

## **The Odyssey**

This is a poem that can be truly called of epic proportions. We experience so much, through the talent of Homer, as he relates the tale of a dashing hero Odysseus. Of course, he is no dashing hero as we might consider one of the great heroes of our time. Instead, this hero not only embodied the very ideal of the Grecian pattern of thought, but he was a figure meant for teaching. Children would gather around a storyteller's feet as he related the events that would transpire through our hero's life. More specifically is the time that Odysseus spent as he traveled toward his home, Ithaca. This would last for a period of about ten years, following the Trojan War. Odysseus, as he did embody all of Greek's ideas of a perfect person, had defeated his adversaries with ease. With victory under their belts, his men shipped out for the journey home. Little did they know what would lie ahead of them. There is a difference between the hero, Odysseus, and those of our time, such as Super Man. Odysseus has faults. It is a very simple thing to us, the fact that he has faults means very little. But I implore you to look further, the heroes of our day have very little fault. Each of course have a weakness, but that can be seen only as a way to increase the tension and apprehension as the hero somehow conquers the evil bad guy. Odysseus, instead of a single weakness made for a good show, has many. He is especially portrayed as a human being. He is not a god, in fact he must turn to the gods often in order to even accomplish his hope, his dream. It is these trials through his adventures, that is the focal point of The Odyssey. It is these trials that express values for all Greeks to learn.

Storytellers could often be found on the roads of Greece, traveling town to town telling stories in order to make their living. With them they brought their lessons, to children and adult alike. They told of the model Greek citizen. A part of being a model citizen in those days meant,

of course, a love of your gods. For without them would they be there? Would they be surviving? A respect for them was an important aspect of a Greek's way of life. You must stay on the god's good side in order to prosper, which can be seen when Odysseus threatened the malevolent cyclops, "Zeus will avenge the unoffending guest." (lines 215-216) A model hero for the Greeks would indeed have to be a god fearing man. He must recognize their power over him, and he must have them on his side. Odysseus is already described as a model Greek citizen, a true hero. But if he were to fall in bad favor with the gods, surely the simple people of every town could easily fall into the same disfavor. Then very simply we can assume that they would work harder to stay on those gods good side. This epic, as stated before, did not happen in a day, for he "weathered many bitter nights and days..." (line 8) It occurred over a period of ten years. That is undeniably a long time. The lesson he learned took the entire epic to finally roll together. We as people cannot learn to be perfect in a day either. The people in Greece would indeed have to know this just as much as anyone else. They were not special in finding some great way of learning in a matter of days rather than years. Patience has been a value that has been taught throughout the ages. Just as it is important now, it was important then. Those who are our elders have lived a life and know of patience, they often implore us just as Odysseus did with his son Telemachus, "Look on, hold down your anger." (Line 1129) We go through our lives living in our mistakes, often we do not even see the fact that we are being stupid. As we look back we can see the mockery that we placed ourselves into and we laugh. But it is ever important for any civilization, to realize that we cannot fix our problems in a day.

From all that we have heard concerning the ancient Greeks, they were not a warlike people. They enjoyed learning of all kinds. Yet where they did not enjoy war, they did enjoy competition. They competed with other city-states in the hope that they might become superior.

But, they still believed in peace. This would be an important thing to breed into our young children, the simple fact that things are better solved in other ways than violence. Odysseus shouted with his victory over the cyclops, "How do you like the beating that we gave you..?" (Lines 433-434) Such words were his major flaw in this episode. His taunting brought about a problem that nearly cost him his crew as well as his own well being. Along with the bad behavior, the epic does give a counter part to replace that which they have discounted as a bad thing. They showed Odysseus, after learning his valuable lesson, with a victory through artifice. He gained that patience required in order to be a perfect model citizen. Of course this did not occur till much after his encounter with the cyclops. There is an important aspect that the Greeks did believe in however. Though they did not like the war, they believed with absolute certainty, that if they must fight, win! Odysseus did just that. When he fought, he fought like a lion as he conquered his enemies. He did not throw in the towel when he came to situations that appeared hopeless. Always he found a way to conquer the enemy, to Win! "In the blood and dust he saw that crowd all fallen, many and many slain." (Lines 1533-1534)

It was said before that staying on a gods good side is indeed important. There is no discounting that. But this epic goes the step further. It described the wonderful things that could happen should proper homage be shown unto the gods. "Suppose Athena's arm is over us, and Zeus her father's..." (Lines 1110-1111) It expresses the importance of Deus Ex Machina, or divine intervention. Forever the gods enjoy intertwining themselves into the affairs of their subjects, man. It is their will, which could determine the success or failure of a mission, or maybe even a simple days task. A principle such as this would give the populace a hope in performing such homage to their gods. If they were to pay great honor to them, perhaps they could make the people prosper. However, it must be remembered that Deus Ex Machina is more than just good

intervention. Odysseus angered the great god Zeus. And because of such great folly his troubles amounted ten fold. "Zeus, the lord of cloud, roused in the north a storm against the ships..." (Lines 70-71) Then after his victory over the cyclops and his folly in taunting the giant beast, Poseidon who fathered the cyclops was called to take revenge and make Odysseus' life miserable. The miserable cyclops, Polyphemus, cried to his father, "...Grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never see his home..." (Lines 486-487) It is expressed that without the help of Athena and Zeus, Odysseus' victory would have never occurred. Having the gods on your side, as I said before, is an important aspect of the Greek way of life.

As this story comes to an end, all the skills and good will that occurred during the ten years of his journey home, rolled suddenly into a giant roll. A mouth watering roll that calls to the beholder. It entices and shows to you all it's wonder. Then it reminds you, the only way to achieve such a wonder, is through the same journey Odysseus took. Not the physical journey over land and sea, but rather the journey he took through his experiences and mistakes. Finally after the tens years comes to an end, he is struck with a perfect sense of the model Greek citizen. His faults reduced to a minimum so that he was virtually perfect. There is a single glory to him that made him such a hero. A simple fact that makes him the great person that all wish they could be. Instead of living within his mistakes to commit them again, he learns. He instead of discounting all that happened, learned and became a better person for it. He has reached that end point, the goal at the end of the road. He got there after taking the road from the beginning. He made the goal by traveling and the roll was sweeter for it. Remember always that the goal ahead is enticing, we must continually strive to reach it, but it is not the goal that is important now. We must remember, that the important thing right now, is the journey. It is the journey that makes the roll, it is the journey that makes it sweet. "The journey is the purpose of life, not the final goal."

(Tiresias, the blind prophet)