

How Is The Greek Idea of a Sound
Mind and Body Essential for The
Successful Characters of The Odyssey?

If one were to only have a very fit and strong body, lacking mental ability, to the Greeks it would not suffice. If a man were merely smart and intelligent, without much physical capability, the Greeks would feel that he is not complete. They believed an individual must have both, a well developed mind and a fit body, not only one or the other, to be ideal. This is the Greek concept of a sound mind and body. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus and Telemachos, had to have and/or achieve a sound mind and body, to be the successful and outstanding characters of the epic. The ones who lacked these quality suffered and paid for it in the end.

In Books one and two, Telemachos acts immaturely and lacks mental prowess. For this reason he makes his life difficult. Yet, Later on he matures and gains a sound mind. Telemachos certainly has a sound body. Menelaos says of how "...it amazes me quite, how this young man (Telemachos) looks exactly like Odysseus, strong and mighty" {page 47}. Yet, he is criticized by others, for the reason that he does not have a sound mind. In an attempt to stand his ground, in front of the council he breaks down into tears. Antinoos says "Telemachos you are a boaster, and you don't know how to keep your temper!" {page 24}. Telemachos made an attempt to express his valid point of view, and does so, but fails to convince the council. He breaks down in tears, showing how immature he really is. He does not have a sound mind. The council basked in this weakness and was even more critical of him at that point. Later on, he is told of how "(Telemachos), you speak like a man of sense, you are older than your years, your father is just the same, you get it from him." {page 48} As his adventure progresses he grows to be a more complete man, to eventually fighting along side his father against the "hangers-on" {page 17} that are "tormenting Penelope" {page 16}, to rid them from his home once and for all.

Odysseus was triumphant in *The Odyssey* for the reason that he was a man who was astute and very clever, at the same time strong and robust. Odysseus, the man who is never at a loss, was so because he had a sound mind and body. Odysseus was so ingenious that "he pretended to be a beggar, and entered the city of Troy and [The Trojans] where all taken in" {page 49}. He was so powerful that "he leaned hard on (the pole) from above and turned it round and round (into the eye of the mighty giant Cyclops, blinding him)." He was so quick with his words, that he could "Appeal to Nausicaa, (so) she brought him to her father's house" {page 73}, when he was washed up onto shore naked and bruised, and after swimming for two days. Time and time again, through the many obstacles he encounters, he is successful, because he has a sound mind and body. The poet, shows through all Odysseus encounters, that he must utilize both his strength and wit to surpass them.

If a man does not have both a sound mind and body, he will suffer. So is the case with Achilles. The conceited Achilles, one of the greatest fighters of the Trojan War, now lays in the underworld and says "I would rather be plowman to a yeoman farmer on a small holding than lord Paramount in the kingdom of the Dead." In the Trojan war he had refused to fight, and now he has to pay for his mistakes. He begged Odysseus, never at a fault, to tell him of his son Neoptolemos, who in fact is a coward and a weakling, but Odysseus, taking pity on his former comrade, says "I can tell you about your beloved son Neoptolemos, and there is nothing to hide. In fact I brought him in my own ship from Scyros to join the Achaian army. When we held a council of war, he was always the first to speak, and always found the right thing to say. Only Nestor and I were superior. When we met our enemies in battle, he did not lag among the crowd or in the scrimmage, but showed himself well in the front, the bravest of the brave: many a man killed in fair fight." {page 134}. Achilles was strong and a great warrior once, but now, because he did not possess a sound mind, he lost the one real thing that meant anything; life.

The ones that suffer most for the flaw of missing a sound mind and a sound

body, are the suitors. The suitors are greedy, selfish, wretched and scheming men, who have tormented Penelope for three years. The suitors were slowly eating Penelope, Odysseus and Telemachos out of house and home. They took all the food and board they pleased, in a home that did not belong to them. Penelope hated them very much as did the gods. "Bright-Eyed" Athena tells Telemachos to "collect your wits and make a good plan to kill these hangers-on(suitors), either by craft or open fight"{page 17}. In the end this is exactly what Telemachos and Odysseus do. They struck down the "Dogs!Who never thought that (Odysseus) would return from Troy."{page 243}. The "Poor fools! they did not know that the cords of death were made fast about them all,"{page 245} now were in their rightful place, in the land of the dead. They trespassed into another man's home, all the time being absent of a sound mind and body, and now had to pay with their lives. Odysseus returns to the Underworld where he is confronted by Antinoos, the leader of the suitors, who says "My friends, here is a monstrous thing this man (Odysseus) has done against our nation!"{page 269} to invoke pity from Odysseus and others. Sorrow is felt for Antinoos, but all knew that "(Antinoos') own faults have brought this (punishment) about"{page 270} and his punishment is fitting.

All in all, one cannot help but note that the idea of a sound mind and body is blended into The Odyssey. The Characters that possessed this trait, obtained their goal in the end. On the other-hand, the ones that lacked either a sound mind or body, failed. Odysseus and Telemachos were able to find each other and win back their home, while the suitors and even Achilles were robbed of their lives. It is a fact that a sound mind and body were an essential ideal in the ancient Greek society and The Odyssey. How would today's society differ if these values held true?