

Next week on MTV Cribs, we take you into the home of one of the world's most powerful men: Gilgamesh. Check out this guy's life. Our man Gilgamesh has all the finer things in life: walls eighty feet high, the classiest chariots, dancers and entertainers at his beck and call, and women, women women. This guy asks, and he gets. He is living the dream, baby. Living the *American Dream*.

Be careful of dreams, for dreams have a way of coming true. If you want to live the good life, the honest to goodness good life, you had better dream the right dream.

Gilgamesh dreamed a dream. It was a dream some call the American dream. It as a dream full of achievements. Gilgamesh was a self-made man, except for a few natural advantages: his mother was a Goddess and the Gods had fated he succeed. And succeed he did. He had a beautiful home, he had all of his needs taken care of – material, sexual, needs of self-esteem. He had achieved much, made a life for himself. If he wanted it, he got it. Everything was in his power. He treated his subjects like objects.

The earth, to Gilgamesh was just another object to be used. Then he went and chopped down the mighty forests. Why did he chop them down? Because it was there. When the forests were chopped down he made a gigantic door to his kingdom. If he were alive today, he might make, I don't know, a fence between the US and Mexico, maybe. This is mine <>, you can't have anything beyond this line.

What happens when this dream, this dream of wealth and power, this *American* dream, is realized? This dream is a dream of death. It is a dream of separateness, of taking everything for me, and not worrying about the consequences on what I take. There is a limit to what we can take. We are learning that now. We may not feel like it, but we in America live like kings. As you may know this country is about 5% of the world's population and consumes 25% of the world's resources. If everyone lived like we did it would take 5 earths to keep us fed and clothed and happy. The problem is we don't have 5 earths. Currently we only have 1. All but the poorest of the poor in this country live like kings, and the earth can only take so many kings. In my view, 1 is too many. We're way past 1.

So what happens when the American dream is realized? Well you might think that the king Gilgamesh gets his comeuppance, and he does, but not in the way you might expect. If this weren't a great story, he'd just be killed by the Gods or something simple like that. But this is a great story, and they have an even more ingenious plan. They make Gilgamesh fall in love with the earth. They create a green man, who becomes a friend to Gilgamesh, the friend he never had before. Then they break his heart.

Enkidu dies. Gilgamesh is devastated for the first time in his life. He –feels something. This loss, and his deep grieving of it, connects him with the earth. Gilgamesh no longer feels like the possessor of all things, but instead he

feels all things connect him with his beloved friend. In his lamentation, he moans these beautiful words:

the pasture lands shriek in mourning as if it were your mother.

May the cypress, and the cedar which we destroyed in our anger

mourn you.

May the bear, hyena, panther, tiger, water buffal, jackal, lion, wild bull, stag, ibex, all the creatures of the plains

mourn you.

May the holy River Ulaja, along whose banks we grandly used to stroll,

mourn you.

May the pure Euphrates, to which we would libate water from our waterskins,

mourn you.”

All the earth, it seems to Gilgamesh, mourns the loss of his friend. Our hero has met his tragedy: not that he losted everything, but that all that he gained was utterly meaningless when compared to the most important relationship in his life.

Gilgamesh then goes off on a new journey. Realizing that he is mortal, Gilgamesh has the mother of all mid-life crises, and tries learn how to gain immortality. The rest of the story is his search for something that lasts beyond death.

He goes on a new journey; but he fails to dream a new dream. It's all still about what he can get: *his* immortality, *his* everlasting life. He does everything he can, tries everything he can, to hold on to his life, seeing on the horizon that death approaches. If this kind of mid-life crises sounds familiar, you might share with me the thought that Gilgamesh is a little more American than we might at first suspect. He wants to bring everything into his mansion, and he does, only to find that there is nothing left to sustain him.

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Gilgamesh dreamed a dream, an American dream, and it separated him from his environment. It was the dream, in the words of the poet Langston Hughes,

Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying
need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

Gilgamesh 's dream ended in a vain quest to live forever.
At the end of his quest, Gilgamesh curses his own vanity:

For whom have I labored? (he says) For whom have I journeyed?
For whom have I suffered?
I have gained absolutely nothing for myself,
I have only profited the snake, the ground lion!

His dream was a dream of death. But the earth turned even this dream into an opportunity for life, for the snake and the lion profited from Gilgamesh's quest.

Gilgamesh dreamed a dream, an American dream, but there are other American dreams too. There are, in fact, many American dreams. There is the dream of Martin Luther King, the dream of brotherhood, sisterhood. There is the dream of Langston Hughes, the poet who too sang America. There is the dream of John Muir, who saw the green man everywhere he looked, the dream of Rachel Carson, the dream of clean air, the dream of Alice Walker, who searched for our mother's gardens, places of beauty and strength. There is the dream of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, a dream of civil rights.

These dreams have one thing in common. All American dreams are dreams of freedom. But freedom by itself is not a virtue. Freedom is an opportunity. It is not fulfillment of that opportunity.

To have freedom, and not use it for justice, is like having a body, and using it for joy. To have freedom, and not use it for justice, is like having a body, and using it for joy. It's a damn shame, that's what it is.

If you want to live the good life, the honest to goodness good life, you had better dream the right dream. Many of our great-great grandparents, and our great-great-great

grandparents, dreamed an American dream. Did they want us to have gigantic chariots and enormous houses and a disposable life? Probably, they simply wanted us to be happy. We can do that. Probably, they wanted us to be good to our family. As Unitarian Universalists, we have an expansive view of what family means, the interconnected web of all existence. Even though our family is larger than tribe or clan, I believe we can be good to our family. And it all starts with our relationship to the green man. Let us love the earth as a brother, as a sister. If we dream a dream that connects us with the earth, our fate will be better than that of Kings. For unlike Gilgamesh, when we are in genuine relationship, we *will* live on past on own death. For although our individual lives may end, the legacy of all acts of love will live on, and the earth our mother will make of our lives the stuff to feed and nourish the generations.

May it be so,
AMEN