents a skill that, if regularly practiced, should dramatically improve our interactions with others and help guide us towards a happier life.

Joy. Siduri tells Gilgamesh to "*Fill your belly. Day and night make merry, let days be full of joy, dance and make music day and night*". We should consider heeding Siduri's advice and living lives full of music, dancing, good food, good wine and general merriment. However, while seeking a life full of joy, Siduri also advises us to keep our daily responsibilities in mind and "*wear fresh clothes, and wash your head and bathe*". It is unclear exactly how far we can interpret Siduri's words on minding to our daily responsibilities, but it may be prudent for us to include attending to our mental, physical and financial well-being as a foundation to build future Joy on. We must be healthy if we are to dance day and night, and good food and wine require a stable source of income! Nevertheless, we can, while attending to our daily responsibilities, consider making every effort to introduce Joy into our lives, and do what makes us happy.

Joy, specifically, the concept that we should look to promote joy in our lives, was developed into its most extreme form by the Hedonistic philosopher Aristippus of Cyrene (one of the students of Socrates) who held that the sensation of pleasure was the highest good. Some have claimed that Siduri promoted Hedonism and her advice to Gilgamesh was the first recorded advocacy of Hedonism and the general Carpe Diem (seize the day) concept. While Siduri was the first recorded to advocate the Carpe Diem concept, she did not support unbridled Hedonism and immediately following her instructions to seek joy and merriment, she then advised Gilgamesh to also tend to more mundane responsibilities. Therefore, at most, Siduri promoted "Responsible Hedonism" and should we wish to follow Siduri's advice we should bear this distinction in mind. Indeed, the Sidurian concept of Joy, or "Responsible Hedonism", can help guide us towards a happier life as long as we do not fall into the trap of irresponsibility!

Family. Siduri ends her advice to Gilgamesh with "*Look at the child that is holding your hand and let your wife delight in your embrace. These things alone are the concern of men*". In this, Siduri ends on a very strong pro-family message, the general implication for us being that we should get married, have a family and make sure our children and significant others are happy. Specifically, that we should pay attention to our children and ensure our significant others are delighted in our embrace. We can interpret "embrace" in both its platonic and sexual forms, although the latter interpretation of Siduri's teachings would appear to be the one most often associated with delight and making a new family. It is interesting to note that while Gilgamesh sought physical immortality, Siduri suggested he abandon his quest and instead focus on family. Richard Dawkins in "The Selfish Gene" suggests that through our children we pass on the essence of who we are. These genes, or as Dawkins called them "immortal coils", give us a form of genetic immortality through our children and our children's children. This drive to procreate is the core purpose of life, not just for humans, but for all life on this planet, and only by achieving our fundamental biological purpose to procreate can we achieve the deepest happiness and contentment with our lives.

Gilgamesh's mother (Ninsun) was even more explicit regarding the importance of getting married and starting a family:

*"Ninsun implored him:
"O Gilgamesh,
Cease your wandering.
Stay here my son,
And take a wife,
Have a child that you can lead by the hand.
This is the purpose of life""*

In addition to the focus on having children, it is important to recognize that Siduri's advice can also be interpreted as including the edification of children, in this way covering both the nurture and the nature aspects of creating and raising a new family, and thereby contributing to the progressive development and evolution of culture in the future generations.

On a personal note, the Sidurian concepts of Understanding, Joy and Family have dramatically improved my life. Specifically, I have found the Sidurian concept of Understanding to be one that has improved my marriage and helped me in my work. Trying to understand things from my wife's point of view has made her significantly happier and she has reciprocated, making me happier. At work, I was tasked to give a presentation to a group of highly skeptical colleagues, with little chance of a successful outcome. I discarded my original presentation and re-created one from scratch, trying to find and mention areas of collaborative interest for each person, by name, in the group. It took a lot of time, thought and effort, but the change was incredible, skeptics became supporters and the proposal was approved.

I have found the Sidurian concept of Joy to be a pleasure to introduce. I purchased and play singing and dancing video games with my wife and daughter, dance with them and I must admit to enjoying Siduri's support for feasting and drinking wine! I have also kept my responsibilities in mind, working hard, socializing with friends and making sure I stay healthy.

The desire for a family is one that I have agreed with for many years, and while on a superficial level sleep deprivation and stress can be regular annoyances, there is no deeper source of happiness in my life than my family. For me at least, Siduri's teachings have worked and continue to work, and although you inhabit a different world, and your interpretations of her words may differ, I suspect her ancient advice will nevertheless work for you too.

While Siduri's words are over 4,000 years old (the oldest recorded advice) we can still heed her words and try to live with more understanding, joy and appreciation of family in our lives. Although ancient, good advice is eternal, and Siduri's teachings can help guide us to happier lives today.



Statue of Siduri

Chapter 6. Analysis of the Rest of the Epic of Gilgamesh

While a major focus of this book is on the teachings of Siduri, there are also a large number of additional concepts in the rest of the Epic of Gilgamesh that are interesting to discuss. I will try to expand on a few of them here, although this is far from a comprehensive list:

*"The city of Gilgamesh was Erech,
The most magnificent of all seven Sumerian cities,
And Gilgamesh was its king."*

- There are a couple of interesting points here. First, "Erech" is a city referred to in the Book of Genesis as an ancient city in the land of Shinar. "Shinar" probably derives from the Akkadian Sumeru which means "native land", and the modern consensus is that Erech refers to the Sumerian city-state of Uruk, which is located in modern day Iraq.



Ruins of Uruk

Thanks to the Epic of Gilgamesh, Uruk is the first city that we have detailed descriptions of its layout, giving us our first recorded urban planning. Second, Gilgamesh appears to have been an actual historical king, rather than just a fictional character. Sumerian texts indicate that Gilgamesh was the fifth king of Uruk, the first king of the Uruk dynasty, and his reign was around 2500 BC, suggesting the Epic of Gilgamesh was orally transmitted for around 700 years before being recorded in clay.

*"[Erech]
A city of temples, brick houses and open groves of trees.
Towering walls protected it from evil,
From enemies, floods and from wild beasts,
But most of all,
They protected Erech from Humbaba,
A monster who dwelled in a nearby mountain,
A beast who could breathe fire."*

- This may be the first written record of the fire-breathing beast/dragon myth.

*"The mother of Gilgamesh was the pale Ninsun,
Herself listed among the goddesses,
A gentle queen,
Who had the gift of prophecy,
And could read dreams."*

- This may be the first recorded case of a psychic, or someone with the gift of prophecy.

*"Gilgamesh understood his dream.
A wildman was sitting before a woman,
Her loins he embraced, her essence he opened."*

*The wildman forgot the place where he was born.
Six days and seven nights,
The wildman continued,
To cohabit with the woman,
Till his innocence was lost,
And to the wild,
He could no longer return."*

- The may be the first recorded "sex scene", which interestingly enough, results in the loss of innocence for Enkidu and his inability to return to the wild.

*"As Gilgamesh knelt helpless,
His breast exposed to the fury of Enkidu,
Strangely enough,
Enkidu lifted him to his feet.
They clasped hands, they embraced.
"I salute you, Gilgamesh,
You are a lion and a great fighter"
"Welcome to my city,
O godlike Enkidu!"
They thereupon pledged eternal friendship,
The King and the wildman from the steppes
Sent by the gods to destroy him.
The elders of Erech stared wondering.
But perfect was the friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.
Gilgamesh called him "my younger brother"
Ninsun looked upon him as an adopted son."*

- This is almost certainly the first recorded "bromance". Some have even gone so far as to suggest that Gilgamesh and Enkidu were homosexual, although there is no direct evidence to suggest that Gilgamesh and Enkidu's relationship was anything other than a deep platonic friendship between men.

*"But Ishtar shrieked:
"Father, you will create the Bull of Heaven,
Or I will destroy the door to the Underworld,
The dead will rise up and join the living,
They will swarm and eat everything,
There will be famine and death on the earth""*

- This may be the first written record of a threatened "zombie" Armageddon.

*"But the Bull seemed indestructible,
For hours they fought,
Till Gilgamesh dancing in front of the Bull,
Lured it with his tunic and bright weapons,
And Enkidu thrust his sword,
Deep into the Bull's neck,
And killed it."*

- This may be the first written "lesson" on bull fighting.

*"A wail split the air,
They saw Goddess Ishtar,
Crouched on the highest city wall,
She cursed them:
"Woe to you Gilgamesh,
Who dishonored my name,
Woe to you Enkidu,
Who killed my Bull"
In anger Enkidu tore off the Bull's leg,
And threw it at the Goddess, shouting
"Receive this offering in your face,
O terrible Ishtar""*
- Almost certainly the first recorded usage of the "in your face" insult.

*"Gilgamesh cut the poles,
Then with care crossed the waters of death.
As the boat came to rest,
Gilgamesh leaped out,
And approached his ancestor:
"I am Gilgamesh,
King of Erech,
And you are my ancestor.
I have travelled far to find answers.
I have been told you know the secrets,
Of life and of death.
My dearest friend,
My brother Enkidu,
The fate of mortal men overtook him,
O Utnapishtim,
I was overcome by terror and grief,
And now,
I roam the wilderness because of the fear,
The paths and shores of unknown places, saying
'Must I die too?'"*
*Utnapishtim replied:
"O Gilgamesh,
Do we build houses to last forever?
Do brothers share their inheritance to last forever?
When the Gods assemble,
They alone decree the destinies of men.
But sit down and listen,
And I will tell you a story.
Many many years ago,
I lived in Shuruppak,
A city full of vice,
Full of arguing and shouting,
Their commotion disturbed the Gods,
Especially Enlil,
Enlil was enraged.
He assembled the Gods:*

*They make too much noise,
I cannot sleep,
I plan to destroy the people of the earth,
And get some rest.
I have sent a hurricane,
To wipe out humanity,
A flood that will drown,
Every living thing.
No one is to survive'
Then one night,
I heard a voice,
Much like my lord Ea,
From the wall of my hut:
'Listen,
Hear,
Man of Shuruppak,
Son of Ubartatu,
Abandon everything,
Build a ship
To save life,
To escape the storm,
Let him take onto the ship,
Seed of every living thing,
Of creeping things and flying things,
Domestic creatures and wild beasts,
And all those creatures that eat grass,
And his wife and his daughter'
I received the dimensions for a great ship,
The height and width and breadth.
I laid the keel of the great ship,
And built the framework,
According to the measurements,
And with the help of workmen,
Built and loaded the great ship.
Then the storm descended,
Six days and six nights the tempest raged,
Demons of rain ran this way and that.
And across the land water roared.
Light became blackness.
The earth was broken.
Even the Gods were terrified,
Great Ishtar wept and addressed Enlil:
"Why did I not stop you?
How could I acquiesce to such evil?
Allow the destruction of my people?
My children,
Who now lie like dead fish in the sea?
On the seventh day the storm ceased,
All around me was water,
No land in sight.
Silence everywhere.*

*Slowly the waters began to recede,
My boat caught and held fast,
At the top of a mountain.
Once the water had receded further,
I stood on the earth,"*

- This is the probable origin of the "Noah's Ark" biblical story, with Utnapishtim's role replaced by Noah in the Old Testament.

*"Gilgamesh,
I will tell you,
A secret of the gods.
At the end of this river,
There grows a plant.
With a strong smelling flower,
But a stem of painful thorns.
Any mortal that can hold this plant,
And eat of it,
Youth will return to him,
This secret I do tell you..."
Gilgamesh tied heavy stones to his feet,
And entered the river,
The water was thick,
He could not see.
But he caught the strong scent of the plant's flower,
He was drawn to it.
He touched it.
It scratched and hurt his hands,
But he pulled it out by its roots.
He returned to the boatman,
Once they tasted of the flower,
All weariness dropped from them.
They journeyed back towards Erech"*

- A friend of mine asked me if the plant referred to in the Epic of Gilgamesh might be the cannabis plant. This is a fun theory to consider. On one hand the budding flower of the cannabis plant has a very strong and distinctive scent, and at low doses tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, the active ingredient in cannabis) can, in some, induce feelings of rejuvenation, stimulation and youth. Advocates of this theory point out that when consumed, the budding cannabis flower will slowly release THC and provide an effect that lasts for an extended period of time, perhaps long enough to "rejuvenate" Gilgamesh and his colleague on their journey back to Erech. But the plant in the Epic is also described as having thorns, and cannabis plants have no thorns, providing evidence against this hypothesis. It was suggested to me that the "thorn" concept may have been added to explain why no normal man could grasp this precious plant, although it is unclear if this explanation is sufficient to explain the thorn problem. Nevertheless, despite the debatable thorn issue, still, it is possible that in our earliest recorded literature, the 'secret of the gods', the 'plant of youth', with the strong smelling flowers, which once consumed induces extended feelings of rejuvenation, was indeed the cannabis plant.

*"They found a fresh pool of water,
And decided to rest.
After Gilgamesh bathed in the spring,*

*He saw a serpent at his feet,
The snake grabbed the plant of youth,
And escaped into the earth."*

- Possible pre-cursor to the serpent in the biblical Garden of Eden. This comparison is reinforced by the knowledge that Adam and Eve had eternal youth in the Garden of Eden, until a snake intervened, and Gilgamesh had the plant of youth, until a snake intervened.

*"Ninsun implored him:
"O Gilgamesh,
Cease your wandering.
Stay here my son,
And take a wife,
Have a child that you can lead by the hand.
This is the purpose of life""*

- Ninsun's pro-family advice seems to closely parallel Siduri's, again suggesting that one of the key messages our ancestors wanted to transmit to following generations was a pro-family one.

*"A hole opened in the earth,
A strange form emerged,
A man made of plants and vines.
It was Enkidu!*

*The brothers embraced,
"My brother,
Tell me of the Underworld,
In which you dwell.
How is it with kings, have you seen them?"*

Enkidu replied:

"I have seen them, the kings wear no crowns, theirs is the lot of servants"

"How is it with heroes, have you seen them?"

"I have seen them, their parents hold their heads, their wives weep over them."

"What of the man having but one son, have you seen him?"

"I have seen him, his portion is but one glass of water."

"What of the man who had two sons; have you seen him?"

"I have seen him, he has a good house of bricks over his head and a loaf of bread each day"

"What of the man who had three sons, have you seen him?"

"I have seen him, daily he is refreshed from the waters of the deep."

"What of the man who had eight sons, have you seen him?"

"I have seen him, he has a great house of stone, and statues of his image,

His name is proclaimed on standards, in red and in gold,

Daily gifts and tributes are his reward!"

"Enkidu, what of the man who had no sons, have you seen him?"

"I have seen him, he lies unburied at the foot of the wall,

Cast-off crusts of bread are his portion.""

- Possible pre-cursor to the biblical "Go forth and multiply" message.

*"As such did Gilgamesh die,
A mortal man's death.
Even so,*

*His life was not as an empty wind,
An everlasting name he had made for himself.
When he was gone the people mourned him,
But they also sang of his adventures and quests,
Dancers acted out his deeds,
Singers set them to music,
And poets recited them,
Scribes wrote it all down on tablets of clay,
Sculptors carved his face in stone,
And painters illustrated the great story in houses and temples,
Finally Erech and its walls slowly crumbled and melted into the earth.
Other cities and languages came into being,
But everywhere was repeated the name of Gilgamesh.
And when people heard the name and asked,
"Who was this Gilgamesh?",
They were answered:
"He who sees all,
He who knows all,
He who stands seven feet high,
One-third man,
Two-thirds god,
Most glorious among heroes,
Most eminent among men,
And Enkidu was his brother.""*

- It is interesting to note that the Epic of Gilgamesh was the first "meta-story" in that it, at the end, described its own writing and effect through the ages.

Chapter 7. Gilgamesh and the Background on His Quest for Immortality

The next three Chapters include the complete text for the Epic of Gilgamesh, with Siduri's teachings re-introduced into Chapter 8.

*Between night and day,
The world of Gilgamesh,
Hemmed in by the mountains of Mashu,
Circled by the Bitter River,
That flowed unceasingly,
And had no beginning and no end.
None knew what lay beyond,
As to touch its waters was death.*

*To the west was the void,
Into which the sun set.
The sun passed under the earth,*

*And into the Eastern Garden,
Where his home was.
So much was known.*

*The Gods were everywhere,
Great Anu of the skies,
Ea of the sea,
Shamash of the sun,
Sin of the moon,
Adad, voice of thunder,
And the mighty Ishtar,
Goddess of Love,
Delight in her friendship,
Fear the terror of her wrath.*

*The city of Gilgamesh was Erech
The most magnificent of all seven Sumerian cities,
And Gilgamesh was its king.*

*A city of temples, brick houses and open groves of trees.
Towering walls protected it from evil,
From enemies, floods and from wild beasts,
But most of all,
They protected Erech from Humbaba,
A monster who dwelled in a nearby forest,
A beast who could breathe fire.*

*Our story begins in Erech,
A company of Elders met with the Gods.
Most eminent of the elders approached Anu:
"O Lord Anu, we must dissent,
About Gilgamesh our King,
He continues to build Erech's city walls,
Higher, ever higher,
It has become a burden,
And we need rest,
Parents no longer see their sons,
Our girls languish without lovers,
Marriages have stopped,
We do nothing but build,
There is no happiness!"*

*Anu replied:
"I like the high walls,
I like Gilgamesh,
A very fine man and perfectly fearless.
He wrestles with lions,
Tames them with his bare hands,
This I have seen.
And he is part God,
He knows best."*

*But Goddess Ishtar pleaded:
"Father, listen to them
I will not see my girls without love,
Help them!"*

*Most eminent of the elders said:
"Indeed, will you listen to our plan,
for we do have a plan.
We want you to create a man,
Taller than even Gilgamesh,
More powerful than Gilgamesh.
A wild beast of a man,
To come to the earth,
And destroy the king.*

*And as the elders explained,
Goddess Ishtar commanded Aruru,
Goddess of the human form,
Who took clay in her hands,
And molded a man,
Unkempt and savage in his looks,
With horns like a beast,
And carried him in her arms,
To the depths of the cedar forest,
Laid him on the earth.
Thus came to be Enkidu.*

*When Enkidu awoke,
He knew not who he was,
Or where he had come from.
He ate and he drank,
And began to enjoy his new life.*

*He knelt by a pool,
He listened and watched,
A gazelle came to drink,
That Enkidu so admired.
He reached out and touched,
This gentle-eyed creature,
It became his first friend.*

*The pool became his home,
He watched the animals,
Touched them and tamed them.
He learned he could run like the gazelle,
But not fly with the birds.*

*One evening a lion came to the pool,
The other animals fled,
But Enkidu remained.*

*The lion's yellow eyes looked at him,
And the beast leaped on him.
Its claws ripped his flesh,
And Enkidu cried out with pain.
He wrestled the lion,
And felt his first anger,
And the mighty strength in his muscles.
He bent the lion backwards,
He twisted its neck.
It fell to the ground roaring,
And lay there until its mouth began to foam,
Enkidu felt pity for the lion,
As he knew it was thirsty,
He carried water in his hand,
To slake the lion's thirst.
He cleaned the lion's wounds,
Caressed its mane,
And cared for it through the night.
In the morning the lion limped away,
But soon it returned,
And also became Enkidu's friend.*

*

*Into the hut of his father,
A young hunter ran,
And hid in the corner.
His father asked him:
"What troubles you my son?"*

*The hunter cried out:
"Father, I have seen a man of terrifying sight,
A man of Godly strength,
Who opened my traps,
And freed the animals.
Hair springs wild from his head,
He has the horns of a beast,
And he is taller and more powerful than even our King.
I was humbled with fear!"*

*His father, a shepherd, told him:
"Son, if what you say is true,
We must report it to the King.
But if you have lied,
We will be in disgrace"*

*Thus travelled shepherd and son,
To the city of Erech,
But when they arrived,
Rumors already abounded,
Of a wildman taller than a giant,*

And covered in hair.

*Most eminent of the elders,
Brought shepherd and son to Gilgamesh,
And addressed the mighty King:
"O Gilgamesh,
A wildman terrorizes our world,
Robs the hunter of his game,
And frees the shepherd's herds.
Taller and more powerful,
Than even our king!"*

*Gilgamesh, went to the temple of Ishtar,
And spoke with the priestess Harim:
"Harim, I have a task for you,
A girl's task of smiles and charm.
Go, Harim, find this wildman.
Soften his heart and bring him back to the city"*

*Harim went to the dark cedars,
Listened to the sounds of the animals,
Saw the sunlight that filtered through the branches,
And lit up the flowers.
She contemplated:
"How peaceful a place this is!
How could any evil thing lurk here?"*

*Harim found a fresh spring,
Bubbling with cool water.
She sat beside it,
And dipped her feet in the water.*

*Enkidu came to spring,
And when he saw the girl,
His breath failed him,
He was overcome,
The most enchanting being he had ever seen!*

*Harim saw a giant beast,
His soaring horns,
And was numb with terror.
But Enkidu knew shy creatures,
He had befriended many,
He knew their ways.
He stood quietly to not frighten her.*

*When Harim saw his gentleness,
She called out timidly:
"Hello"
But Enkidu knew no words,
He stood looking at the girl.*

*Again she spoke,
Holding out her hands in greeting.
Enkidu approached slowly,
And sat at Harim's white feet.
He felt ecstasy in his heart.*

*Harim smiled,
But she then felt new fear.
How could she bring this wildman,
So gentle and innocent,
Back to the city?
To be killed?
To be jeered at?
To be put in a cage?
She shuddered,
No,
She must teach him the ways of the city.*

*Thus, she taught him to speak,
And then spoke:
"I gaze upon thee, O Enkidu,
Like a god art thou!
Why with the cattle,
Dost thou roam across the fields?
Come let me lead thee,
Into Erech,
To the holy house, the dwelling of Anu,
O, Enkidu arise, let me conduct thee,
To Eanna, the dwelling of Anu,
The place where Gilgamesh is perfect in vitality.
And thou wilt embrace him in devotion,
Thou wilt love him like thyself.
Come, arise from the ground,
That is cursed."*

*He heard her words and accepted her speech.
The counsel of the woman,
Entered his heart.
She stripped off a garment,
Clothed him with one.
Another garment
She kept on herself.
She took hold of his hand.
Like a god she brought him,
To the fertile meadow,
The place of the sheepfolds.
In that place they received food;
For he, Enkidu, whose birthplace was the mountain,
With the gazelles he was accustomed to eat herbs,
With the cattle to drink water,
With the water beings he was happy.*

*Milk of the cattle
He was accustomed to suck.
Food they placed before him,
He broke it off and looked
And gazed.
Enkidu had not known
To eat food.
To drink wine
He had not been taught.
Harim spoke to Enkidu:
"Eat food, O Enkidu,
Drink wine, the custom of the land"*

*The barber removed,
The hair on his body.
He was anointed with oil.
He became manlike.
He put on a garment,
He was like a man.
He took his weapon;
Lions he attacked,
So that the shepherds could rest at night.
He plunged the dagger;
Lions he overcame.
The great shepherds lay down;
Enkidu was their protector.
The strong man,
The unique hero.
He learned to care for animals.
He learned to make plants grow.
He learned to build with reed, mud and brick.
He learned to play a flute.
Enkidu ate food
Till he was satiated.
Wine he drank,
Seven goblets.
His spirit was loosened,
He became hilarious.
His heart became glad and
His face shone.
Harim smiled.
"Enkidu, now you are like man,
We shall go to the city"*

*

*The mother of Gilgamesh was the pale Ninsun,
Herself listed among the goddesses,
A gentle queen,
Who had the gift of prophecy,*

And could read dreams.

*Gilgamesh came to her, troubled,
Sat beside her,
And put his head in her lap.*

*Gilgamesh sought to interpret his dream.
Gilgamesh spoke to his mother:
"My mother, during the night,
I became strong and moved about,
Among the heroes,
And from the starry heaven,
A meteor of Anu fell upon me,
I bore it and it grew heavy upon me,
I became weak and its weight I could not endure.
The land of Erech gathered about it.
The heroes kissed its feet.
It was raised up before me.
They stood me up.
I bore it and carried it to thee."*

*The mother of Gilgamesh,
Who knows all things,
Spoke to Gilgamesh thus:
"Someone, O Gilgamesh, who like thee
In the field was born and,
Whom the mountain has reared,
Thou wilt see him and thou wilt rejoice.
Heroes will kiss his feet.
Thou wilt spare him and wilt endeavor,
To lead him to me."*

*He slept and saw another dream,
Which to his mother he reported:
"My mother, I have seen another dream.
My likeness I have seen in the streets,
Of Erech.
An axe was brandished, and
They gathered about him,
And the axe made him angry.
I saw him and I rejoiced,
I loved him devotedly,
I embraced him.
I took him and regarded him
As my brother."*

*Gilgamesh understood his dream.
A wildman was sitting before a woman,
Her loins he embraced, her essence he opened.
The wildman forgot the place where he was born.
Six days and seven nights,*

*The wildman continued,
To cohabit with the woman,
Till his innocence was lost,
And to the wild,
He could no longer return.*

*

*Harim spoke to Enkidu:
"To have a family home
Is the destiny of men, and
The prerogative of the noble.
For Gilgamesh, the King of Erech,
Open the hymen,
Perform the marriage act,
With the legitimate wife one should cohabit.
So as was before,
Will be in the future,
By the decree pronounced by the gods,
From the cutting of his umbilical cord,
Such is the fate of man."*

*

*Enkidu went in front,
And Harim behind him.
He entered into Erech.
The people gathered about him.
As he stood in the streets
Of Erech,
The men gathered,
Saying in regard to him:
"Like the form of Gilgamesh he has suddenly become;
In his structure high, powerful, overseeing.
In the land strong of power has he become.
Milk of cattle,
He was accustomed to suck."*

*Steadily in Erech,
Enkidu rejoiced.
He became famous.
To Gilgamesh,
Enkidu became a rival to him.
Gilgamesh approaches and
Enkidu stood in the streets.
He blocked the path
of Gilgamesh.
At the exhibit of his power.*

*

*Gilgamesh the mighty.
Against him Enkidu proceeded,
His wild hair flowing.
He started to go
Towards Gilgamesh.
They met in the plaza of Erech.
Enkidu blocked the gate,
With his foot,
Not permitting Gilgamesh to enter.
They seized each other, like oxen,
They fought.
Gilgamesh and Enkidu
Wrestling each other.
Like beasts they battled.
The threshold they demolished,
The wall they impaired.*

*

*Now the King seemed to prevail,
And then the wildman.
Through blood and sweat,
They fought,
Gilgamesh, the lofty and unconquerable,
Weakened and fell to his knees.*

*The crowd surged forward to help him,
but the elders cried out:
"Stop! Whatever happens,
It is the will of the gods"*

*As Gilgamesh knelt helpless,
His breast exposed to the fury of Enkidu,
Strangely enough,
Enkidu lifted him to his feet.
They clasped hands, they embraced.*

*"I salute you, Gilgamesh,
You are a lion and a great fighter"*

*"Welcome to my city,
O godlike Enkidu!"*

*They thereupon pledged eternal friendship,
The King and the wildman from the steppes
Sent by the gods to destroy him.
The elders of Erech stared wondering.
But perfect was the friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.
Gilgamesh called him "my younger brother"
Ninsun looked upon him as an adopted son.*

*They traveled everywhere together,
And all admired them.
They partook in contests of strength and of daring,
Winning all praise and all prizes.
And Erech was content.
But not so Gilgamesh.
One day he said to his friend:
"Day and night I dream of a great challenge,
When I slumber voices call to me,
'Arouse yourself Gilgamesh,
There are great quests to be performed!
We will go down to the forest
And destroy the monster Humbaba!"*

*

*The eyes of Enkidu filled with tears.
He clutched his heart,
Sadly he sighed.
The face of Gilgamesh was grieved.
He spoke to Enkidu:
"My friend, why are thy eyes
Filled with tears?
Thy heart clutched
Dost thou sigh sadly?"
"My friend,
Why dost thou desire to do this?
A thing so very difficult,
Why dost thou desire to go down to the forest?
Know, my friend, in the mountain,
when I moved about with the cattle,
to a distance of one double hour into the heart of the forest,
Alone I penetrated within it,
To Humbaba, whose roar is a flood,
whose mouth is fire,
whose breath is death.
If we go to the cedar forest,
The guardian, O warrior Gilgamesh,
is a demon of great power."*

*Gilgamesh spoke to Enkidu:
"Enkidu,
Thou and I will go down to the forest,
with the axe I will destroy,
the covering of the forest,
reveal the dwelling of Humbaba.
Whoever, my friend, overcomes terror,
It is well for him with Shamash for the length of his days.
Mankind will speak of it at the gates.
Where-ever terror is to be faced,
Thou, forsooth, art in fear of death.*

*Thy prowess lacks strength.
I will go before thee.
If I fall, I will establish my name."*

*

*"When thou callest to me,
'thou art afraid to approach'
Thou afflictest my heart.
I am determined
To enter the cedar forest.
I will, indeed, establish my name.
The work, my friend,
To the artisans I will entrust.
Weapons let them mold before us."*

*The work to the artisans they entrusted.
A dwelling they assigned to the workmen,
Hatchets the masters molded,
Axes of three talents each they created.
Lances the master molded,
Blades of two talents each,
A spear of thirty mina each attached to them.
The hilt of the lances of thirty mina in gold*

*

*The counselors of Erech
Brought word to Gilgamesh:
"Thou art young, O Gilgamesh,
And thy heart carries thee away.
Thou dost not know what thou proposest to do.
We hear that Humbaba is enraged.
Who has ever dared oppose him?
Into the heart of the forest,
Who has ever penetrated into it?
Humbaba, whose roar is a deluge,
Whose mouth is fire,
Whose breath is death.
Why dost thou desire to do this?
To advance towards the dwelling of Humbaba?"*

*Gilgamesh heard the report of his counselors.
He saw and cried out to his friend:
"Now, my friend, thus I speak.
I fear him, but I will go to the cedar forest;
I will go with thee to the cedar forest.
Thy god,
On the road may Shamash guide us in safety."
At the rampart of Erech,
Gilgamesh knelt down before Shamash,*

*A word then he spoke to him:
"I will do this, O Shamash,
Thy hands I seize hold of,
Save my life,
Bring me back to Erech.
Grant protection to me.
I Gilgamesh, the strong one of the land.
On a road which I have never trodden;
When I have succeeded,
I will praise thee in the joy of my heart,
I will extol the superiority of thy power,
I will seat thee on thrones".*

*The masters brought the weapons;
Bow and quiver
They placed in hand.
He took the hatchet.
With lance in his girdle,*

*Again the counselors approached him.
For the road they counseled Gilgamesh:
"How long till thou returnest to Erech?,
Do not rely, O Gilgamesh, on thy strength!
Provide food and save thyself!
Let Enkidu go before thee.
He is acquainted with the way,
He has trodden the road,
To the entrance of the forest.
Of Humbaba all of them his,
He who goes in advance will save the companion.
Provide for his road and save thyself,
May the god of the sun carry out thy endeavor,
May Shamash make thy eyes see the prophecy of thy mouth.
May he track out for thee the closed path,
May he level the road for thy treading,
May he level the mountain for thy foot,
During thy night the word that will rejoice
May Lugal-banda convey, and stand by thee,
In thy endeavor!
Like a youth may he establish thy endeavor,
In the river of Humbaba as thou plannest,
Wash thy feet,
Round about thee dig a well,
May there be pure water constantly for thy libation
Goblets of water pour out to Shamash,
May Lugal-banda take note of it"*

*Enkidu spoke to Gilgamesh:
"Since thou art resolved to take the road.
Thy heart be not afraid, trust to me,
Confide to my hand his dwelling."*

*On the road to Humbaba they proceeded.
To the mountain of the cedar forest,
After forty hours they sat and ate food.
After sixty hours they slept.
Within three days they travelled,
The distance five times greater,
Than that of ordinary men.
They reached the mountain,
Gilgamesh spoke:
"Here, we must pour meal upon the earth,
And gain the goodwill of the gods,
They will reveal their purpose in our dreams"*

*They poured meal upon the earth,
And lay down and slept.
After some time, Gilgamesh awoke:
"Enkidu, I have had a dream,
We were standing beside a mountain,
In comparison to it, we were tiny,
The size of flies.
But the mountain collapsed,
Before our very eyes!"*

*Enkidu responded:
"The meaning of your dream is clear,
Humbaba is the mountain,
And he will fall before us!"*

*The magnificent gate they approached.
They threw their weight against the gate,
It swung inwards.
They heard the heartbeat of Humbaba,
And smelled the smoke from his lungs.
To show daring,
Gilgamesh cut down a tree,
The blows of his axe ringing out,
And from afar Humbaba heard the sound.
His face loomed among tree tops,
Grooved like ancient rock.
He crashed down upon them.
His breath set many fires.
Enkidu's fears disappeared.
The friends stood side by side,
As the giant demon advanced.
As he came upon them,
They stepped apart.
Humbaba lurched through the forest,
Stumbled and fell.
But rose again roaring,
And charged towards Enkidu.*

*Gilgamesh brought his axe down on the beast's giant toe,
Humbaba roared with pain,
He grabbed Gilgamesh by his long hair,
Swung him around,
And prepared to throw him.
But Enkidu saw that his ribs were exposed.
And thrust his sword into Humbaba's side.
Liquid fire poured from the beast's wound.
But Humbaba grabbed Enkidu,
And smashed him against a tree.*

*

*Enkidu spoke to Gilgamesh:
"Attacks, my friend,
have exhausted my strength.
My arms are lame,
my strength has failed me."*

*

*But before the wildman died,
Gilgamesh threw his sword,
Into Humbaba's throat.
The giant demon cried out,
And distant mountains shook.
Gilgamesh felt pity in his heart,
Withdrew his sword,
He put down his axe.
Enkidu observed the monster draw in,
A long breath to blast fire,
To consume the King.
He leaped on Humbaba,
And destroyed the beast with his sword.
Humbaba was dead.*

*

*As the two friends had fought Humbaba,
Goddess Ishtar had heard the fighting,
And descended from the sky,
To watch the battle.
Ishtar began to respect the two friends,
Their bravery and dexterity,
She fell in love with Gilgamesh,
And followed the heroes down the mountain.*

*She called to Gilgamesh:
"Gilgamesh, King of the city,
I saw your battle with my servant Humbaba,
I saw the destruction of my forest,*

*A terrible reckoning will descend upon you,
When the Gods learn of this insult.
But, Gilgamesh,
They will forgive you,
If you become my husband,
And live with me among the stars.
A husband of Ishtar,
Will be above the vengeance of the Gods."*

*But Gilgamesh called out:
"Save your threats,
I have no fear,
We have done a great deed,
We have rid Erech of an evil monster.
Freed the people from terror.
We have earned great honor,
Our name will be great for all mankind,
Poets will sing of our deeds,
Old men will praise us,
We will be kissed by all the girls of Erech,
We need no favors from you."*

*Ishtar wept:
"Gilgamesh, beware of your arrogance,
I offer not love lightly."*

*But Gilgamesh replied:
"I know of your love Goddess
Whomever you love,
You soon tire of and destroy.
If I loved you, Ishtar,
You would destroy me too!"*

*Ishtar screamed with anger,
Ascended to the heavens,
And addressed her father:
"O Father Anu,
Vengeance will be mine,
But I must enlist your help.
Father Anu, create the Bull of Heaven.
The Bull will descend to the earth,
Destroy Erech,
Trample the people,
And kill Gilgamesh!"*

*Anu replied:
"Ishtar, my daughter,
This I will not do"*

*But Ishtar shrieked:
"Father, you will create the Bull of Heaven,*

*Or I will destroy the door to the Underworld,
The dead will rise up and join the living,
They will swarm and eat everything,
There will be famine and death on the earth."*

*In fear and in dread,
Anu created the Bull of Heaven.
The Bull smashed through the gates of Erech,
One hundred men rushed out to defend Erech,
But the Bull gored them pitilessly,
Two hundred men met him with clubs and sticks,
But the Bull trampled them to death,
The Bull surged onwards,
Death and destruction in his wake.
Mothers screamed and hid,
Holding their children close.*

*Three hundred warriors came out,
With swords and spears,
To fight the deadly bull.
Enkidu heard the battle,
He rushed out to fight.*

*The bull saw Enkidu,
And rushed to gore him.
But Enkidu met the charge,
With his own mighty horns.
As he held back the creature,
He saw the spear of Gilgamesh,
Speed through the air,
And strike the beast in the throat.
But the Bull seemed indestructible,
For hours they fought,
Till Gilgamesh dancing in front of the Bull,
Lured it with his tunic and bright weapons,
And Enkidu thrust his sword,
Deep into the Bull's neck,
And killed it.*

*A wail split the air,
They saw Goddess Ishtar,
Crouched on the highest city wall,
She cursed them:
"Woe to you Gilgamesh,
Who dishonored my name,
Woe to you Enkidu,
Who killed my Bull"*

*In anger Enkidu tore off the Bull's leg,
And threw it at the Goddess, shouting
"Receive this offering in your face,*

O terrible Ishtar"

*

*That night, Enkidu awoke from a dream
"O Gilgamesh,
I dream of many threats and bad omens,
I looked up at the wall of Erech,
Crouched like some dark bird,
Was the Goddess Ishtar.
The Gods gathered around her,
Angry at my insult to the Goddess,
The Gods agreed that I should die."*

*In tears Gilgamesh answered:
"O my friend,
My brother,
Why would the Gods punish you and not me?
We have done all things together.
Go to sleep brother."*

*But Enkidu became very ill,
Gilgamesh paced back and forth,
Tore out his hair,
And grieved as his brother died.
Gilgamesh knelt for days by his dead brother,
Until the worm fastened upon him,
Then he went to his mother's bedside.
"O Ninsun, what fate has overtaken my brother?
His death comes not from battle,
His death comes not from disease,
His death comes not from old age,
The earth reaches up to seize him,
Will I die too?"*

*Ninsun answered:
"My dearest Gilgamesh,
In time, all must die"*

*Gilgamesh asked:
"Tell me, mother,
Of my ancestor Utnapishtim,
He who lives forever and does not die,
I will seek him,
And from him learn the secret of eternal life."*

*With tears Ninsun answered:
"Utnapishtim lives beyond the Bitter River,
But no one can cross,
Its waters are death itself,
My son, stay here"*

*But Gilgamesh cried out:
"I, Gilgamesh, will find him!"*

*At the first shimmer of dawn,
Gilgamesh set out from Erech,
He crossed deserts and plains,
Until he reached the edge of the world.*

*Before him lay the mighty Mashu mountains,
Whose feet touch the earth,
But whose peaks reach into the heavens.
He looked up to see a scorpion man,
Standing above him in a snowy pass.
The scorpion man approached:
"Why do you come to this place?"*

*"I seek Utnapishtim,
My ancestor,
Once a mortal man,
But now in the assembly of Gods,
He who knows the secret to eternal life"*

*The scorpion man replied:
"O Gilgamesh,
Deep are the caverns under these mountains,
After eighteen hours the heart fails,
Dense is the darkness,
There is no light,
After twenty hours the mind fails,
First there's unbearable cold,
Then there's unbearable heat.
The distance is the same as that between life and death,
Turn back Gilgamesh"*

*But Gilgamesh replied:
"Even if my heart fails,
I will go on,
In cold or in heat,
I will go on,
Sighing or weeping,
I will go on."*

*After a long silence the scorpion man spoke:
"Gilgamesh, go.
These gates I will open,
May your feet carry you to safety"*

*Gilgamesh entered the gates,
And into the earth,
Darkness closed around him,*

*He saw not where to step,
He stumbled often,
First he shook with cold,
Then he fought through unbearable heat,
No sound but his feet,
Scraping the ground,
He felt all his life he had been trudging in the darkness,
His heart failed him,
He was full of terror,
His mind failed him,
He screamed in the darkness,
He began to run,
But he stumbled and fell.
He lay in the darkness,
He closed his eyes.
He could not go on.
Then on his face,
From the north,
He felt the wind blowing.
He rose and stumbled on.
Finally he saw light,
Tears of joy filled his eyes.
He emerged from the earth.*

*Gilgamesh found himself in the Eastern Garden,
Surrounded by rose tress,
And flowers of all kinds,
Water glimmered in fountains and pools,
And through the trees he saw Shamash,
The huge face of the sun.*

*Shamash the sun god greeted him,
"My son,
What are you doing here?"*

*Gilgamesh said:
"I have lost my brother to death,
The earth reached up and seized him,
Since that time I have known no rest
Now, great Shamash,
I seek my ancestor who now lives among the immortals,
From him I shall learn the secret of eternal life,
Great Shamash,
In your travels across the sky,
You have seen all things,
Please tell me where I can find my ancestor,
In the place of the immortals."*

*Shamash pointed to a path,
Leading down through the trees:
"Walk thus,*

*And you will find Siduri,
The woman of the vine,
The maker of wine;
In the garden,
At the edge of the sea.
She will advise you,
Of the right path to take.
But remember,
O Gilgamesh,
What you desire has never been."*

Chapter 8. Siduri and Her Teachings

*Beside the sea Siduri lives,
the woman of the vine, the maker of wine;
Siduri sits in the garden at the edge of the sea
And where she sits she sees Gilgamesh coming towards her,
the flesh of the gods in his body,
but despair in his heart,
she barred her gate against him.*

*But Gilgamesh called to her,
"Young woman, maker of wine,
why do you bolt your door
for I am Gilgamesh
who seized and killed the Bull of Heaven,
I killed the watchman of the cedar forest,
I overthrew Humbaba who lived in the forest,
and I killed the lions in the passes of the mountain."*

*Then Siduri said:
"If you are that Gilgamesh
Why is despair in your heart
and why do you come here wandering over the pastures
in search of the wind?"*

*Gilgamesh answered her,
"Despair is in my heart,
Enkidu my brother
whom I loved,
the end of mortality has overtaken him.
I wept for him seven days and nights
Because of my brother I am afraid of death,
because of my brother I stray through the wilderness
and cannot rest.*

*But now
young woman, maker of wine,*

*since I have seen your face
do not let me see the face of death
which I dread so much."*

*Siduri said,
"Gilgamesh, whither are you wandering?
Life, which you look for, you will never find.
For when the gods created man, they let
death be his share, and life
withheld in their own hands.
Gilgamesh, fill your belly,
Day and night make merry,
let days be full of joy,
dance and make music day and night.
And wear fresh clothes,
And wash your head and bathe.
Look at the child that is holding your hand,
And let your wife delight in your embrace.
These things alone are the concern of men."*

Chapter 9. The Aftermath

*But Gilgamesh said to Siduri, the young woman:
"How can I be silent,
How can I rest,
when Enkidu whom I love is dust,
and I too shall die
To be laid in the earth forever."*

*Gilgamesh thanked Siduri:
"I must go on.
Tell me which way I must take."*

*Siduri led Gilgamesh by his hand,
To the edge of her garden.
She pointed to a vast expanse of dark and dismal water:
"Behold the Bitter River,
An ancient boat lies on the shore,
There you will find Urshanabi, the boatman.
He can cross the river,
none have ever joined him."*

*Gilgamesh walked to the Bitter River,
The ancient boat he found,
But no boatman nearby,
He called out, but no boatman came,
He waited, but no boatman came,
He called out continuously, there was no reply.*

In anger he smashed the boat's oarlocks with a rock.

A voice shouted:

*"Who dares lay their hand,
On the boat of Urshanabi?"*

Gilgamesh replied:

*"Forgive my rage boatman,
For I am weary,
And have travelled far.
Forgive my anger,
And impatience,
And take me across the water,
To find my ancestor Utnapishtim"*

The boatman shook his head:

*"Never have the living crossed the waters of death,
Even if I wished to,
You have destroyed my oarlocks,
It is impossible for me to ferry you across,
But if still your will is to cross,
Do now as I say.
Enter the forest,
Cut one hundred and ten poles,
Sixty feet each.
We will pole our way over,
The river of death.
Be warned,
O wanderer,
Each pole once used,
Must be discarded,
For to touch but a single drop,
Of these dark waters,
And you will die."*

Gilgamesh cut the poles,

Then with care crossed the waters of death.

As the boat came to rest,

Gilgamesh leaped out,

And approached his ancestor:

"I am Gilgamesh,

King of Erech,

And you are my ancestor.

I have travelled far to find answers.

I have been told you know the secrets,

Of life and of death.

My dearest friend,

My brother Enkidu,

The fate of mortal men overtook him,

O Utnapishtim,

I was overcome by terror and grief,

*And now,
I roam the wilderness because of the fear,
The paths and shores of unknown places, saying
'Must I die too?''*

*Utnapishtim replied:
"O Gilgamesh,
Do we build houses to last forever?
Do brothers share their inheritance to last forever?
When the Gods assemble,
They alone decree the destinies of men.
But sit down and listen,
And I will tell you a story.
Many many years ago,
I lived in Shuruppak,
A city full of vice,
Full of arguing and shouting,
Their commotion disturbed the Gods,
Especially Enlil,
Enlil was enraged.
He assembled the Gods:
'They make too much noise,
I cannot sleep,
I plan to destroy the people of the earth,
And get some rest.
I have sent a hurricane,
To wipe out humanity,
A flood that will drown,
Every living thing.
No one is to survive'
Then one night,
I heard a voice,
Much like my lord Ea,
From the wall of my hut:
'Listen,
Hear,
Man of Shuruppak,
Son of Ubartatu,
Abandon everything,
Build a ship
To save life,
To escape the storm,
Let him take onto the ship,
Seed of every living thing,
Of creeping things and flying things,
Domestic creatures and wild beasts,
And all those creatures that eat grass,
And his wife and his daughter'
I received the dimensions for a great ship,
The height and width and breadth.
I laid the keel of the great ship,*

*And built the framework,
According to the measurements,
And with the help of workmen,
Built and loaded the great ship.
Then the storm descended,
Six days and six nights the tempest raged,
Demons of rain ran this way and that.
And across the land water roared.
Light became blackness.
The earth was broken.
Even the Gods were terrified,
Great Ishtar wept and addressed Enlil:
'Why did I not stop you?
How could I acquiesce to such evil?
Allow the destruction of my people?
My children,
Who now lie like dead fish in the sea?'
On the seventh day the storm ceased,
All around me was water,
No land in sight.
Silence everywhere.
Slowly the waters began to recede,
My boat caught and held fast,
At the top of a mountain.
Once the water had receded further,
I stood on the earth,
Enlil saw me,
His anger was terrible to see:
'A mortal escaped?
No one was to survive my flood.'
Ea answered:
'How could you do such a thing?
Punish only those who do wrong,
Send lions or wolves against those who offend you.
Why destroy all mankind?'
Then Enlil came forth,
Made us kneel.
Touched our foreheads:
'Hitherto,
You will be like unto Gods,
Shall be immortal,
Shall live at a distance,
At the confluence of the waters'
And thus,
It was a God,
Who granted me immortality,
Who will grant you the eternal life that you seek?
It happened but once,
But Gilgamesh,
I will tell you,
A secret of the gods.*

*At the end of this river,
There grows a plant.
With a strong smelling flower,
But a stem of painful thorns.
Any mortal that can hold this plant,
And eat of it,
Youth will return to him,
This secret I do tell you."*

*In joy Gilgamesh cried out:
"Boatman,
You and I,
We shall get this plant of life,
And return to Erech,
And share the plant among the old,
Old men will become young again,
Grandmothers will become maids."*

*But the boatman said:
"Gilgamesh beware,
Your desires lead you into a trap,
These waters are death,
To enter them is to die.
Let this plant stay where it grows."*

*Gilgamesh replied:
"If I can eat of this plant,
My health will be restored,
I will still live.
Boatman, you must wait for me."*

*Gilgamesh tied heavy stones to his feet,
And entered the river,
The water was thick,
He could not see.
But he caught the strong scent of the plant's flower,
He was drawn to it.
He touched it.
It scratched and hurt his hands,
But he pulled it out by its roots.
He returned to the boatman,
Once they tasted of the flower,
All weariness dropped from them.
They journeyed back towards Erech.*

*They found a fresh pool of water,
And decided to rest.
After Gilgamesh bathed in the spring,
He saw a serpent at his feet,
The snake grabbed the plant of youth,
And escaped into the earth.*

Gilgamesh beat his chest in anger.

*

*They travelled three days,
Until they came to the Euphrates river,
They washed in its waters,
Above them loomed the high wall of Erech.
They descended into the city,
And the people celebrated their return.*

Ninsun rejoiced:

*"Gilgamesh,
Death has not found you,
And now you return.
Did you find what you seek,
Is your heart at last content?"*

Gilgamesh told her all,

But informed her:

*"Dear mother,
I still have one more quest.
I must find my brother."*

Ninsun implored him:

*"O Gilgamesh,
Cease your wandering.
Stay here my son,
And take a wife,
Have a child that you can lead by the hand.
This is the purpose of life."*

Gilgamesh said:

*"First, dearest mother,
Tell me the path I must take,
How I can direct my steps,
To find my brother."*

*Patient Ninsun went to her palace,
Prepared incense on the roof,
And addressed the God Shamash:*

*"Great Shamash,
How can my son Gilgamesh,
Direct his steps,
To find his brother Enkidu?"*

Shamash replied:

*"Say to Gilgamesh,
When he gets to the gate of the Underworld,
He must discard his clean garments,
Lest he arouse the envy of the dead.
He must discard his sandals,
Lest he awake the dead.
He must discard his weapons,
Lest he offend the dead."*

*As to the path,
I cannot say,
My ways are of light,
I know not the realms of darkness.
He must ask another God."*

*Gilgamesh set out to the temple of Ea:
"Great Ea,
Assist me to find my brother,
For I weep for him day and night"
Ea heard Gilgamesh's appeal,
To the gatekeeper of the Underworld he spoke:
"Gilgamesh desires to speak to his brother.
Open the earth so he can come out."
Ea told Gilgamesh to go to the western field,
And thus he did run,
But royal tunic,
And sandals,
And weapons,
He forgot to remove.
In the western field.
A hole opened in the earth,
A strange form emerged,
A man made of plants and vines.
It was Enkidu!
The brothers embraced,
"My brother,
Tell me of the Underworld,
In which you dwell.
How is it with kings, have you seen them?"
Enkidu replied:
"I have seen them, the kings wear no crowns, theirs is the lot of servants"
"How is it with heroes, have you seen them?"
"I have seen them, their parents hold their heads, their wives weep over them."
"What of the man having but one son, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, his portion is but one glass of water."
"What of the man who had two sons; have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, he has a good house of bricks over his head and a loaf of bread each day"
"What of the man who had three sons, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, daily he is refreshed from the waters of the deep."
"What of the man who had eight sons, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, he has a great house of stone, and statues of his image,
His name is proclaimed on standards, in red and in gold,
Daily gifts and tributes are his reward!"
"Enkidu, what of the man who had no sons, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, he lies unburied at the foot of the wall,
Cast-off crusts of bread are his portion."
Gilgamesh then pleaded with the gatekeeper:
"Gatekeeper,
Listen to me,
My brother did not die from battle,
My brother did not die from sickness,*

*My brother did not die from old age,
The Gods stole him in his prime.
Release him!"
But the gatekeeper shook his head:
"It is decreed,
The dead may never join the living,
But,
O Gilgamesh,
The living may join the dead,
Your royal clothes,
Have brought out the envy of the dead,
Your sandals,
Have awoken the dead,
Your weapons,
Have offended the dead!"
Gilgamesh grew fearful,
He turned to run,
He hesitated,
So much wandering,
So much hardship,
He at last found Enkidu,
He could not desert him.
He turned.
He walked towards his brother.
He bowed.
He fell into the dust.
He was dead.
The earth reached up and seized him.*

*As such did Gilgamesh die,
A mortal man's death.
Even so,
His life was not as an empty wind,
An everlasting name he had made for himself.
When he was gone the people mourned him,
But they also sang of his adventures and quests,
Dancers acted out his deeds,
Singers set them to music,
And poets recited them,
Scribes wrote it all down on tablets of clay,
Sculptors carved his face in stone,
And painters illustrated the great story in houses and temples,
Finally Erech and its walls slowly crumbled and melted into the earth.
Other cities and languages came into being,
But everywhere was repeated the name of Gilgamesh.
And when people heard the name and asked,
"Who was this Gilgamesh?",
They were answered:
"He who sees all,
He who knows all,
He who stands seven feet high,*

*One-third man,
Two-thirds god,
Most glorious among heroes,
Most eminent among men,
And Enkidu was his brother."*

- The End -

###

Chapter 10. Epilogue and Discussions Regarding the Teachings of Siduri and the Epic of Gilgamesh

EPILOGUE

There are many philosophies and concepts contained within the Epic of Gilgamesh. First, Enkidu teaches Gilgamesh what it means to be human; he teaches him the meaning of devotion and compassion, the meaning of loss and of growing older, the meaning of mortality. Second, Siduri teaches him to accept his mortality, enjoy life and appreciate family. Finally, the overarching story teaches us to strive for dreams that are achievable in our lifetimes. While everlasting life is not Gilgamesh's destiny, his epic quest did achieve a form of immortality in that his name and actions have lived on, for thousands of years, in our minds and in our hearts. Gilgamesh and Siduri teach us that in the lasting impact of our actions in this world and through our children and our children's children, we too can achieve immortality.

DISCUSSIONS

The following section represents various discussions regarding Siduri's Teachings and the Epic of Gilgamesh. Please note that discussions have been edited for clarity.

*

ROBERT:

Does Siduri touch upon ambition and legacy at all?

PETER:

Ambition and legacy are large concepts within the Epic of Gilgamesh, with Gilgamesh seeking both physical immortality and immortality in name. However, Siduri's advice is that life should be lived today, and that your children and your children's children are the legacy you leave in this world, at least, this is my interpretation of her words.

ROBERT:

Well, I chose not to add to the world's ills, so I don't have children (I'm a child of abusive parents and don't want to pass that on) and instead try to leave something else. I guess I'm damned in Siduri's eyes.

PETER:

I am very sorry to hear that. While I am a big believer in family and admit that in many ways I seek justification for many of my beliefs in Siduri's words, I wonder how my position may well be different if I had endured what you have. Siduri's advice fascinates me and I try to live it to this day, but I also understand that her advice is not for everyone, and I respect each of us must choose our own path. No one is damned who does what they believe to be right in their heart.

*

JOSEPH:

Do you have any shorter advice – you know, things like "a penny saved is a penny earned"?

PETER:

Well, yes, there is lots of valuable shorter advice, indeed I own several books/lists of famous quotations that in many instances represent short and useful advice. Unfortunately, none of these shorter quotes can claim to be the oldest recorded advice, so for this book we are stuck with Siduri's advice as the oldest recorded surviving advice on how we should live our lives.

*

MO:

Enkidu needs a haircut.

PETER:

Indeed, but his horns keep getting in the way :)

*

ROSIER:

In the end, it is the serpent who gets immortal life instead of man. Perhaps like Gilgamesh, I should just take life as it is.

PETER:

A fellow aficionado of Sumerian literature! I'm sure your conclusions would make Siduri proud :)

ROSIER:

Hopefully Siduri would reconsider my status as a puny mortal and elevate me to godhood through genetic engineering!

PETER:

Ha! I hope she would :)

Interestingly enough, my own "early life crisis" revolved around the hope that genetic engineering and personalized stem cell-based regenerative medicine would cure our mortal curse. Like Gilgamesh I dreamed of physical immortality, and hoped my research in these areas would also bring me immortality in name. A combination of factors which included Siduri's ancient advice, but also included my advancing age, my new family and the realization that genetic engineering and stem cells may somewhat prolong life in the near future, but the technology is way too primitive to escape the eventual hands of death, combined with the realization that Nobel Prizes are incredibly hard to get and even they do not really guarantee "immortality in name", slowly shifted me to a more "Carpe diem" perspective.

*

CAROLE:

Thought provoking book Peter. Yes, I can imagine why you find the Sidurian concept of joy a pleasure to introduce. But wise words are so often lost on those who could most benefit. Their minds are closed as they view the world not in color, but shades of grey as they wallow in negative thoughts. Did Siduri mean we are our own worst enemy, not the world that surrounds us? I am a great believer that once you discover inner peace you will find happiness.

I particularly like these words from Siduri's ancient advice:

*Whither are you wandering?
Life, which you look for,
you will never find.
For when the gods created man,
they let death be his share,
and life withheld in their own hands.*

PS Out of interest who do you consider to be your target market for this book?

PETER:

Very well put, I think you hit the nail on the head! In my opinion the concept that "we are own worst enemy", at least in-so-far as our current and future happiness is concerned, was exactly the idea Siduri was trying to convey. I also really like your belief regarding achieving happiness through inner peace. For my own edification, I would very much appreciate it if you would be so kind as to advise me which are the most important priorities/steps that someone could take to (hopefully) eventually achieve inner peace? I love and live Siduri's advice, but I also try to keep an open mind as to other complementary colorful paths to happiness.

PS. I guess the target audience is anyone open to the idea that ancient advice may still hold positive value in how we live our lives today.

CAROLE:

To be honest, I believe we must all paddle our own canoe in life and be responsible for our actions. We can ask advice and listen to the opinions of others, but at the end of the day we process information and adjust our life's rudder accordingly, or not. Hence if someone reads your book and they take away just one point or nods their head in agreement it has been worthwhile. So, we read and reflect.

We all have our own life's experience on which to draw, and whether we learn from them, really depends on our willingness to change and how we embrace new ideas.

"I would very much appreciate it if you would be so kind as to advise me which are the most important priorities/steps that someone could take to (hopefully) eventually achieve inner peace?"

Sorry Peter, I don't have a magic formula to achieve 'inner peace', it is work in progress; continually evolving and everyone is different.

My beliefs in striving for inner peace are simple. I have not tried to explain this before, so I hope my philosophy and random thoughts make sense.

Inner peace for me is basically accepting you must be responsible for your own thoughts and actions. For example: I don't believe in praying to God to provide, as I believe God only helps those who help themselves. But I do believe in God (many will disagree, but that is OK) Basically, if I want something I figure out how to get it, and if it's not achievable I accept it, compromise and move on.

One of my acquaintances is a born again Christian and we disagree as to how we arrive at achieving inner peace, but we do agree our goal is still the same, so we have found common ground. Be mindful of how to agree to disagree. If you can find common ground fine, if not don't get all bent out of shape and bear a grudge - life's far too short. And as they say 'there are as many opinions as there are people'.

I have also learned - when you have everything it is easy to value nothing, and when you have nothing you value everything. Accept what you have and be grateful.

Appreciate and enjoy the simple things of life. (Take a moment to pause and reflect. Resist the temptation to be materialistic especially to impress others).

I strive to be respectful and mindful of others opinions (despite provocation). (Put brain into gear before operating mouth.)

While it is important to have sympathy and show empathy towards others who are experiencing emotional stress do not be tempted to join them in the well of their despair and negativity. It is counterproductive for them and you. Some people do not want to be helped and just enjoy moaning for the sake of moaning. I call these sappers and try and avoid this type of person because they will never be satisfied with life no matter what they do and sap my positive energy. (My solar panels only run for so long)

Focus on your strengths and not on your weaknesses. But having recognized your weaknesses strive to improve.

Manage your ego - be humble.

When things get tough I find peace and solitude in the beauty of nature.

Often, I retreat to my special place by the ocean, look out to sea and feel the stresses of life ebb away as a feeling of peace washes over me.

You need a place to retreat where you feel at peace.

Finally, a quote from the Serenity Prayer. Even if you are not religious the words hold a certain truth. I don't agree with all of the prayer because I still subscribe to "God only helps those who help themselves"

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;*
-Reinhold Niebuhr

To me discovering inner peace is not sitting by the ocean in the lotus position, but living life one day at a time and making the most of it. The rules are simple so just live.

Hope this is of some help Peter.

PS learn to laugh at yourself and smile often.

PETER:

Thank you so much for elaborating on your philosophy, you did a great job and I think there is a significant overlap between our beliefs.

"To be honest, I believe we must all paddle our own canoe in life and be responsible for our actions. We can ask advice and listen to the opinions of others, but at the end of the day we process information and adjust our life's rudder accordingly, or not. Hence if someone reads your book and they take away just one point or nods their head in agreement it has been worthwhile. So, we read and reflect."

I completely agree with you. I have found value in Siduri's advice and want to offer the opportunity for others to also consider her words, hence the book. I am especially interested to find out if others find her advice as useful as I have. So, I offer my opinions and interpretations, and as you said, if they take anything of value from the book, then it has indeed been worthwhile.

"Inner peace for me is basically accepting you must be responsible for your own thoughts and actions. For example: I don't believe in praying to God to provide, as I believe God only helps those who help themselves. But I do believe in God (many will disagree, but that is OK). Basically, if I want something I figure out how to get it, and if it's not achievable I accept it, compromise and move on. Refer to the first paragraph of the Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference."*

Yes, we are definitely on the same wavelength. Figuring out what you want and then seizing the opportunities to realize your desires is the real meaning behind Horace's famous and often misinterpreted "carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero" (seize the day, trust as little as possible in the future). Siduri was the first recorded advocate of the underlying "carpe diem" concept, when she told Gilgamesh to stop worrying about his unavoidable future death and to enjoy the present. I also love your Reinhold Niebuhr quote. I came across it quite recently in Dale Carnegie's book "How to stop worrying and start living" and was so impressed that I made a note of telling my wife about it. She rolled her eyes and told me she had heard it many years earlier. Nevertheless, good advice remains just as useful now as when it was first written. This is how I feel about Siduri, Niebuhr or any other good advice, regardless of when they were written or how popular they are. The fact that Siduri's advice is so old is far less interesting to me than what she actually said.

Thank you for taking the time to write out and post your beliefs, I very much appreciate it and I found myself nodding my head often :)

*

MO:

Too often advice such as Siduri's is taken wrongly or misinterpreted or reinterpreted by those who would put themselves in positions of power by influencing others. I don't disagree that the suggestion has value, I would just be wary of the legions of middlemen and other anglewangers.

PETER:

These are valid concerns which I share. I have always been wary when people try to sell me anything, but now with this book, I find myself on the other side of the divide trying to promote/sell a life philosophy that I have personally found great value in. I find myself in the uncomfortable company of the "legions of middlemen and other anglewangers" you mentioned. Even worse, I find myself enjoying both the somewhat privileged position I have found myself in for trying to promote Siduri's beautiful advice, as well as the fascinating discussions on life, happiness and inner peace that have arisen because of this work. My only antidote to these concerns is to try to be as honest as possible, with myself and with the people reading the book, and to explicitly state that these are my personal interpretations of Siduri's words and that I understand and respect that others may find different meaning in her advice. My main goal is increased awareness of Siduri's advice, so even if the reader disagrees with my interpretation completely, they will still have had the chance to read and think about Siduri's original advice on the Sippar tablet and I will have achieved my hope for this book.

MO:

And that's just fine. I myself remain unmoved-my inner peace is not gained by any consideration of gods and their works and advice; I do not believe in such. There is no direct incontrovertible evidence for their existence. There is certainly sufficient evidence as to the venality of mankind. Good luck with your quest to bring this message to those who would believe or heed it. I am not of your target audience, that's all.

PETER:

Thank you and I understand. Just to clarify, while Siduri was considered a goddess by the ancient Babylonians, I do not consider her one. My fascination is with her advice as recorded on the Sippar tablet, not because of any putative deistic status, but because her words moved me. They certainly won't move everybody, in fact they may not move anybody else, but I only wish to write about what I am passionate about and I will always make every effort to learn from my mistakes. I agree that there is much evidence as to the venality of mankind, but let's not forget that as a species we also possess remarkable capacity for honesty, devotion and a plethora of other positive attributes.

*

OLIVER:

I was of the impression that The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor predated The Epic of Gilgamesh

PETER:

Technically the Epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest long work of literature that has survived, several short stories and tales preceded it, but are not typically placed by scholars in the same literary category. There may also have been equal length or longer works of literature, but these have been lost over time, or at least not discovered to date. I am not a big fan of using the qualifier "long", but perhaps I could compromise with a more impressive qualifier like "great".

OLIVER:

I am not sure how literally I would take the advice, singing and dancing could be seen as representative of things which bring simple pleasure.

PETER:

Yes, I agree that singing, dancing, good food, good wine, good company etc. may all represent simple pleasures, but in my interpretation, Siduri was proposing that we embrace these simple pleasures. Siduri's philosophy appears to be that we should live in and enjoy today. I have tried to follow her advice on a somewhat more literal level and have found myself and my family to be significantly happier as a result, especially my two year old daughter; she loves to dance, especially to upbeat party music! However, it is in no way practical (at least not for me) to "dance and make music day and night" so I guess even people like me who wish to follow Siduri's advice on a more literal level will still need to find their own balance.

OLIVER:

"Looking at the child who is holding your hand" a recognition that the culture of man still has some way to go. A child requires education to bring them up to speed, but they also represent the future development of the culture, not necessarily of the personal genetic form. This is the huge plus culture has over Darwinian evolution, it is not entirely random, new bits can be deliberately added and passed on to the next generation by other than physical means.

PETER:

This is an excellent point! My training as a geneticist, as well as a life-long love of neo-Darwinist concepts, as elucidated by Richard Dawkins in "The Selfish Gene", combined with my wife and I trying for a second child, blinded me to the cultural aspect of Siduri's words. I think the sentence "Look at the child that is holding your hand" refers to both the nurture and the nature aspects of having children. I will need to give the cultural aspect more thought and then make the necessary changes to the next edition of this book. Thank you so much for pointing this out!

OLIVER:

I find Siduri's concepts of understanding, happiness, and inheritance reminiscent of later trilogies, the Christian; faith, hope and charity; or the Buddhist; give, sympathize and control.

PETER:

Fascinating. I suspect that like Jesus, Buddha, or many of the philosophers throughout history, Siduri took concepts that were already culturally present and presented them in a form that could be easily understood and transmitted (we tend to have an easier time remembering things in threes) in this way these concepts became crystalized in history.

OLIVER:

There is, as you say, an element of the oral tradition about Siduri's advice. I have done a bit of storytelling, there is something about traditional storytelling which is akin to the therapeutic metaphor in that the aim is partially to be all things to all people.

PETER:

Yes, I think you're right, I connected to what I saw in Siduri's words, while you rightly identified the cultural aspects that I originally missed. I also agree that an overly literal interpretation of Siduri's advice is not practical. However, I think the underlying concepts are still fascinating as they highlight ideas that our ancient ancestors considered important enough to transmit from generation to generation before they were eventually recorded in clay. I still think that one of the concepts they were trying to advocate was a pro-family one. Not only did Siduri end her advice to Gilgamesh on a pro-family note, but Ninsun (Gilgamesh's mother) was even more explicit:

*"Ninsun implored him:
"O Gilgamesh,
Cease your wandering.
Stay here my son,
And take a wife,
Have a child that you can lead by the hand.
This is the purpose of life"*

And when Gilgamesh's adopted brother gets to temporarily leave the Underworld to enlighten Gilgamesh regarding the afterlife, the importance of having children again appears to be the primary message:

*"A hole opened in the earth,
A strange form emerged,
A man made of plants and vines.
It was Enkidu!
The brothers embraced,
"My brother,
Tell me of the Underworld,
In which you dwell.
How is it with kings, have you seen them?"
Enkidu replied:
"I have seen them, the kings wear no crowns, theirs is the lot of servants"
"How is it with heroes, have you seen them?"
"I have seen them, their parents hold their heads, their wives weep over them."*

*"What of the man having but one son, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, his portion is but one glass of water."
"What of the man who had two sons; have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, he has a good house of bricks over his head and a loaf of bread each day"
"What of the man who had three sons, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, daily he is refreshed from the waters of the deep."
"What of the man who had eight sons, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, he has a great house of stone, and statues of his image,
His name is proclaimed on standards, in red and in gold,
Daily gifts and tributes are his reward!"
"Enkidu, what of the man who had no sons, have you seen him?"
"I have seen him, he lies unburied at the foot of the wall,
Cast-off crusts of bread are his portion.""*

Whether we agree or not with the concept, it is difficult to argue against the suggestion that at least one of the recurrent messages our ancient ancestors considered important enough to orally transmit for hundreds of years, before the invention of writing, revolved around the imperative of actually having children. It is perhaps fortunate that ancient culture held these types of beliefs, because without them we might not be here today!

END OF DISCUSSIONS

Author's note

If you wish to participate in future discussions, which will (if appropriate) be published in the next edition of this book, please email your comments/questions to me at Professor.Peter.Dyr@gmail.com and I will do my best to respond as quickly as possible.

This third edition, in many ways, represents a work-in-progress, if you would like to read the next edition (once it is completed) please visit Amazon.com and search for "Peter Dyr" or visit my website:

<http://EpicOfGilgamesh.webs.com>

New editions of this book will be posted to my website and to Amazon.com as soon as they are completed.

Warm regards,

Peter Dyr

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