


## Module 2: Self-Discovery Through Change and Rebirth

### Topic 2: The Epic of Gilgamesh Summary

#### Introduction

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

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*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an epic poem from Mesopotamia, is one the earliest literary works of literature. The epic was originally written on tablets of stone, and has been translated into many different languages. Only a few fragments of the original stone have survived. In this interactivity, use the previous and next buttons to explore a summary of each of the tablets in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

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### Topic 2: The Epic of Gilgamesh Summary

#### Prologue


### The Epic of Gilgamesh

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Before you begin the summary of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, it will be helpful to have some background information about the work. Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk, was half man and half-god. He was described as a wise ruler of Uruk, and as one who was able to see and understand the hidden and unknown. Gilgamesh built walls to protect the land. Then, Gilgamesh embarked on an epic journey. When he returned, he inscribed a description of his travels on the magnificent walls he built.

As ruler of Uruk, he built a temple for the god Anu and Ishtar, the goddess of love. The temple was a fortress and made of protective walls of burnt bricks. Gilgamesh did not just make any brick walls. His walls were magnificent. These extraordinary walls, with their shining copper foundation and beautiful brick work, awed all who beheld them.

The next tablets will describe the journey and epic of Gilgamesh.



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### Topic 2: The Epic of Gilgamesh Summary

#### Tablet I

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablet I



Edniku

As Gilgamesh travels the world, no one can match his strength. When Gilgamesh arrives in Uruk, he terrorizes the people. He kills the men and forces himself upon the women. Those within the city cry to Anu, the god of Uruk, who appeals to Aruru, the goddess of creation.

Because Aruru created Gilgamesh, Anu begs Aruru to make his equal: create someone who matches Gilgamesh's strength; someone who can tame him and take Gilgamesh away from Uruk. Aruru imagines Enkidu, and then creates him from a hearth, placing him in the wilderness so that he knows nothing of cultivated land and civilization. Enkidu has long hair like a woman's which covers his body. He eats and drinks with the animals.

One day, as Enkidu is drinking at the water hole, a hunter spots him with the wild game. Three days later the hunter faces Enkidu, fearful of this uncivilized being. After his encounter with Enkidu, the hunter goes home and tells his father about Enkidu. He describes Enkidu as the strongest being he has ever seen, comparing him to a god. The young hunter seeks advice from his father because he is afraid of Enkidu's strength, and he is frustrated with Enkidu's actions. In hearing this, the young hunter's father advises him to go to Uruk and tell the great and strong Gilgamesh of this and request a harlot, a woman to seduce and weaken Enkidu's strength. The young hunter sets on his journey to Uruk, tells Gilgamesh of Enkidu, and Gilgamesh provides the young hunter with a harlot.

The harlot seduces Enkidu, who sheds his innocence. After his encounter with the harlot, the wildlife turns away from Enkidu. The harlot tells Enkidu of Gilgamesh, and Enkidu desires a

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comrade. That night Gilgamesh dreams of Enkidu and tells his mother, Ninsun. Ninsun interprets the dream. Gilgamesh has a second dream. Ninsun interprets this dream which is about Gilgamesh's and Enkidu's companionship.

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#### Tablet II

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

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The harlot tears her clothes and prepares Enkidu to meet Gilgamesh. Enkidu wants to challenge Gilgamesh, and as he enters into Uruk the people notice that he looks like Gilgamesh. They recognize his strength as well as his beauty. When Gilgamesh and Enkidu finally meet, they begin to fight. They struggle with one another until Gilgamesh throws Enkidu to the ground. Enkidu acknowledges Gilgamesh's strength and status. They embrace. This embrace solidifies their friendship.

Enlil has already decided Gilgamesh's fate, which is given to Gilgamesh in the form of a dream. Enkidu interprets the dream: Gilgamesh will not live forever, but he has been given unconquerable power that must not be abused. After Enkidu interprets Gilgamesh's dreams, he becomes sad and tells Gilgamesh that he has become weak. Upon hearing this, Gilgamesh decides to take a journey to the Land of Cedars and defeat the giant, Humbaba. Gilgamesh wants his name to be marked on bricks.



#### Humbaba

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Gilgamesh makes a sacrifice to Shamash, and asks for his protection as well as his blessings. Shamash grants Gilgamesh mercy, and the armourers give Gilgamesh and Enkidu their weapons.


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### Topic 2: The Epic of Gilgamesh Summary

#### Tablets III-IV

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablets III-IV



Gilgamesh and Enkidu arrive at the gates of a forest

Gilgamesh announces his journey to the citizens of Uruk. They are fearful of this journey because of the depths of the forest and Humbaba's ferociousness. Gilgamesh takes his concerns to his mother, Ninsun. Ninsun prays to Shamash, and tells Enkidu to guide and protect Gilgamesh. The counselors of Uruk give their blessing and offer these words of advice, "Do not forget Shamash and Lugulbanda, Gilgamesh's guardian gods."

Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel to the forest. They walk great lengths in record time. What would take an individual to walk in two weeks to a month, Gilgamesh and Enkidu cover in three days. As they arrive at the gate of the forest, Enkidu becomes hesitant about entering the forest. Gilgamesh encourages him to have no fear. He affirms their friendship, and they enter the forest.

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#### Tablet V

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablet V



Gilgamesh builds a gate for Uruk with the cedars from the forest.

As they enter the forest, they experience the grandeur and splendor of the cedar. Before Gilgamesh and Enkidu confront Humbaba, they stop and sleep and dream ominous dreams. Although these dreams frighten Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Gilgamesh takes his ax and cuts down Humbaba's cedar. Humbaba hears this and is quickly angered. Shamash encourages Gilgamesh and Enkidu to remain fearless and to move forward, but Gilgamesh becomes weak and extremely tired. Overcome with sleep, Gilgamesh drifts into a deep sleep. Enkidu tries to wake him, and after many attempts Gilgamesh awakens. He puts on his breastplate and moves forward to slay Humbaba.

Once again, Enkidu expresses his fear of Humbaba, but Gilgamesh remains courageous about facing Humbaba. As Gilgamesh and Enkidu confront Humbaba, Gilgamesh calls upon the sun god, Shamash,

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Once again, Enkidu expresses his fear of Humbaba, but Gilgamesh remains courageous about facing Humbaba. As Gilgamesh and Enkidu confront Humbaba, Gilgamesh calls upon the sun god, Shamash, who helps them slay Humbaba and his seven splendors. Gilgamesh uses Humbaba's cedars and makes a new gate for the city of Uruk. He also builds a raft to get back home to carry the gate and Humbaba's decapitated head.


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#### Tablets VI

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablets VI



Ishtar releases the Bull of Heaven

Once Gilgamesh and Enkidu return to Uruk, Gilgamesh washes the filth from his body and puts on his robe and crown. Ishtar sees Gilgamesh in all his beauty and asks him to marry her. She reveals the lavish life he will live, how she will cater to him, and how kings and rulers will bow down to him. Gilgamesh does not accept her offer. In fact, he mentions her treatment and the fate of her previous lovers. Ishtar, infuriated by his response, cries to her father Anu and her mother Antum asking them to release the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh. She threatens her parents with creating confusion and mixing the dead with the living if they do not go along with her request. Her father, Anu, reminds her that releasing the Bull of Heaven will cause a drought. However, Ishtar has saved enough grain and grass to protect the people and cattle from the famine.

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Anu decides to give Ishtar the Bull of Heaven, which he releases. As the Bull of Heaven reaches the gates of Uruk, he lets out a snort so powerful that it cracks open the Earth, and one hundred men fall to their death. The Bull of Heaven snorts a second time, which causes two hundred men to fall to their death. With the third snort, Enkidu initially loses his balance but is able to leap on top of the Bull of Heaven and grab it by its horns. Enkidu cries out to Gilgamesh who takes his sword and stabs the Bull of Heaven between the nape and the horns. After they killed the Bull of Heaven, Gilgamesh and Enkidu cut out its heart, and after offering it as a sacrifice to Shamash, decide to rest.

Ishtar curses Gilgamesh; however, Enkidu tears out the bull's right thigh, tosses it in Ishtar's face and threatens her. While Ishtar and her people mourn, Gilgamesh calls the armourers and they



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admire the bull's horns. Gilgamesh carries the thirty pound horns into the palace. Gilgamesh and Enkidu wash their hands in the Euphrates River. Then, they go and celebrate in the streets of Uruk, and eventually rest for the evening.


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#### Tablets VII

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablets VII



**Edniku dies**

The next morning Enkidu gets up and cries to Gilgamesh regarding his dream. Enkidu dreams of the meeting among the gods Anu, Enlil, Ea, and Shamash. Anu reveals to Enlil that either Gilgamesh or Enkidu must die because they killed Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. Enkidu realizes that he will die and never see Gilgamesh again.

When Enkidu becomes deathly ill, he curses the gate that was made from Humbaba's cedars, blaming it for his death. At dawn, Enkidu weeps to the sun god and curses the young hunter and the harlot. Upon hearing the weeping, Enkidu takes back his curse and prays blessings over her life. After Enkidu calls to Gilgamesh and reveals his dream, he dreams a second time of being guided by an awful looking being to the palace of the Queen of Darkness, the house of dust where no one returns. Those within this

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Gilgamesh weeps and realizes that this dream tells of Enkidu's fate. Enkidu suffers in his bed for twelve days. Before Enkidu dies he tells Gilgamesh that Ishtar has cursed him and he must die in shame. Gilgamesh weeps over Enkidu. At dawn he tells his counselors of his love for Enkidu. After he professes his love for Enkidu, Enkidu dies.

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#### Tablets VIII-VIX

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablets VIII-VIX

Gilgamesh travels to Mashu in search of everlasting life.



Gilgamesh weeps and becomes enraged. He paces, tears out his hair, and rips off his robe. He cries out and promises Enkidu that all of Uruk will lament and weep over him. He summons the coppersmith, goldsmiths, and stonemasons to make a statue of Enkidu. After the statue is made, Gilgamesh makes an offering to the sun. Gilgamesh weeps and then leaves. Gilgamesh roams in the wilderness and mourns the loss of Enkidu. Because Gilgamesh fears death, he decides to find Utnapishtim. Utnapishtim was granted everlasting life by the gods and it is this that Gilgamesh seeks.

While on his journey, Gilgamesh comes to the great and magical mountains of Mashu. The guards of Mashu's gate were man-scorpions. Although fearful of the guards, he speaks to them and tells them that his friend has died and he wants to find Utnapishtim to show him how to find everlasting life. The

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Gilgamesh travels ten leagues into utter darkness. Once he reaches the eleventh and twelfth leagues, he finally sees the sun. He finds himself in a garden where he sees fruit of carnelian and lapis lazuli leaves. The thorns and thistles are that of precious gems and pearls. Shamash sees Gilgamesh covered in animal skins and filthy. Shamash reveals to Gilgamesh that he will not be able to live forever. Ignoring this, Gilgamesh continues his search for everlasting life.


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#### Tablet X

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablet X



Covered in filth and animal skins, Gilgamesh meets the woman of the vine, Siduri. Initially Siduri bolts the doors, but Gilgamesh reveals himself. Because of his broken and filthy appearance, Siduri questions his identity. Gilgamesh reveals the loss of his good friend, Enkidu and his search for everlasting life. Siduri tells Gilgamesh to enjoy the life he has because, as a mortal, he is not granted everlasting life. Disregarding her advice, Gilgamesh asks her how to get to Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh states that he will either go across the ocean or continue to wander in the wilderness. Siduri reveals to Gilgamesh that no one crosses the ocean but Shamash. However, Urshanabi, Utnapishtim's ferryman, may take him across the ocean. She also advises him that if Urshanabi does not take him across, he must come back. Hearing this Gilgamesh becomes angry. As he walks into the forest with his ax and his dagger, Gilgamesh destroys the tackle of the boat. Urshanabi hears the loud noise and becomes extremely

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Utnapishtim recognizes the boat and questions who has come to see him without a tackle and a mast. He also recognizes that Urshanabi is not sailing the boat. Once Urshanabi and Gilgamesh reach the shore and reach Utnapishtim, Utnapishtim questions Gilgamesh's intentions and physical appearance. He sees that Gilgamesh is filled with despair. Gilgamesh reveals to Utnapishtim his fear of death after experiencing the death of his good friend. He shares with Utnapishtim that he is searching for everlasting life. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh that in life there is no permanence. The Annunaki and Mamentun, mother of destinies, came together to decide the fate of mankind. Life and death are known but one's day of death is unknown. Gilgamesh looks at Utnapishtim and asks him to tell the story of how he was granted everlasting life.

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#### Tablets XI-XII

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

#### Tablets XI-XII

Bread is the evidence that is used to prove that Gilgamesh failed Utnapishtim's test.



Utnapishtim tells the story of the flood. The gods Anu, Enlil, Ninurta, Ennungi, and Ea were the gods over the old city of Shurrupak. As the inhabitants become more and more unruly, the gods decide to exterminate the human race. The god, Ea, warned Utnapishtim in a dream. He told Utnapishtim to tear down his house, leave his possessions, and build a boat. Ea provides Utnapishtim with the exact measurements needed to build the boat and specific instructions on making sure that a male and female of each species were represented on the boat.

Utnapishtim honors Ea's request, but was uncertain about how to address the citizens and elders. Ea states that Utnapishtim reveals that Enlil is angry with him, and he can no longer live in that land but must stay with Ea. He reveals that Enlil will cause abundant rain. On the seventh day, Utnapishtim and

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The storm lasts for seven days and six nights, and on the seventh day the storm ceases. The flood waters stand still and Utnapishtim releases a dove. Because the dove is unable to find land, it returns. Utnapishtim decides to release a swallow. The swallow is unable to find land and returns. Utnapishtim finally releases a raven. Seeing that the waters have receded, the raven eats, calls out,

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and flies around. When the raven does not return, Utnapishtim offers a sacrifice to the gods. The goddess, Ishtar, invites the gods to feast on the sacrifice except for Enlil because he brought the flood upon the Earth and caused the destruction. When Enlil finally arrives, he becomes upset because he sees that there were mortals who were still alive. Ea, the god who knows all, questions Enlil's reason for causing the flood. Enlil explains that mankind has sinned and must be punished but should not perish. In hearing this, Ea explains to Enlil that Utnapishtim learned about the flood in a dream. Enlil decides to go up to Utnapishtim and his wife, and grant them everlasting life.

After Utnapishtim tells his story, he invites Gilgamesh to a test. Gilgamesh is to stay awake for six days and seven nights; however, as Gilgamesh is resting, he falls into a deep sleep. Utnapishtim and his wife observe Gilgamesh sleeping. His wife directs Utnapishtim to wake Gilgamesh up, so he can return home; however, Utnapishtim tells his wife to bake a loaf of bread and put a mark on the wall for each day that Gilgamesh sleeps. He advises her to do this because man deceives, but the bread provides evidence. Each day Gilgamesh sleeps, Utnapishtim's wife bakes a loaf of bread, puts it by his head, and marks it on the wall. Gilgamesh sleeps for seven days. The bread from day one is hard, the second loaf is like leather, the third loaf is soggy, the crust of the fourth loaf is molded, the fifth loaf is fresh, and the seventh loaf is cooking. On the seventh day, Utnapishtim awakens Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh thinks he has been sleeping for a short while, but Utnapishtim tells him otherwise and shows him the seven loaves of bread and the markings on the wall. Gilgamesh becomes distraught and questions Utnapishtim about what he should do. He realizes that he encounters death each time he decides to rest.

Utnapishtim speaks to Urshanabi, the ferryman, and tells him that he is banished. Urshanabi will no longer be the ferryman; however, he will take Gilgamesh to wash off the foulness that has covered Gilgamesh's body and gives him new clothes and a new head piece. These new clothes will appear as new until he has reached home and completed his journey. Gilgamesh and Urshanabi board the boat, but Utnapishtim's wife reminds Utnapishtim to give Gilgamesh something to take back with him to compensate for his troubles. Utnapishtim decides to reveal a secret. He tells Gilgamesh about a plant that is underwater, and it will restore one's youth. If Gilgamesh is able to obtain this plant, he will receive eternal life. In hearing this, Gilgamesh goes to the deepest part of the waterway with two heavy stones tied to his feet. He lowers himself down, retrieves the plant, cuts the stones from his feet, and comes back to shore. Gilgamesh shows the plant to Urshanabi and tells him that he will take the plant to Uruk and give it to the old men. He will call the plant, "The Old Men are Young Again" and will eat the plant himself. Gilgamesh goes through the gate and begins his journey home. After traveling for thirty leagues, Gilgamesh and Urshanabi decide to stop for the evening. As Gilgamesh goes to bathe in the cool water, a serpent smells the sweet scent of the plant, comes up from the water, snatches the flower from Gilgamesh and eats it. After the serpent eats the flowers, it sheds its skin and returns to the water. Gilgamesh cries to Urshanabi realizing that his last and only chance to receive eternal life has come and gone. Gilgamesh decides to push forward with his journey home. The journey home takes three days, although a journey of this magnitude would usually take about a month and fifteen days. When they arrive to Uruk, Gilgamesh urges Urshanabi to examine the wall of Uruk's foundation and brickwork that were built and laid by the seven wise men as well as Gilgamesh himself. After Gilgamesh's journey, he engraves his journey on a stone.

After Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, has fulfilled his destiny, he dies and the citizens of Uruk grieve and lament. Because he is the son of the goddess, Ninsun, the citizens offer sacrifices to Ninsun and the many gods and goddesses. Because of who he is, his accomplishments and his feats, Gilgamesh is praised.