Lilith from the Pre-Biblical and Biblical Periods Until Today

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Abstract

The character Lilith emerges fully formed from the Middle Ages, and many scholars attempt to read this later character further back into history. My contention is that Lilith develops slowly along with views of women. This project attempts to trace the character of Lilith as she is found in the Bible, the Midrash, and the Talmud. I attempt to explore her presence and presentation in these texts while keeping in mind the chronology of her change and growth. Through the primary and secondary texts, I uncover the origins of Lilith and how she becomes a modern figure.

Contents

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Introduction

"After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, '*It is not good for man to be alone*' (Gen. 2:18). He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while am to be in the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: 'Sovereign of the universe!' he said, 'the woman you gave me has run away.' At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angles to bring her back.

"Said the Holy One to Adam, 'If she agrees to come back, fine. If not she must permit one hundred of her children to die every day.' The angels left God and pursued Lilith, whom they overtook in the midst of the sea, in the mighty waters wherein the Egyptians were destined to drown. They told her God's word, but she did not wish to return. The angels said, 'We shall drown you in the sea.'

"'Leave me!' she said. 'I was created only to cause sickness to infants. If the infant is male, I have dominion over him for eight days after his birth, and if female, for twenty days.'

"When the angels heard Lilith's words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: 'Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I will have no power over that infant.' She also agreed to have one hundred of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels' names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath, and the child recovers."

From *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*

It is unclear to me when I first became acquainted with the character of Lilith. But when I proposed to research her, I knew of her as Adam's first wife and a child-

killer. I began my exploration for Lilith expecting to find that these familiar stories could be traced back to Midrash. After all, the work of explaining seeming biblical repetitions and conundrums often falls to the Midrash. I was convinced that the Lilith character was a way for male law- and legend-makers to manipulate the role of women in their society. I thought they created Lilith in an effort to let women know what their roles should be and what they were forbidden to do. Instead, I learned Lilith was older than the legend I knew of her—she had existed for a very long time, but in a different form. I owe the sages of Midrash an apology; they were not manipulating women through Lilith, because they did not yet know the story of Lilith that I found to be manipulative.

I began my search by looking for as much secondary material as I could. I wanted to prepare myself before delving into the primary texts. There are two forms of Lilith literature in the secondary sources. The first form, mostly written by women, is often a personal, non-scientific discussion of how learning of feminine power has influenced their lives. These women explore themselves through Lilith in a semi-biographical manner. While this was likely a valuable exercise for the women authors, their stories gave me little to work with. The second collection of Lilith material was, indeed, made up of histories. Coming across at least two fairly comprehensive explorations of Lilith was disappointing to me at first. I was now doing something that others had done. However, after careful examination of these texts, I found that the analysis of Lilith before her presentation in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* or in the Zohar was often cursory or else flawed. There was a lens these authors were looking through. They were reading the past with an eye towards the future. I felt that they went through the

origins of Lilith, waiting for the medieval climax. I, on the other hand, wanted to know how this character developed.

I began, then, at the beginning. I went to the Bible to see what Lilith's role was, and I continued from there. From the Bible to the Midrash to the Talmud. There were a couple steps back also. For example, knowing that the word "lilith" was in the Bible, I was interested in exploring the pre-biblical origins. Essentially, though, I wanted to understand how the lilith—a characterless name in Isaiah—had become the legend that had seeped into my consciousness. This thesis, then, is the culmination of my findings. I have tried to apply a disciplined approach, keeping separate what information was available to the writers of different texts.

I was also interested in how the views of writers of different eras would effect their treatment of Lilith. Oddly, this aspect of my thesis came from confusion on my part. While reading, I had come across the name Ben Sira any number of times. Little did I know that *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* and *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* (easily confusable in an unknowing mind) were two different texts, separated by centuries. Thus, I read and reread *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, looking for some reference to Lilith. The closest I found was a litany of reasons that women should be considered vile and terrible. It was this discovery that led me to consider that the view of women held by the authors of the texts might well influence the way they presented Lilith. Thus, I incorporated this aspect into my research.

Unfortunately, there are some variables which I could not control. One of them is folk-tradition. Because throughout history the masses have been unable to record their thoughts and beliefs—that was left to the elite—it is impossible to know whether what is

presented in the Midrash and Talmud in specific is a reflection of what a greater society believed or what the authors of these texts wish to reflect back to the people. Because of this quandary, I have focused only on the texts themselves and what they present. Without any definitive evidence of what those who were not writing believed, I could not include them in this exploration.

Lilith has lived and breathed in my life for as long as I have worked on this project and I understand how the writers of their own personal narratives get caught up in her role in their lives. My intention has always been to get caught in her life rather than she caught in mine. This, then, is my exploration of her origins.

Lilith in the Pre-Biblical and Biblical Periods

When we begin to discuss Lilith in the biblical era, we must first ask whether she exists as Lilith in this period at all. The character of Lilith is a long-standing one, though the attributes of the character may exist without the name, and the name may exist separate from the character.

First we explore the character that later comes to be associated with Lilith: the child-killing temptress of men. Because women naturally have the role of mother, the anti-mother must exist, and there must be the woman who does not want motherhood, who is estranged from her children—at the extreme she is infanticidal. Additionally, throughout history there has been a high rate of infant mortality, making one of the significant roles of women to reproduce often. Because of this expectation, the woman who falls outside traditional family roles is suspect.

Biblically, we are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. This command is repeated and stressed. If a woman's role is to multiply, then another aspect of the Lilith character is the woman who is sexual without the intent to reproduce. Logically, this sexual being and the woman who has no regard for her offspring can meld into one character. As we begin to explore Lilith in the Bible, we must understand that there are precursors to the character we will come to identify as Lilith. She is not the only powerful woman who debunks the role of woman as subservient to man, the producer of children.

Origins of Lilith

There is quite a lot of speculation as to the origins of Lilith; none of it is overwhelmingly conclusive. One reason for the ambiguity is the pervasive nature of her characteristics. She is a strong, sexually charged woman with a disdain for men, offspring, and family. Clearly, the powerful feminine, sharing some of these component pieces, existed throughout the Ancient Near East long before the concept of monotheism. The Ancient Near Eastern religions believed in pantheons of gods and goddesses. Some of their goddesses and she-demigods may have served as models for the later incarnation of Lilith, some of their components may have been co-opted, or the underlying cultural need for them may have reemerged in her character. Certainly precursors to Lilith exist as well as the more general understanding that if the "woman" were to exist, the "anti-woman" must also exist.

One way of trying to track down Lilith's origins is through linguistics. We can attempt to find the origins of her name. Even the elementary Hebrew student can determine that "Lilith" sounds like "layla." While we may make a connection between sexuality and darkness or infant death and the night, most scholars concur that Lilith's origins, however similar to "layla" in sound, have nothing to do with the night. Rather, some find correspondence between her name and the root LIL. In her exploration *Lilith: The Edge of Forever*, Filomena Maria Pereira—recapitulating the work of R. Campbell Thompson—goes into great depth on the etymological origins of Lilith:

> If we are to find a Semitic derivation for it [the word Lilith] at all, and if it has not been taken over from the Sumerian, which seems most probable, it may be connected with lalu, "to be abundant," lalu, "luxuriousness" and lulu, "lasciviousness, wantonness."[1]

These correlations seem apt, but they also present a conundrum. These names suggest that Lilith was created to have the role she later encompasses. If the words had these meanings prior to the being Lilith having been conceived of, it seems that she would almost artificially have been created. Also, it would appear that from her inception she would have had *all* of the characteristics she only takes on over time.

It seems more logical that the identity was originally separate from the name "Lilith," and only later were the two combined. Pereira explains elsewhere that "the Sumerian word LIL has been translated variously as wind, geist or spirit and is best illustrated as part of the name of one of the best known divinities of ancient Sumer, the god ENLIL."[2] This information allows us to see Lilith's roots in the supernatural rather than thinking she was created into the role of the "lascivious" mother. As a spirit, we can identify her with other Ancient Near Eastern entities. "Babylonian (possibly even Sumerian) demonology... identifies similar male and female spirits—Lilu and Lilitu respectively..."[3] A connection can be drawn between Lilith and these spirits both because of the similarity of their names (logical if LIL ties a name to a spirit) as well as commonality in their functions. For example, "one of them—the Ardat-Lilith—preys on

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[1] Filomena Maria Pereira, *Lilith: The Edge of Forever* (Las Colinas, TX, Ide House, 1998), p.4.
[2] Pereira, p. 2.
[3] *Encyclopedia Judaica.*

males, while others imperil women in childbirth and their children."[4] Though there are separate spirits with these roles, we can see that there are cultural pre-cursers for Lilith.

Along with these demons, we must consider the character of pre-biblical goddesses such as Innana, Ishtar and Lamashtu. Inanna, the Sumerian equivalent to the Babylonian Ishtar, also known as the Queen of Heaven, was said to have created sacred sexual customs. She "was most reverently esteemed by the sacred women, who in turn were especially protected by her."[5] In the legend of Inanna there was a character by the name of Lilith:

> One interesting Sumerian fragment recorded the name of Lilith, described as a young maiden, as the "hand of Inanna." We read on this ancient tablet that Lilith was sent by Inanna to gather men from the street, to bring them to the temple.[6]

Another theory about the origins of Lilith assumes that because of her close ties to Innana, she and what she represents must be demonized. Therefore, what was sacred sexuality now becomes taboo and evil. An alternative way to soil Lilith, who may have originally been benign or positive, is to connect her with stories of evil. Hence, her portrayal as infant-killer and seed-spiller.

Rather than having an association with the Babylonian goddess Lamashtu, Lilith shares common traits with her. Lamashtu is the daughter of "the Babylonian god of heaven, Anu, and thus she is, generally called simply 'daughter of Anu.' She is the 'chosen confidante' of Irnina, a goddess who is related to the Sumerian Inanna and the Babylonian Ishtar."[7] In legend, Lamashtu watches pregnant women, trying "to harm her

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[4] *Encyclopedia Judaica.*

[5] Merlin Stone,*When God was a Woman* (New York, The Dial Press, 1976), p. 158.

[6] Stone, p.158.

[7] Siegmund Hurwitz, *Lilith: The First Eve, Historical and Psychological Aspects, of the Dark Feminine* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland, Daimon Verlag, 1992), p. 36.

personally, but also to steal her newborn child from her and to kill it."[8] Like Lilith, she was entreated through amulets to leave mother and child unharmed. This is our first encounter with an anti-woman she-goddess. The existence of such a goddess is both profound and highly expected. If we are to have models of what a woman is to be in the goddess realm, then we must also have a model for what a woman cannot be. Enter Lamashtu and Lilith.

Lilith in Isaiah

There is only one explicit mention of Lilith in the Bible. Though she is mentioned by name, it is still unclear as to whether this is the character of Lilith as she will later appear in Ben Sira or in Talmud. This may still refer to Lilith as a more general demoness. By taking a closer look at Isaiah 34:14, we can gain a greater insight into Isaiah's Lilith.

> *Wildcats shall meet hyenas,*
> *Goat-demons shall greet each other;*
> *There too the Lilith shall repose*
> *And find herself a resting place.*

Mentioned among a list of woesome fates, Lilith appears here briefly. Even so, there is a great deal to be learned from this short passage. The first significant lesson we can glean is that Isaiah has no need to spell out in any greater detail who this Lilith is. Like the other evils mentioned, she is familiar to the listener. Isaiah's audience, it appears, would already be familiar with this character, giving him no incentive to go into greater detail. Through this passage, we—not as familiar with "Lilith" as Isaiah's intended audience—

[8] Hurwitz, p. 34-35.

can make some other inferences. Clearly, because of the grammar (the feminine suffixes in the Hebrew) we can determine Lilith to be female and singular. She has a negative connotation because she is associated with scavengers and demons such as hyenas and goat-demons. In the greater context of Isaiah 34, we learn that Lilith is included in the savage imagery of God's wrath upon enemy nations. Lilith is vile and detestable. She is a punishment and dwells within a greater blood bath and misery.

Isaiah's mention of this character separates her from the powerful she-goddess presented in other Ancient Near Eastern associations. Of course, because of the power paradigm that the Bible presents in terms of family and the feminine, this change is not surprising.

Lilith in Biblical Gaps/Lacunae

Whereas Lilith is specifically mentioned in Isaiah, there are other biblical passages that do not refer to her by name, but invite her presence. The passage the rabbis would later latch on to and associate with Lilith is the creation story. Because two stories are told of the creation of man and woman (Gen. 1:2-28 and Gen 2:18), we must ask why. We will later explore the rabbinic explanation of the seeming redundancy, but first, through modern biblical scholarship, we must consider that there are multiple writers with different purposes.

> Genesis 1:26-28: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it..."*

Genesis 2:18: *Adonai God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." And Adonai God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. The man gave name to all the cattle and birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So Adonai God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And Adonai God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. The man said,*
"This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was she taken."
Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

In the first story of the creation of humanity, woman and man are created together—seemingly equal. This presentation appears to relay, in the mythological sense, how woman and man came into being. The predominant themes of Genesis 1:26-28 are that man (potentially with woman included), created by God, will rule over all other living beings on the earth and that man is created in God's image. Power is invested in humanity through God because it is like God. Man and woman (who does seem like an afterthought but is included in the creation myth) are created for the purpose of keeping order and ruling over the rest of the earth. Nevertheless, in this seemingly more equal telling, we are still presented with the task of populating the earth. As mentioned earlier, it is always important to keep in mind that as long as reproduction is an expectation and a command, the role of the woman is implicitly structured.

While woman's responsibility is implicit in the first telling, in the second, it is much clearer. Indeed it would seem that this myth is created almost for the sole purpose of defining woman in relation to man. First man is created; as in the previous

description, his role is to order the rest of the world. But this account is much more sensitive to words—its own and Adam's. This description of man shows that it is through language that the world is constructed and controlled. After all, Adam names all the creatures of the earth; that is his mode of control. Likewise, the writer of this account is aware that the previous writer did not use his words to their utmost power. The previous telling failed to define the role of woman through his writing. This writer will not make the same mistake.

Here man is created before woman. He has clearly stated his dominance over the rest of the world before he even realizes that he needs a partner. Woman is already situated: she is below God and then below man, but above the rest of creation.

It is unclear when the notion that the two stories represented two different women originated. Clearly, Eve is biblical and there is some argument that gives Eve some of the strength of Lilith,[9] assuming that there is only one character; it is Eve who disrupts the "intended order." But the character of Lilith and her characteristics of feminine strength and defiance existed before biblical times, as we noted when discussing her Ancient Near Eastern counterparts. This is not to say that Lilith must be read into these passages; only that, even if it is Eve who disrupts the masculine norm and expectation, the cultural repertoire of Lilith's character may have influenced biblical writers.

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[9] Jay Newman, *Biblical Religion and Family Values: A Problem in the Philosophy of Culture* (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger, 2001), p.66.

Lilith in Midrash

If in the Bible, we begin to see aspects of Lilith's character as well as the gap that allows us to read Adam's first wife into the text, then the midrashic sages were among those who would explore these mysteries. With their own particular view of society and the relationship between man and woman, they explore who this "first Eve" was and what her role was. For these sages, there could be no accident in the Bible. If it appeared that woman was created twice in Genesis, they could not conceive of it as a mistake by biblical editors. Instead, they must explore and determine the explicit reason for this purposeful doubling.

The rabbinic midrashists clearly understand that two creation stories of humans need explaining. They make strides to cover up the dual creations and, alternatively, to give some elucidation. *Genesis Rabbah* puts forth a story wherein translating rabbis amend the sacred text in order for it to receive a more favorable view in the predominant culture of the time. In a world where women were clearly seen as inferior to men, it was suspect for the two sexes to share a creation story. In order to publicly align themselves and their religious text with the common mentality of the day, these rabbis alter the text they present to a local monarch. When translating the Torah into Greek, instead of translating, "'male and female He created them,' they translate 'male and his bodily openings' – a play on a similar sounding Hebrew word, *nekuvov*."[10] Rather than allowing Ptolemy to read the creations in their original biblical form, they give him a more palatable text. The revision of the text provides a single story of the creation of

[10] Wilfred Shuchat, *The Creation According to the Midrash Rabbah* (New York, Devora Publishing Company, 2002), p. 324 and Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, B.A., PH.D. *Genesis in Two Volumes* p.61 .

palatable text. The revision of the text provides a single story of the creation of humans, and that story fits the more popular cultural notions.

The Midrash passes no judgment on the changes. It neither criticizes them for adulterating their sacred text for the sake of good relations nor applauds them for good public relations. This ambiguity can lead to multiple interpretations of the Midrash. First, the rabbis may recognize the need for the change. Whether or not they approve of internal manipulation of the text, in order to present Judaism well, they see merit in alteration. In so far as this may be true, the Midrash presents a precedent for future Jews who may need to clarify or simplify for outsiders. Second, the rabbis may find the change abhorrent. It may be set out as an example without comment because of the common knowledge that, while word play is acceptable and even commendable in homiletics, Torah is not to be misrepresented. This notion may not have been spelled out if it were completely commonplace. A third potentiality is that the rabbis see this as a clever solution to a problem they have also had with the text. They too were concerned with the dual creation stories and also had misgivings about the common creation of man and woman. They may present this clarification in order to elucidate for themselves and for others.

While there is no clear evidence for any one theory, it is clear sages saw the two creation stories as a reason to delve into exposition. The co-creation of man and woman was not only a problem for Greek society; it also presented a conundrum within the Jewish world. For the rabbis, there were "essential differences between male and female"[11] not explained in the original story of creation.

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[11] Judith R. Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Hanover, NH, Brandeis University Press, 2002), p.14.

The First Eve

In this era, Lilith does not yet appear as Eve's predecessor. Though the first woman is not yet named Lilith, the dual creation story is accounted for by the presentation of two women. Clearly, the second is Eve—the first, then, is the "first Eve." The rabbis must explain why there was a need for two Eves. If the second Eve is mother of all humanity and the prototype for woman, then the first Eve and her disappearance must have a purpose. Indeed, she serves multiple purposes including clarification of the text and of the role of women.

The first Eve primarily is necessary for textual understanding. The first textual question, clearly, is that of the two creations. Having two separate women gives adequate reason for two creation stories. There might have been another way of bringing the two tales together, had Adam not said, "This one at last / Is bone of my bones / And flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Because of the "at last" or "this time," *zot ha paam*, there must have been another time. The first Eve provides the other time. Also, implicit in Adam's statement is that there must have been something wrong with the first time, if we interpret his "this time" as "finally." The rabbis are prolific in the possible conflicts that may have arisen between Adam and the first Eve. Their explanations have a particularly male bias.

First, Adam knows too much about her. The first Eve, having been created with Adam, holds no mystery for him. In *Genesis Rabbah* 17:7, a Matrona asked R. Jose why Eve was created while Adam was asleep. He presents two answers to her. One is this

supposition that beholding the creation of another human makes the other too familiar. The Matrona supports his explanation with an anecdote of her own. She tells: "It had been arranged that I should be married to my mother's brother, but because I was brought up with him in the same house I became plain in his eyes and he went and married another woman, who is not as beautiful as I."[12] The woman's tale serves two purposes: it underscores the vanity of women and corroborates the rabbis' justification. In both cases, though, it is the man who rejects the woman because she is too well known to him. It seems that the mystery of woman is a significant part of a relationship, while the mystery of man is less important.

The second reason presented to the Matron as to why Adam rejects the first woman, and needs the second to be created while he is unconscious, is that seeing the creation of woman is repulsive to man. After he has seen her inner workings, he wants nothing to do with her. This reasoning is another angle to the lack of mystery. It holds that ignorance is bliss. Adam has no interest in seeing the material of which woman is made. We see evidence of rabbinic projection onto Adam in this argument. While the rabbis may think that seeing the inner workings of another human being reminds them of mortality and is disturbing, Adam—as of yet—has no mortality. The first Eve's construction should hold less repulsion for him than for the sages.

The first two arguments of flaws with the first Eve have to do with over-familiarity. The next has to do with her otherness. The rabbis also postulate that because of the sexual nature of Adam's feelings towards the first Eve, he was uncomfortable with her.[13] In this explanation we begin to see the roots of Lilith. Adam is uneasy with his

[12] Baskin, p.57.
[13] Baskin, p.57.

arousal by this other being. It may be that the rabbis are setting the stage for the prohibitions against sexual relations with women of immediate bloodlines. But it is also plausible that they are recognizing the power that women hold in their sexuality. In order to mitigate that power, they have to lower the rank of woman from equal to subservient.

The first Eve also holds the key unclear text in the Cain and Abel story. Multiple questions arise in the conflict between these two brothers. The predominant curiosity is why they are in conflict at all. In *Genesis Rabbah* 22:7, Judah b. Rabbi suggests that their quarrel was about the first Eve.[14] The assertion seems to suffice. We may read into the statement that there was some kind of love triangle or fight for dominance with the female. It remains obscure particularly because, following the logic that Eve (the second) was the mother of Cain and Abel, the first Eve should have long departed. Nevertheless, the first Eve's potential responsibility for the brotherly strife reiterates her role as that of rabble-rouser and temptress. In another attempt to affiliate the first Eve with the wicked Cain, the rabbis proposed her as the potential wife who "conceived and bore Enoch" (Gen 4:17). She fails in this capacity also, but her ties to the evil Cain should not go unnoticed.

The question remains as to whether the status of woman is lowered aggadically because it was generally accepted that women were lesser or because women needed to be made lesser. The question is one of agency and awareness on the part of the rabbis. As previously encountered in the story of the textual change for Ptolemy, culturally women were not seen as equal to men. This gender preference was also evident in the Jewish world. If the first Eve, created alongside Adam, were the archetype for all

[14] Baskin, p.57.

womankind, women should be more similar to men than they are. Based on anecdotal evidence, the rabbis knew woman to be different and inferior to man.

The Continuity of the Legend

Neither the same as what came before or after, the Midrash maintains the link of Lilith. Biblically, Lilith appears as an evil spirit or shade. The individual character that would later be associated with her as an individual has yet to be established. The same is true for the vast majority of midrashic literature. In this collection, the name "Lilith" is all but absent. Even so, through the aggadah in Mishna and the legends of midrash, we encounter the frame of mind and the cultural attitudes that provide fertile ground for the Lilith story.

Lilith in the Talmud

Within Talmudic literature, Lilith is mentioned more often (though still not plentifully) in the Babylonian Talmud. The writers of the Babylonian Talmud may have been more influenced by the beliefs of others around them. Therefore they might have been more likely to include demons and spirits than the writers of the Palestinian Talmud. Angelo Rappaport, in his *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel,* clarifies that the Talmudic sages have "been influenced not by the Babylonian cult of Marduk-Bel, but by that of Ormuzd and Ahriman. The Persian devas, the devas of Ahriman, have invaded Jewish folklore and acquired citizen right in Jewish myth and legend."[15] This distinction is significant to interpreting Lilith's character in the Talmud. Rather than a full character—with a background and history—she resides within the realm of demons.

Indeed, often writers on Lilith point to references of *Lilin*, the larger category of demons to which Lilith belongs, as specific references to her. Clearly, there is a similarity in the words "Lilith" and "Lilin." To some it may appear that "Lilin" is the plural of "Lilith." However, as Rappaport explains when delineating categories of demons, Lilin are "night spirits, [named] according to the time during which they are active."[16] As was true of those studying Lilith in a biblical or midrashic context, Lilith scholars tend to be influenced by later tales of Lilith, and interpret her with a post-Zoharic bent. They seek to use minor talmudic references as precursors to what they know will happen to the character centuries later.

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[15] Angelo S. Rappaport, *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel, Volume I* (New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1966), p. 70.
[16] Rappaport, p. 72.

More accurately, many of the seemingly comprehensive books about women in Talmud leave out Lilith entirely, and for good reason. Apart from the dearth of references to Lilith in the Talmud, it is also the case Lilith is not yet a woman in the Talmud. She is still either a specific demon or else a collection of demons. Therefore, she does not belong in a compilation of texts referring to women in the Talmud. In order to clarify the confusion abundant in texts on Lilith, we turn to the Talmudic texts.

The first presentation of the passages is from Filomena Maria Pereira's *Lilith: The Edge of Forever*. In her book, Pereira's purpose is to explore the character of Lilith; therefore she has read the Talmud with an eye towards that purpose. The second presentation is from the bilingual Babylonian Talmud, translated by Rev. Dr. Israel W. Slotki.

Tractate Erubin 18b:

Rabbi Yirm'ya ben El'azar said: "All those years in which Adam the first man was in isolation from Eve he begat spirits and demons and Lilin..." Rabbi Meir said: "Adam the first man was very pious. When he saw that through him the punishment of death was ordained, he sat in fasting for 130 years, and put fig belts on his flesh for 130 years. But we are talking {about spirits, demons, and Lilin} whom he begot through spontaneous emission of seed."[17]

R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar further stated: In all those years during which Adam was under the ban he begot ghosts and male demons and female demons, for it is said in Scripture, *And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begot a son in his own image*, from which it follows that until that time he did not beget after his own image. And objection was raised: R. Meir said Adam was a great saint. When he saw that through him death was ordained as a punishment he spent a hundred and thirty years in fasting, severed connection with his wife for a hundred and thirty years, and wore clothes of fig [leaves] on his body for a hundred and thirty years.—That statement was made in reference to the semen which he emitted accidentally.

[17] Pereira, p. 77.

For both texts the question arises: what Adam did for a hundred thirty years before having a son "like him"? Pereira's version concentrates on Lilin, which—as has already been stated—is an erroneous link to Lilith specifically.

One argument is that because the words "like him" are included, that he must have had children before that time who were not like him. In this case, Lilin are Adam's female demon children, pre-dating his human sons. R. Meir argues that this is a slanderous statement against the father of all humanity, and that his demon children could not possibly have been purposeful offspring. He argues, instead, that the "like him" refers to accidental seminal emissions, and not to demons. Nevertheless, there is no dispute that demons exist, only that their origin should not have come from Adam.

This passage reconfirms the influence of surrounding cultures on the rabbis, but debunks Pereira's notion that *lilin* are the same as Lilith.

Tractate Nidda 24b:

Lilith is demoness who has a human face and has wings.

Rab Judah citing Samuel ruled: If an abortion had the likeness of Lilith its mother is unclean by reason of the birth, for it is a child, but it has wings. So it was also taught: R. Jose stated, It once happened at Simoni that a woman aborted the likeness of Lilith, and when the case came up for a decision before the Sages they ruled that it was a child but that it also had wings.

This references is a better lead for Lilith scholars, though it provides less substance than one might hope. From this passage, we learn that Lilith is a particular being. Oddly, Pereira focuses only on the aspect of appearance—the face and wings. She edits out the context of a miscarried child. It would seem, in light of the mystical attribution to Lilith as "baby slayer" that she would concentrate more on the question of

why a deceased child might have the likeness of the demon. It would appear that the sages also concentrate on why the child might have wings, but are willing to give the benefit of the doubt that this trait does not mark it as demon instead of human.

Tractate Erubin 100b:

Lilith has long hair.

Though at least two authors attribute this translation to Raphael Patai, I have difficulty deciphering what he might be translating from this page of Talmud to come to such an understanding. As I will later comment, sometimes Patai's notes are not easily understandable; perhaps there was some difficulty in this case.

Tractate Sanhedrin 109a

Rabbi Jirmija ben Eleazar said: "They [which means the people who tried to build the Tower of Babel] were divided into three groups...Those who said: Come, we will arise and make war [against God], were [turned into] apes, ghosts and Lilin."

"'Let us ascend and wage war' were turned to apes, spirits, devils, and night-demons..."

This is yet another case of Lilin being confused for Lilith. This usage is more like the reference to Lilith in Isaiah, considering the demon to be part of a punishment for those who are estranged from God.

Tractate Shabbat 151b:

Rabbi Hanina said: "It is forbidden to sleep alone in a house, for he who sleeps alone in a house, Lilith gets hold of him."

R. Hanina said: One may not sleep in a house alone, and whoever sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith.

Of the references to Lilith in the Talmud, this is by far the most interesting because it is the hardest to interpret. Many writers assert that the reason a man should not sleep alone in his home is that he is open to seduction. This is one possible interpretation of the passage, but it is not the only possibility. In Jewish literature, to be alone is not a good thing. It opens a person to a variety of dangers—seduction is not the only vice. A man alone is at a greater risk of danger of many sorts, and with the awareness that Lilith has not yet become the fully developed seductress of later history, other dangers must be considered. This passage, more likely, can be interpreted as a warning against physical danger. It is to instruct people not to live far away from others.

This passage is not the only one interpreted to reveal Lilith as a sexual temptress. While that understanding may be justifiable in the post-Zoharic interpretation of Lilith's character, the imposition of those readings onto Talmud requires deeper delving. One reason for the common misreading may be a misunderstanding of a key scholar. Raphael Patai is the scholar of most import in the realm of Lilith; it is near impossible to understand her without Patai's vast knowledge of text and lore. Unfortunately, like the commendable Louis Ginsberg, his notes are sometimes confusing. It appears that many would-be Lilith scholars rest on the research of Patai and Ginsberg rather than exploring for themselves. Because of the confusing notes or zealous wishful-reading, some researchers have given Lilith's character an a-historicity. They attribute the talmudic references later characteristics which are clearly anachronistic.

Another possibility is the idea that because throughout history demons have been understood in a specific way in the folk-realm, that the Talmud borrows from those understandings. Pereira cites ancient Sumerian texts that state, "If a man slept alone, he

was in danger of being set upon by the *ardat lili*, who was also associated with ghosts of women who died in childbirth and returned from the dead as flying demons in the form of night owls looking for their lost children."[18] Indeed, this passage sounds quite similar to the one in Tractate Shabbat. There is the connection of the man sleeping alone and the similar sounds of "lili" and "Lilith," but there is not talmudic evidence to suggest that sages agree with the Sumarian account. It is as likely that the rabbis would take a legend and use it to their own means rather than maintaining its original context. It could well be that the rabbis are trying to instruct their readers by using a story, already familiar to them, in a new way.

Periera continues her evaluation of Lilith as a "seductive woman" in the Talmud by insisting that in this text "Lilith is portrayed as a completely negative figure."[19] Lilith is hardly seen as a figure at all. She is demoness and, as such, she is a negative figure. But having wings, long hair, and emerging in the night do not combine to definitively make a seductress. These attributes do combine as the beginning of a clear figure. Lilith is only beginning to emerge in her own right. It will take centuries more for her to develop fully. By claiming that Lilith is a complete character as early as talmudic times, Periera deprives us of the understanding that a character can form over time. It is the changing views of cultures and their surroundings which lends to new and creative interpretations of older figures.

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[18] Pereira, p. 78.
[19] Pereira, p. 87.

How Views of Women Effect Views of Lilith

Lilith does not come to existence in a vacuum. She is a character, at times more well defined than others. As a character, she must also have an author or group of authors. In order to understand Lilith as she develops and changes, we must explore the purpose of those who write about her and their use of this demoness as a tool. All of the texts in which I propose to explore Lilith—the Bible, Midrash, and Talmud—are constructed by men. It behooves us, therefore, to recognize that their views of women differ from the modern view and to explore what their views are.

The Biblical Role of Woman and Anti-Woman

We could easily see Lilith as a precursor to modern feminism. We could root for her and see her as a kind of heroine, fighting for the cause of independence in a world where women served specific roles. But if we are to truly look at her character, growing out of the culture of the Ancient Near East, we must see the world from their perspective. In this context, the role of each person in society was valued for what it was. Throughout the Bible, there are delineations of what each member of a family must do and broader pictures of society where different roles and positions are affirmed. Culturally there were expectations for women as they related to sexuality, men, and family.

In the Bible, Lilith does not yet have the fully elaborated character later associated with her. Nevertheless, several contemporary authors have retrojected her later character onto biblical culture. This practice represents faulty scholarship; especially as these authors may then go on to begrudge biblical society its structures. They reject the

common roles of woman as familial caregiver, mother, daughter, wife, or prostitute/temptress. One author argues:

> In the pursuit of their objectives, the women of the Bible came up against the realities of the social order. Biblical Israel believed in a hierarchically ordered world in which everyone had a place. The state had a king, the local villages had elders, the tribes had chiefs, and the house-hold had a male head. With the lines of power clear, the people were expected to conform to the norms and obey the dictates of the leader. Children were to honor their parents, and men had dominion over women.[20]

She is correct in identifying the importance of structure and power dynamics, but the genius of the biblical woman is her ability to manipulate the structure to her own needs, not the breaking of structures. It is not that a woman becomes the head of the household or that she forms a new form of governance. Within a world where men held the external positions of power, women used their roles as household managers and domestic authorities to accomplish their ends. Though the temptation is strong to see the plight of the modern woman in the ancient world, it threatens an accurate understanding of the period and Lilith particularly.

The scholarly interest ought not be to defend ancient interpersonal social dynamics. I will not argue that the best role for women in this period was a domestic one, nor will I disparage it. These were simply women's roles. Rather than judging the feminist implications of biblical roles, I wish to explore them in order to better understand the evolution of one character through time.

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[20] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York, Free Press, 1992), p.128.

Independence

Independence was dangerous for women in biblical times. To be far from society was to risk losing support; one of the greatest punishments exacted in this period was to be expelled from the community. Without the basic structure of society, there was no food or protection. Especially in a desert community where water and shelter were scarce, to be alone was to perish. In this light, independence was not a virtue, even among men. How well we know the story of Korah who challenged authority or the punishment of the stubborn and rebellious son who was to be put to death. Biblical life revolved around structure and hierarchy. Only once, biblically, do we encounter a woman who seems to go against the grain, and even then Tamar is trying to find her place within a family, not trying to escape it.

With this in mind, to consider the character of a woman who challenges a man in the most elemental of scenarios, in sexual intimacy, is truly significant. Before we can approach the myth of Lilith's challenge of Adam, we must determine the norms of the biblical period as well as the explicit presentation of male-female relations in Genesis.

Gender Equality

The concept that women should be seen on a par with men is a modern one. For generations, women have been consigned to specific roles and have been considered subservient to men. Even the order of creation seems to contradict the modern notion that women and men should been seen as equal. Whereas the first story of creation provides women an argument for equal footing, the second makes clear the assertion that

men are primary and dominant. "As social theorist Jessie Bernard tersely observes, 'Adam came first. Eve was created to supply him with companionship, not vice versa. And God himself had told her that Adam would rule over her; her wishes had to conform to his.'"[21] In the biblical world, neither men nor women would have conceived of equality in the way we consider it in the modern world. We see proof of the discrepancy between the biblical perspective and the modern one in the way male and female relationships interplay in biblical texts. For example, reinforcement of the hierarchical gender roles is clear in the lore of Adam and Eve. If we take the story of Eve as a construction—a circumstance that has not happen but has been contrived for specific meanings—then we have the opportunity to mine the text for greater insight into the views the men who constructed it took towards women.

In the Bible, the apparent first woman is Eve. As the first, she can be considered archetypal for all women. Therefore, her treatment in the tale in the Garden of Eden cannot be overestimated. Eden is supposed to be the ideal world—humanity has dominion and does not have to work. Within this paradigm, though, Eve is still considered secondary to Adam. Not only is she created after him, but she is also brought into the world through an aspect of Adam, his rib, making it seem as though she could not exist or subsist without Adam. She is also considered Adam's "helpmeet." She is there to alleviate Adam's loneliness and to help him, again putting her in a secondary position. As though her creation and reason for having been created were not proof enough of her subservience, Eve's behavior also relegates her to a lower class.

Eve violates the one prohibition given to the couple in the Garden of Eden: they should not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. "Genesis 1-3 begins a long

[21] Newman, p.49.

tradition of paternal displacement and attributing the origin of evil: here, as elsewhere, the problem revolves around women."[22] It is Eve who breaks God's first rule to humans and who encourages Adam to do the same. The punishment for her infraction is "twofold: to be subordinate to the husband she desires, and to have great difficulty in childbirth."[23] We now see a fortification of the original position of woman's status. If it was unclear before, it is solidified now.

Those who redacted this biblical legend not only saw woman as inferior, but psychologically, they may have seen her encroaching on their power and potency. Eve does something that Adam will not dare to do—she disobeys. The mode by which she sins can be interpreted in a myriad of ways. Jay Newman, in *Biblical Religion and Family Values: A Problem in the Philosophy of Culture*, proposes a Freudian interpretation:

> Eve desires her father's sexual power (symbolized by the [phallic] sign, the fruit that has been denied her). By asserting her desire to determine her *own* sexuality, she challenges God's usurpation of procreative power from the female fertility goddess(es) to himself.[24]

Newman expands this legend as a representation of patriarchal monotheism displacing the power of the goddess in the ancient world. Just as a new male-centered religion might find the feminine-divine threatening, so too do men find the latent power of woman threatening. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, in her work *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth,* agrees with Newman, though she interprets the symbolism of the text somewhat differently. For her, the fruit is woman's sexual power, not man's.

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[22] Newman, p. 73.
[23] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, p. 23.
[24] Newman, p. 69.

> ...Eve reminds the male Deity of the potential danger of female sexuality, a danger represented by the fruit. Eve's choice to give fruit, the conventional symbol of female sexuality to a male represents the ultimate dispossession of her father and her sway over reproductive control. The daughter's act is a violation cursed by the father, and, like her mother before her, she is subject to a permanent barrier of separation. At the *daughter's* instigation, the son has cast aside his obedience and perpetual security, an action viewed by the Deity as an outright rejection.[25]

For both Newman and Frimer-Kensky, sexual power and the power of God are interlinked. Women present a threat if they have control in either of these realms. Hence, the introduction of woman in the Bible as subservient sinner is fundamental to a patriarchal, monotheistic religion.

Sexuality

The sexual power of woman is obviously an issue in the beginning of Genesis. There is a great deal of power in sexual union, because through this union life begins. Also, as we are well aware in the modern world, the spirit is connected to the body, and when sex is misused, it can be a powerful weapon. In the current day, we stress the importance of consensual intercourse and value the intentions and feelings of both members involved in sexual behavior.

> From current perspectives the consequences the Hebrew-Scriptural approach to certain sexual practices holds for family values may also seem largely negative, inasmuch as polygyny, concubinage, sexual freedom for the husband, and ease in discarding an undesirable wife are institutions that tend to limit the main forms of intimacy, stability, and security usually associated with a healthy family.[26]

All of these practices favor the dominance of the male. There is no question that women may not take on other lovers or husbands or that they be able to replace a husband who might be unable to impregnate them. Sexual dominance insures societal dominance. The woman's life revolves around her desirability to her husband and her ability to bear him

[25] Newman, p. 69.
[26] Newman, p. 69.

sons who will maintain this patriarchal paradigm. Though it may be argued that "according to the Hebrew-Scriptural outlook, male succession is the 'key to the whole structure of family life,'"[27] we do not know when this emphasis on a male-centered society began. What is evident is that the Bible reinforces this assertion through its portrayal of women and through its acceptance of specific male sexual behavior.

The Role of Woman in Midrash

Whereas the Bible implicitly presents the subordination of women to men, the Midrash does so explicitly. "*Genesis Rabbah* 17:8 begins by reinforcing both the inferior nature of female creation and woman's dependence upon and subordination to man with the argument that males are born looking down to the place of their origin, the earth, while females are born facing upwards towards the rib from which they were formed..."[28] Modernity knows this assertion to be foolishness, but it was considered only one of many proofs of the superiority of man. The rabbis also rely on some circular reasoning: that woman is inferior to man explains for them why she is subordinate to man. Other signs of woman's mediocrity include her shrill voice and unappeasable nature. And, to add insult to injury, another sign of the inferiority of woman is her foul odor, requiring her to wear perfume.[29]

Based on their understanding of the world, the sages form some prescriptive notions also. For example, "that the male takes the superior position in sexual

[27] Newman, p. 66.
[28] Baskin, p. 67.
[29] Baskin, p. 67.

intercourse because he looks at the material from which he was created, the earth, while the woman looks at the man from whole bone she was formed."[30]

The rabbis spent many passages listing the differences between men and women. The distinctions include:

> "the views that the birth of a male excites celebration while the birth of a female is a cause for disappointment. Males are said to come into the world well equipped to function fully in society and to leave progeny after them. Women, conversely, come into the world with nothing; they are dependent upon male largesse for their very survival and, as empty wombs, they must wait for male agency in order to become bearers of children. A male child is circumcised on the eighth day of life to the great delight of all; indeed, on that day his parents may resume sexual relations. No rituals await newborn daughters and, as a sign of grief at her gender, marital relations may only resume fourteen days after her birth. Women must be separated from their husbands during their menstrual periods, and, as the *halakhah* evolved, for a week afterward."[31]

Clearly, these are not merely differences, but a litany meant to prove and enforce the superiority of men to women. From a modern perspective, it is clear that these judgments are constructed from a male vantage point. It may be true that women need men to become impregnated, but without women, men would have just as hard an endeavor to reproduce.

Along with the centrality of women for reproductive needs, they are also vital for other aspects of life. The Rabbis clearly "believed that to be female was significantly less desirable than to be male. Yet, different as they were imagined to be, women were also acknowledge as essential to men, since they constituted the indispensable social mortar which sustained rabbinic society..."[32] Women were relegated to certain positions and roles while their "spiritual and intellectual qualities and needs were generally seen as

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[30] Baskin, p. 67.
[31] Baskin, p. 15.
[32] Baskin, p. 43.

inferior and subordinate to those of men."[33] They were lesser in their minds and spirits and also in their ability to reign in their desires and evil inclinations. "Women...were often shown as having the potential to lead men towards immorality and death. For many aggadic writers, the explanations for these mysterious differences between women and men could be found in the nature of female creation itself."[34] The rabbis not only insisted that women were inferior to men, but that they pulled men down from their pious and lofty stature.

With this portrait of woman in mind, the rabbis go on to describe the ideal wife. No doubt they were inspired by what they felt lacking in their own lives to expound on what the perfect wife might be. As we saw in the consideration of woman in the Bible, Eve is seen as Adam's helper. The rabbis expound upon this notion:

> Seder Eliyahu Rabbah presented Eve as a paradigm for the ways women can help men:
>
> > *Ezer c'negdo* means a wife who would help make him stand up on his own two feet and would help put a sparkle in his eye...Adam gave [wheat and barley] to his wife who made them edible: she prepared the grains by sifting them and grinding them in a mill, and thus out of grains made bread...When Adam gave flax to his wife, she wove a garment out of its fibers...Out of her he brought increase to humanity. Because of his appreciation of her, he did not go about committing adultery.
>
> Seder Eliyahu Rabbah described Eve as an ideal wife. She performed the domestic tasks expected of a wife, while the husband worked outside. The passage continued with the idea that all good wives should bring a sparkle to their husbands' eyes, make bread, weave clothing, and produce offspring.[35]

From these perspectives, the role of a woman is to be a good wife which entails bringing out the best her husband can be and providing for her family. A "good wife" is expected to be selfless and truly a support rather than a self-actor.

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[33] Baskin, p. 43.
[34] Baskin, p. 43.
[35] Andrew J. Busch, *The Rabbinic Image of Adam and Eve* (1994), p.56.

One particular view of women is that of Ben Sira of *The Wisdom of Ben Sira.* He is quite clear on his view of women, how they should behave and what exactly places them in the categories of "good wife" or "bad wife." For him, neither kind of wife changes his largely negative perspective of women. Though his personal perspective may not cover the range of rabbinic views of women, the survival of his writing, including his critique of women, is a testament to the perceived veracity of his claims.

Warren C. Trenchard has done extensive analysis of Ben Sira's presentation of women in his *Ben Sira's View of Women: A Literary Analysis.* He describes both what Ben Sira writes and his phrasing. Trenchard compares Ben Sira's treatment of women to that in the Hebrew Scriptures which Trenchard refers to as "OT": "In considering the bad wife Ben Sira employs terms and discusses issues that are not found in the OT material on the subject. Furthermore, he applies to bad wives several metaphors which the OT uses in particularly pejorative or harsh settings but never for women."[36] Ben Sira seems to go out of his way to find criticisms of women, including insulting them with "pejorative" or "harsh" words that the Bible reserves for men. Ben Sira is willing to go farther in his lambasting of women than biblical redactors are. According to Trenchard,

> Ben Sira's handling of extrabiblical sources is even more revealing. We found that he reconstructed a Zahlenspruch[37] to include negative material on women. He rearranged traditional material and applied general statements to specific situations in an effort to darken his picture of the bad wife. We also noted that he qualified traditional statements on the good wife, by both replacing a positive parallel stich with a negative corrective and adding his own negative distich to soften the impact of a preceding positive distich.[38]

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[36] Warren C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View of Women: A Literary Analysis* (Chico, California, Scholars Press, 1982), p.94.
[37] A common wisdom device, i.e., a numerical saying.
[38] Trenchard, p. 94.

Ben Sira was not above manipulating existing texts to present women negatively. Interestingly, it is not only the bad wife that he paints in negative light, but neither does he have kind words for the good wife. In an atmosphere such as this, it is no wonder that female demon mythology might thrive.

The Talmudic View of Women

Much like the biblical and mishnaic texts, the Talmud is composed and compiled by men. It therefore has a male leaning. Scholars of gender in the Talmud debate whether the writers discriminate against women or whether they simply consider them from a male perspective. Their discussions "range from complete apologetics based on the argument that the sages merely adopted and expressed natural differences and role divisions, to a frontal attack on the sages' alleged sense of superiority: they were not acting out of a desire for social justice even when they treated women favorably."[39] Either way, women are not considered equal. The Talmudic writers are not as scathing as Ben Sira, but neither are they particularly kind. We experience women in the Talmud as characters who ask annoying questions and present difficulties for the sages. This presentation of women as inconvenient and burdensome surely contributes to the way Talmudists would consider female characters of lore.

Even more important to our exploration of Lilith is how the talmudic sages approached sexuality. For them, sexual intercourse "and its outcomes, were intimately involved with one's morality and the amount of one's learning, which were also seen as

[39] Shulemit Valler, *Women and Womanhood in the Talmud* (Atlanta, Scholar Press, 1999), p. xi.

interconnected."[40] Rather than the commingling of individuals being seen as a positive sharing, they saw intercourse as a dangerous exchange. "Because sexual intercourse can involve some blurring of the boundaries between male and female, and also the weakening or abandonment of the rational self, the sages felt it should be carried out in as decorous a manner as possible so that these chaotic forces would not destroy the order the sages were trying to bring to their world." The strong, disobedient woman could not only destroy a man, but also the fabric of the entire world.

In this view, we see the future of Lilith. She will, as she demands sexual equality or superiority, threaten the world of the sages. She will disrupt what has been seen for centuries as the natural order. Her behavior is a menace to Judaism, to God, and to the world.

[40] Judith Z. Abrams, *The Women of the Talmud* (Northvale, New Jersey, Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995), p. 153-154.

Conclusion

Lilith may seem not to have changed dramatically between the Bible and the Talmud, but there is a marked difference. She has evolved from a general demon, listed along with wolves as plight for those who do not follow God's will, to a character with physical aspects—such as wings—who travels alone. These differences set her on the path to being merged with the First Eve from the Midrash into the fully formed character later associated with her. We have learned that the evolution was gradual and influenced by the views of women held by the sages who composed the *Torah sh'b'al peh*, the oral Torah.

The changing of Lilith's character did not end with the Talmud, and, indeed, did not end with the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. Lilith is still being interpreted by means of contemporary views of women. She has become an increasingly popular character in feminism. She has become an icon, lending her name to a popular television character, Frasier's wife Lilith, and to the musical tour, Lilith Fair. She has come to represent strength, independence, and a willingness to break with convention. More specific to the Jewish world, the Jewish feminist movement has essentially recreated the character of Lilith in an effort to find a female link with Judaism's textual past. A Jewish, feminist, quarterly publication has taken her on as a namesake.

Of these references, the one that comes closest to honoring the Lilith explored in this thesis and the Lilith of later lore is Lilith Sternin-Crane of "Cheers" and "Frasier" fame. Her character is a cold, analytical one—there is no evidence of the foundation of these attributes in her namesake. However, she is often maligned by the mostly male

cohort of the Cheers bar. "Characters on the show often speak of her in demonic or witchlike terms. Niles once commented, 'How strange—I usually get some sign when Lilith is in town: dogs forming into packs, blood weeping from the walls.'"[41] Additionally, her story line—over time—follows a Lilith-ian path. Her character eventually leaves her husband, abandoning her marriage and her child. She does depart from our character by later insisting upon custody of their son. Clearly, the writers of "Cheers" had some notion of the legend they reference with the character's name. Through the use of the name, they allow some transference of the folk-character into the television character.

Alternatively, the musical tour Lilith Fair used the name to show the strength and power of women. Their usage is a show of reverence to a once-demoness. The tour began when Sarah McLachlan found it difficult to book tours as a female musical artist. Instead of fighting the mainstream industry herself, she compiled a group of female artists who would tour together. The tour was a great hit, lasting from 1997-1999 and then continued through the production of albums by the performers at the concert tours into the 2000s. Like the Lilith we have been considering, this Lilith Fair was willing to break out of the expectations of a male-dominant realm. But this kind of reference is selective. These women choose to see only one aspect of Lilith—that which challenges the male status quo. They do not consider the more demonic side of the character. Perhaps they read that side as the insecurity of the male world. Nevertheless, it seems precarious to latch on to the aspects of Lilith that promote power without considering her downsides also.

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[41] http: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilith_Sternin, 18 January, 2007.

In the Jewish world, *Lilith* magazine appears to do much the same as Lilith Fair. It also approaches Lilith as an heroic character. However, instead of using the power of the character to overthrow a male-dominated field, they use her name to explore the realities of Jewish women in the modern world. They surely reference the power of Lilith's character, but they also use her name in an effort to explore both the positive and negative world of the women whom they represent and to whom they present. This usage appears to be the most informed and honest treatment of the name Lilith.

No matter how the name is referenced or used though, the essential aspect of these presentations of Lilith is that they cause her to thrive and live. They change the fear associated with the character, forced upon her by a male perspective. She lives on, now, in the realm of women. She still changes and grows as the way we approach women changes and grows.

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