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A Hero for the Ages

Literature is filled with stories about physical, emotional, or psychological journeys where the protagonist grows and learns, but this is not the case in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Odysseus stays the same character from when he first leaves Ithaca for Troy to when he slays the suitors in his palace. He does not change, but there is not really a need for him to. Odysseus is cunning, courageous, and dedicated to his faith. Throughout his journey home from Troy, he never loses sight of the importance of these virtues. The significance of the story comes from how he is able to maintain this character, no matter what he faces. *The Odyssey* still impacts people today because it teaches the reader the value of being intelligent, brave, and pious.

One of Odysseus’ most prominent qualities is his “great, teeming mind” (Book 9, 1). Odysseus frequently finds himself in very tough positions that only somebody very intelligent could find their way out of. In the Greek culture a lot of value was placed on physical strength, but that’s not what makes Odysseus one of the greats. It is his brain, and not his brawn that help him escape most situations. In the cave with the Cyclops, if he had just killed the Cyclops they would have been stuck in the cave because they could not move the rock in front of the door. Instead, he comes up the scheme to blind the Cyclops, and then sneak out by having “Each middle sheep [carry] a man underneath, protected by the two on either side: three sheep to a man,” (Book 9, 427). It is an ingenious trick, and one of Odysseus’ best-known conquests. Anyone can lie, but not everyone can lie well. Odysseus can is always coming up with clever and elaborate aliases. When he comes to back to Ithaca in the end, he pretends to be a beggar and tells everyone “…he was born somewhere in Crete and that it has been his lot to be a roamer and wander from city to city,” (Book19, 68). Had he revealed himself immediately, he would have met the same fate as Agamemnon, who made it home safely only to be immediately killed by his wife’s lover. No matter what obstacle Odysseus is faced with, he is able to think his way out of it. He never lets his guard down, and he is always one step ahead of everyone else. He keeps this up throughout *The Odyssey*, so one of the most important lessons to take is always be on your a-game mentally.

Even though traditional Greek polytheism is not nearly as prevalent anymore, Odysseus’ dedication to faith can still be inspiring to people of all faiths today. There is a lot of wisdom in the teachings of every religion, and a lot of improvements could be made in society if people adhered more to the morally righteous principles of religion. For the most part, Odysseus is very respectful to his gods. When Zeus is talking to Athena on Mount Olympus about how to get Odysseus off Calypso’s island, he says “No other mortal…offers sacrifice like him to the deathless gods in heaven,” (Book 1, 72). Odysseus has always been enthusiastic about offering proper sacrifices because that is one of the most important aspects of his religion. Sacrifices were how the Greeks showed gratitude for the blessings in their lives. Being grateful for what you have makes the world a brighter, more hopeful place. Hope is very important to success; if someone goes into something hopeful, he or she will perform better. Many people today are inspired with hope from their own divine being. *The Odyssey* supports this hope from faith strategy. When Odysseus is coming up with a plan with Athena he tells her, “I would take on three hundred men if your power were with me,” (Book 13, 405). Odysseus is always appreciating the good things in his life, and he is very confident in himself. All this comes from him following his religion. Religion is a very important aspect of life, and Odysseus proves that by respecting your faith, a person will have a more fruitful and happier life.

Bravery is an essential characteristic of a hero. Odysseus is as brave as they come, and his courage never falters. When he finds out that his men are captured and bewitched by Circe, he immediately arms himself and heads off into the uncharted woods alone to retrieve them without any hesitation (Book 10, 281). He knows what he has to do, and he does it. Fear is never a factor for him. He exhibits the same daring when the families of the suitors come to avenge their murdered sons and brothers. The villagers outnumber Odysseus and his team ten to one, but “Odysseus and his glorious son charged the front lines, thrusting hard with their swords” (Book 24, 546) without any doubt of victory in their minds. The point of *The Odyssey* is to teach the reader what it takes to be a hero, and courage is essential to that.

Maybe Odysseus does not change, but that does not mean that there is nothing to be learned from *The Odyssey.* Odysseus is cunning, brave, and he is spiritual every step of his journey. These three qualities not only get him home, but also grant him a very successful and victorious homecoming. Odysseus’ journey teaches the reader the importance of piety, bravery, and cleverness; this is why his story matters, and it is why it still inspires readers today.