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Odyssey Essay

An essential characteristic of every epic is that the main character must undergo a change as a result of their journeys. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus was that character. The following text will attempt to explain the changes he went through and the lessons he learned. But before delving into this essay, it must first be stated that Odysseus’s transformation was not a typical one. The person he became at the end of the story was a person that he had been before, before he left for Troy. Everything that Odysseus experienced converted him from the warrior he was in Troy back to the husband, father, and king he was before he ever left Ithaca.

First off, it is important to note that Odysseus never wanted to fight in the Trojan War. In *The Illiad*, Odysseus tried to tell Agamemnon and Menelaus that he would be staying home. Penelope had just given birth to Telemachus and he wanted to be around to take care of and raise his only son. They persisted, though, and he eventually gave in. It was at this point that his mind transitioned from that of a dad to that of a fighter. He thrived in his role as a general and ultimately it was his Trojan Horse idea that won them the war. From there he went to the Cicones. “I pillaged the town and killed the men,” he said (Book 9, 43). He had gotten so used to the warrior mindset that he just could not get enough of the conflict. However, this got him into trouble. Some escaped Cicones returned with reinforcements and Odysseus’s men were beat down, six men lost from every ship. This should have taught him to tread carefully in unknown lands, but it would take one more mistake for him to learn that lesson.

Pride overtook Odysseus as he was sailing away from the land of the cyclops; he could not resist revealing his true name to Polyphemus, against the wishes of his crew. They tried to stop him, “but didn’t persuade my hero’s heart…I called back to him”, Odysseus explained (Book 9, 498). This condemned everyone sailing with him to continuous suffering, and by the time Poseidon was finished, Odysseus was the only survivor of his crew.

This “hero’s heart” was exactly the thing that Odysseus needed to change. The mindset that served him well in battle would prove to be destructive outside of it. He would need to reattain the domestic mindset he had before he left for war if he wanted to make it back to Ithaca alive. Every good king is humble. They know when to show strength and when not to. Leaving Troy, Odysseus’s response to every situation was to show strength because he was in the warrior mindset and not the king mindset.

By the end of his journey, Odysseus learns to put aside his hubris and plead to keep his life. When the last of his crew dies, he falls into a depressed state. When Calypso went to tell Odysseus that it was time for him to go home, “she found him sitting where the breakers roll in. His eyes were perpetually wet now, his life draining away in homesickness” (Book 5, 150).

One of Odysseus’s first encounters back on Ithaca was with a goat-herder. This goat-herder tried to shove Odysseus out of his way, for Odysseus was disguised as a beggar. Instead of retaliating, he lets it go. This is a huge shift from the warrior who’s first act after leaving Troy was to sack the land of the Cicones. The altercation with the herder was a sign that Odysseus was ready to take his kingdom back and rule over Ithaca.

In summary, Odysseus’s epic journey changed him back into the man he was before he left to fight in the Trojan War. The war turned Odysseus from a merciful husband and father to an egotistical warrior. He was slowly humbled by each negative experience until he learned again to suppress his pride and treat others with respect, no matter where they came from. Odysseus was not the same person at the end of *The Odyssey* than he was at the beginning (in Troy), but rather the same person he was before he left Ithaca.