

Talking to Demons

Stories of Communication between Demons and Human Beings in Rabbinic Literature

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Digest

Much can be learned about the rabbis and their world through analysis of their texts. The texts receiving in-depth examination here are those in which demons and human beings communicate. By looking specifically at one type of rabbinic story within that subject, we gain knowledge not only of the demonology of the rabbis, but also why they wrote these seemingly strange tales.

With this goal in mind, first the Jewish world preceding the rabbinic time periods is introduced. This requires looking at Second Temple and post-Second Temple sects, along with the Hebrew Bible. In examining rabbinic literature a significant amount of material about demon-human communication is found in amoraic texts, but none can be found in tannaitic texts. Despite this fact, in the first chapter, the tannaitic material is introduced in an effort to show the rabbinic background for the amoraic material where communications of this sort are so prevalent.

The second chapter provides a much more thorough look at the intricacies of the Jewish sects up to 200CE. This means an examination of Gnostic ideas, along with early Christianity and Qumranite literature. What I found is that there are two basic ways of looking at demons. The first was adopted by Christianity—that there is a demonic realm, which is allied together under the rule of Satan (or a satanic being) and threatens the rule of good (and God). This satanic being may be a secondary power in the universe, or the secondary power may be Jesus who holds back the demonic realm. The second was adopted by rabbinic Judaism—there is no

power rival to God in any way, and the demons were actually created by God for whatever divine purpose.

Chapter three is a close look at what I have decided to name the three types of stories involving communication between demons and humans. The first are stories that push a *halakhic* motive. The second are present to reinforce the power of the rabbis. The third are a quandary, which I call “fantastic narratives” and are the stuff of legend.

Chapter four is a detailed analysis of the world of the rabbis and its potential influence on them and their writings. Roman Paganism, Christianity (in Palestine) and Babylonian Zoroastrianism are the three major cultural and religious doctrines that I look to as potentially involved in the lives of the rabbis and their communities.

Given the details of chapter two and chapter four, one can see that the demonology that the rabbis espouse is very much inclined towards both preservation of the Jewish religion and as an anti-Christian polemic. This is troublesome because the majority of these demon narratives appear in Babylonian texts, and it is commonly believed that Babylonian culture played a major role on influencing the *Babylonian Talmud*. I do not in any way suggest this is false, however, these demonological stories alone seem to be based on what is happening in Palestine rather than Babylonia. This is based on what we know about interaction between Jews and non-Jews in Palestine, the rabbis involved in the communication stories, our analyses of Zoroastrianism and Christianity, and more.

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I came up with the general idea of writing my rabbinic thesis about magic, demons, or some other such fantastical notion while eating pad thai with Rabbi Ken Kanter. His presence and support began from the time this work was just a tiny thought with no substance and has been without end.

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Chapter 1: Demonological Introduction

There are things in this world, which we cannot see or hear. Science today explains these natural occurrences, but in the biblical and rabbinic worlds, science could not explain the fear and dread invoked by the uninhabited place, or the cause of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. For the individual living during rabbinic time the causes of disease and random injury in the ancient world were demons. These creepy and shadowy creatures explained the unexplainable, and were an answer to the question of theodicy. Demons freed the individual from ascribing evil to their own god.

From Biblical Israel to Rabbinic Judaism, the demon was not a static idea. Like many ideas in Judaism, change and adaptation within new cultures and societies takes place. This causes the description and understanding of demons to change and adapt as well. Therefore, when looking at demonology in the Israelite cult and Judaism during these times, it is important to look at the demonology of the Near East more broadly, being sure to capture the essence of the place of demons in the cultures surrounding the people of the Bible and the rabbis.

Demonology, first, must be defined. "The etymology of the word demonology is no safe guide as to what the word itself means, for the Greek denotes a supernatural being that stands midway between gods and men. He may be good or bad."¹ Simply put for our purposes, demonology is the description of and belief in

¹ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 7.

the array of evil spirits. Most importantly, the demon is defined by the writer of the time. Therefore, the spirits distinguished here as demons are called *sheid*, *mazik*, or *ruakh rah* (“shade,” “injurer,” or “evil spirit”). There can be no better way to define the demon, than to use the definitions provided by the ancient writers through the terms they use. Generally, a demon is an evil being with the ability to cause the human being injury.²

To be sure, we cannot know the true role that the demon played in the life of the individual. Was the demon a real supernatural being to whom the ancient attributed bad luck? Or was the demon understood to be a metaphor for misfortune and the disappointing side of God? It is unclear. The learned (those who wrote the texts) are not always in touch with the superstitions and beliefs of the unlearned. All that can be known is how the Biblical redactors wanted others to see demons, and how the rabbis wanted the non-rabbis to understand them.

There is certainly a lot of material on demonology in Judaism. However, what seems to be missing is an analysis of the different kinds of demonological stories found in rabbinic literature. Most specifically, there is one type of story that has slipped under the radar: rabbinic narratives of communication between demons and human beings.

Communication between two beings involves mutual acknowledgement of existence, as well as the idea that they can comprehend one another. Sometimes communication with a demon appears in the process of exorcism or warding. There

² Satan is not to be considered a demon in Jewish demonology, for the purposes of this survey. His role as prosecutor within the angelic court as per *The Book of Job* and rabbinic literature leaves him out of the demonic realm.

are other times, which strike a much more interesting chord for the sake of this study, where demons and human beings have a two-way communication.

Acknowledgement of the other goes both ways, and on occasion, there is even mutual respect or a service that one does for the other!

In looking at rabbinic stories where demons and human beings communicate, this study will evaluate the hypothesis that these stories were carefully crafted by the rabbis as anti-Christian polemics. This requires looking at the preceding and surrounding cultures, and an analysis of demonology in rabbinic literature. This is not meant to be indicative of a general intention in everything the rabbis wrote, but only involves the stories of communication between demons and human beings, and *maybe* stretches to general rabbinic demonology.

It will be shown that there is undoubtedly influence of foreign cultures upon Biblical and rabbinic demonology. However, with a thorough look at the demonology of Zoroastrianism, Second Temple and post-Second Temple Jewish groups, and early Christianity, it becomes clear that the rabbis opted *out* of the potential demonology that Christianity embraced, and purposefully adapted a kind of demonology that renders that of Christianity to be ineffective in explaining the world. At the same time, given a thorough look at Zoroastrianism and its predecessors, there does not seem to be a significant polemic against the Zoroastrian culture. This is despite the fact that the Talmud with the most authority is written in Babylonia, and also despite the fact that the Christian influence would have been more of a force to be reckoned with in Palestine.

Indeed there are a lot of difficulties in proving this hypothesis. It requires research on many cultures and their potential influences on Judaism in terms of demonology. This introductory chapter includes an examination of the Biblical redactors and editors, and potential cultural influences. Chapter Two involves a discussion of the various sects of the second Temple period and the first century CE, including the tannaitic rabbis (rabbis of the early rabbinic texts, living before 300CE). Chapter Three is a focused look at amoraic (rabbis of later rabbinic texts, living between 300 and 600CE) texts. With all this information explored, Chapter Four examines the cultures surrounding the rabbis (tannaitic and amoraic; Palestinian and Babylonian) in an attempt to identify similarities and differences between demonologies. Finally, Chapter Five, as was just indicated, will pull this information together to make an argument for the notion that the fantastical demonological stories that appear in the amoraic sources may be purposefully crafted to hold the loyalty of the lay Jew to the rabbinic authorities.

This broad-sweeping research is not the limit of the difficulty here. There is also the fact that the majority of stories involving communication between demons and humans appear in the *Babylonian Talmud*, not in Palestinian rabbinic texts. This works against the notion that these stories are an anti-Christian polemic, and obtaining a better understanding of this phenomenon will require extensive research beyond the scope of this work. However, what is hoped here is to explore the plausibility of the hypothesis (that the rabbis were reacting to Christianity rather than what was happening in Babylonia). This is only in regard to those stories of communication between the evil spirits and humankind, those stories

which are strange and seemingly out of place in the rabbinic world of order, God, and anti-magical rules.

When writing these stories of communication, the authors had only the following choices: to invent, borrow, adapt (or some combination thereof). This is generally the case with myth and with the creation or continuation of any religion or culture. "Israelite literature could (1) embrace this material and reorient it in accordance with the social and political needs of the audience, (2) create new material, or (3) use mythic material in a reduced manner."³ Therefore, when the rabbis decided to write stories where demons and human beings communicated, they were inventing something entirely new, borrowing it from somewhere else, or adapting it from another source to fit perceptions of demons within the rabbinic ideal. They were creating anew, reacting to something foreign, or both.

It is obvious that demons existed in cultures outside of Judaism and the Israelite cult. Therefore the rabbis were faced with a choice in whether or not to include demons in their texts: "one choice was to attempt to stifle foreign myths and practices, a move which could drive followers to mysterious cults...The other choice was to reconcile and mutually coexist with a demonic world—while controlling and supervising it."⁴ This is similar to Michael Fishbane's opinion in the development of rabbinic myth in general. He points out the two ways that rabbinic mythmaking develops. One way is through *thematic continuity* "with mythic topics, images, and scenarios found in earlier ancient Near Eastern and biblical sources or

³ Mark Straaton Smith, "Myth in Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* Volume 3, 2031-2041, 2039.

⁴ Azriel, *Satan in Rabbinic Literature*, 38.

traditions. The other is by *thematic innovation*, “whereby new mythic themes, figures, and topics are developed.”⁵

This is why it is so important to look deeply at Jewish as well as non-Jewish demonology and its development. This will help to establish whether the rabbis were embracing and adapting a foreign idea, or whether the writing of (what turn out to be highly unusual) communication texts is simply a logical progression of the development of Jewish demonology.

The development of demonology in Judaism is complex. In order to introduce the material, we will first briefly outline the situation of second Temple and rabbinic communities so that in our discussion on demonology we will have a deeper understanding of these groups. Afterwards, we begin to encounter the earliest of Israelite demonology, that which appears in the Hebrew Bible, in order to enable ourselves the ability to move forward through the next chapters.

Second Temple/Post-Second Temple sects

The situation of Judaism during the second Temple period and just afterwards was extremely varied. With so many sects, and the beginning of development away from the Israelite cult, demonology was not uniform. This leads to the rabbis choosing what to take on and what to leave behind.

To be sure, up to the first century, little is known about the Jew/Israelite: who he was, what he did, what he believed, etc. In the second century, we know a lot more due to Christian texts.⁶ Despite this, there are some works that suggest

⁵ Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking*, 191.

⁶ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 35.

possible Jewish demonological beliefs. These include the *Nag Hammadi* texts that suggest potential Jewish-Gnostic origin, Qumran texts, and early Christian work (as it was indeed a Jewish sect).⁷

The Qumran texts, describe an apocalyptic movement that believed suffering and terror were meted out by God to make humans stronger.⁸ They also include the battle between the *Sons of Light* and the *Sons of Darkness*. The light is represented by the Qumranites, and the darkness is *evil* (perhaps non-Qumranites). The eventual end will come when God intervenes on the side of the light to defeat the darkness.⁹ There is a battle occurring but it is within God's control, when God is ready to weigh in on the fight.

Another idea is the fallen angel motif which abounds at this time, as evidenced in the Book of Jubilees and the Book of Enoch. Here there are angels that have been removed from heaven, they have fallen, and they procreated with human women, as per Genesis 6:1-4:

When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them. The LORD said, "My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years." It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth -- when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.¹⁰

This created a demonic array. In this sense, their creation was not within God's planned world, and therefore is outside of God's control (that does not mean that

⁷ More on this in Chapter Two.

⁸ Azriel, *Satan in Rabbinic Literature*, 31.

⁹ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 42.

¹⁰ Gen 6:1-4 (NJPS).

these demons are more powerful than God, God can still overcome them, but they do not follow God's commands). There is also suggestion of this idea in Isaiah 14:12-

21.¹¹

¹² How are you fallen from heaven, O Shining One, son of Dawn! How are you felled to earth, O vanquisher of nations!

¹³ Once you thought in your heart, "I will climb to the sky; Higher than the stars of God I will set my throne. I will sit in the mount of assembly, On the summit of Zaphon:

¹⁴ I will mount the back of a cloud -- I will match the Most High."

¹⁵ Instead, you are brought down to Sheol, To the bottom of the Pit.

¹⁶ They who behold you stare; They peer at you closely: "Is this the man Who shook the earth, Who made realms tremble,

¹⁷ Who made the world like a waste And wrecked its towns, Who never released his prisoners to their homes?"

¹⁸ All the kings of nations were laid, every one, in honor Each in his tomb;

¹⁹ While you were left lying unburied, Like loathsome carrion, Like a trampled corpse In the clothing of slain gashed by the sword Who sink to the very stones of the Pit.

²⁰ You shall not have a burial like them; Because you destroyed your country, Murdered your people. Let the breed of evildoers Nevermore be named!

²¹ Prepare a slaughtering block for his sons Because of the guilt of their father. Let them not arise to possess the earth! Then the world's face shall be covered with towns.¹²

Jubilees is dated to the Second Century BCE¹³ and copies are found within the Qumran collection. It represents a frame of mind during the second Temple in which there is a prince of evil spirits. Also, "there is a class of angels known as Watchers, who were sent to instruct men and to do righteousness (4:15), but they corrupted themselves by having intercourse with the daughters of men who bore them giants (7:21f)." In this tradition, these Watchers also produced the demons of the world.¹⁴ Note that there was no rebellion in heaven against God. Instead, these

¹¹ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 136.

¹² Isaiah 14:12-21 (NJPS)

¹³ Charlesworth Pseudepigrapha Volume 2, *Jubilees*, O.S. Wintermute, 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.a.

angels simply failed to do the job they set out to do. They were tempted by humanity, and so evil was created in the world.

The *Book of Tobit* is another example of Second Temple text that tells us about the potential mind frame of the ancient Jew (though since the text is preserved in the *Septuagint*, we cannot know how widespread it was). Ashmedai, the king of the demons in the *Babylonian Talmud*, appears here “as a sensual demon, who in love with the bride, kills off her husbands as they approach her and is punished by Raphael after having been driven out and fled into Egypt.”¹⁵ This too can help in determining the direction that the rabbis *could* have gone in terms of their proscribed demonology (and perhaps this example from the *Book of Tobit* sounds a bit like the fallen angel motif as well). However, no such description or story about Ashmedai appears in the *Babylonian Talmud*

At the same time, Josephus ignores the notion that demons were descended from the fallen angels for his Roman readers and “instead described them as the ghosts of evil people, perhaps because this would make more sense to a non-Jewish audience, well aware of the existence of nefarious ghosts.”¹⁶ Obviously varying opinions of demonology exist based on the beliefs of the sects, and their understandings of proper Jewish belief.

Rabbinic Literature

These texts fall within the span of time beginning towards the end of the second Temple and up to the writing of the *Mishnah* (around 200CE). In general,

¹⁵ Jung, *Fallen Angels*, 89. Tobit Chapter 8.

¹⁶ Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 92. Josephus, War 7:180-185, Loeb Classical Library translation Volume III, 557-559.

there were two options when it came to evil spirits. The first, as we have been discussing, comes from the fallen angels. They are a demonic array with allegiance to Satan, or Samael, rather than falling under the direct power of God. The second, as is related in the rabbinic literature, are the evil spirits that are part human and part supernatural. The *lilin* are those who were created through Adam and Lilith. Lilith is their queen. The others are *sheidim*, who are the offspring of Eve and male spirits. Their king is Ashmedai.¹⁷

The source of evil and wrongdoing in this world, and the powers that lead to such behavior and incidents, was clearly an issue on the forefront of the minds of the pre-*Mishnah* Jew. With the writing of the *Mishnah*, the rabbis began the process of solidifying the lines of what constitutes a Jew and what would be left outside of the religion. When it came to demonology, there was more than one direction the rabbis could have gone. They opted for God as supreme and only power. “Although the Mishnah never mentions angels, it speaks of demons twice: their creation on Sabbath eve, and the legal remark that one may extinguish a lamp on Sabbath out of fear of an evil spirit.”¹⁸ This creation during the week of the Creation of the world means that demons were conceived of and created by the Holy one. There was no rebellion against God, no casting down of mischievous angels from heaven, and no ongoing battle between evil beings and the good. “Nowhere in Talmudic sources is Satan depicted as a rebel against God. Nowhere is it even hinted that he was once an angel of light. Nor does the *aggada* foretell Satan’s downfall or destruction in the future...The Satan of the Talmud is essentially the Satan of the Hebrew Bible. He is

¹⁷ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 111.

¹⁸ Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 103.

an agent of God.”¹⁹ Satan’s role exists in a different manner from either the angels or the demons of rabbinic literature.

There is no leader of the demonic realm that controls all demons and aligns them all against God (or the Jews) in a strategic way. “They are not an organized body under the leadership of the Prince of Darkness.”²⁰ As a matter of fact, “The demons, though far from good, are not utterly evil.”²¹ This is consistent from the *Mishnah* on through the rabbinic literature. “Being created at a time that was neither Shabbat nor week-day, neither night nor day, *ben ha-shmashot*, literally, ‘between the suns,’ demons are by nature creatures of liminality, dangerously lingering on the margins of human existence.”²²

The rabbis in later texts use demons in their stories in ways we might not entirely expect to see. “They are able to manifest in forms that permit them to interact with humans.”²³ Also, though the rabbis are “generally opposed to demon-magic” the reader will see that some of the most prominent amoraim are involved with demons themselves, or tell the stories about rabbis involved with demons.²⁴ To be sure, “the existence of demons is taken for granted throughout the rabbinic literature. The sources often speak of ‘evil spirits,’ more commonly of *mazikin* (injurers) or *sheidim* (a Biblical term borrowed from Assyrian).”²⁵

The *Mishnah* generally contains *halakhic* material while later writings of the rabbis often contain more of a mixture of *halakha* and *aggada*. It is possible that the

¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

²⁰ Ibid., 104.

²¹ Ibid., 106.

²² Bloom, *Jewish Mysticism and Magic*, 128.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 30.

²⁵ Bamberger *Fallen Angels*, 103.

rabbis of the *Mishnah* were much more exclusive. Later, contact with other religions “would make them broader, and more ready to adopt new principles and practices.”²⁶ This is where the question over influence from other cultures upon rabbinic demonology comes in. It becomes important to know what foreign cultures and religious ideas the rabbis encountered in Babylonia/Persia and Palestine, in order to understand the context in which they were writing.

Later texts involve a significant amount of additional thought about Jewish demonology. While demons only appear twice in *Mishnah*, they can be found all over amoraic literature. The rabbis are even concerned with the appearance of demons:

The Rabbis taught: six things are said about demons (*sheidim*): three [ways] are they similar to the angels and three [ways] are they similar to humankind. The three [ways they] are similar to angels: 1) they have wings like the angels, 2) they fly from one end of the world to the other like the angels, and 3) they know what the future will bring like the angels. “They know” is not what is meant, rather that they hear from behind the veil like the angels. And three [ways] they are like humankind: 1) they eat and drink like humankind, 2) they are fruitful and multiply like humankind, and 3) they die like humankind.²⁷

This is a much more developed sort of demonology than what appears in the *Mishnah*.

It is important to distinguish which rabbinic texts are tannaitic and which are amoraic. *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*, and the midrashim: *Mekhilta Attributed to R. Ishmael*, *Sifra*, *Sifre Numbers* and *Sifre Deuteronomy* are the tannaitic sources under

²⁶ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 109. In Seth Schwartz, *Some Types of Jewish-Christian Interaction*, Schwartz also argues that interactions between Jews and Christians brought about significant change to Judaism and to rabbinic text. While rabbis may or may not have been ready to adopt revolutionary principles, there is no doubt that their later situation brought about changes that were reliant upon the rabbis coming face-to-face with a new/different communal context.

²⁷ *B. Hagigah* 16a (my own translation).

examination for demonology and especially stories where demons and human beings communicate. Amoraic sources include the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Palestinian Talmud* and the midrashim: *Genesis Rabbah*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*, *Lamentations Rabbah*, *Esther Rabbah 1* (only the first two chapters), *Ruth Rabbah* and *Song of Songs Rabbah*.²⁸

As mentioned above, the surrounding cultures of the rabbis will be an important part of this research in trying to identify the rabbinic demon. Therefore, while the surrounding cultures were mentioned briefly, it is important to expound a little bit. The tannaitic rabbis, those who authored the *Mishnah* and its midrashic counterparts, were living in the pagan Roman culture of Palestine: the same pagan Rome that had destroyed their beloved Temple in Jerusalem. The amoraic rabbis of *Palestinian Talmud* and its midrashic counterparts also lived in pagan Rome. However, they were increasingly faced with the existence of Jewish sects that were counter to their own ideas, and even saw Christianity rise and eventually take power over all of Rome as the state religion (established by Constantine in 324 CE).²⁹ Lastly, the amoraic rabbis of the *Babylonian Talmud* were faced with quite a different sort of situation—Zoroastrianism.

Hebrew Bible

Those looking to the Hebrew Bible for demonology were limited only by their own creativity. For instance, the fallen angel motif is built on Genesis chapter 6.

²⁸ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 4. I have endeavored to search the demonologies outlined in all of these texts. However, some will not be mentioned beyond this point, as their demonologies are limited or only reiterative of what is found in other sources. Many of them do not contain stories where demons and human beings communicate.

²⁹ Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 206.

The rabbis were similarly limited in their work by what they could find in the Bible. Yet, there are two opinions about demonology in *Tanakh*. The first is that there are only a couple of places where demons are mentioned. The other opinion is that demons are *everywhere* in *Tanakh* if you know their names and what to look for.

David Everson points out that “there are two places within the Bible where the demonic *sheidim* occur: Deuteronomy 32:17 and Psalm 106:37. Though the *sheidim* scarcely appear in the Biblical text, they are found commonly in later Hebrew literature and throughout a variety of Aramaic dialects.”³⁰ The Deuteronomy verse says: “They sacrificed to demons (*sheidim*), no-gods,/Gods they had never known,/New ones who came but lately,/Who stirred not your fathers’ fears.”³¹ Here, the demons—*sheidim*—were being worshipped as gods in the ancient times. Psalm 106:36-38 reads: “They worshiped their idols, which became a snare for them. Their own sons and daughters they sacrificed to demons (*sheidim*). They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; so the land was polluted with bloodguilt.”³² In the next verse and in the preceding verse, it is made clear that the *sheidim* are equivalent to *a’tzabim* (עֲצָבִים), or idols. So, in both texts, demons or *sheidim*, are likened to an object commonly found in non-demonological texts. It could be argued that even as demons are rarely present in the *Tanakh*, where they can be found they may be defined as something else entirely. The word “demon” here is nothing more

³⁰ Everson, *Angels in the Targums*, 40.

³¹ Deut 32:17 (NJPS).

³² Ps 106:36-38 (NJPS).

than a nasty name for the gods that others worship. The Hebrew Bible is de-demonologized.

At the same time, the alternative opinion is that, “A vast array of demonic elements, often subtle or concealed, exists in the Bible. This network of demons may have been taken on by the ancient Hebrews either by force or by choice, through contact with ancient cultures in the Near East during the Bronze and Iron ages.”³³ There are certainly some interesting questions raised by this notion. A number of issues in the *Tanakh*, can be explained with this notion. One example, for instance, is how I Chronicles 21:1 and II Samuel 24:1 differ though they are telling the same story. In Samuel, it is God’s ire that causes David to move against Israel. In the retelling of Chronicles, it is Satan who causes David to do the same. While Satan, as described in these passages, is not a demon, there is no doubt that other traditions such as those second Temple and post-Second Temple sects see him as such.³⁴ Be that as it may, which ever way we approach Satan, the change in the story is an interesting one that may suggest a possible jumping off point for a change in Satan’s character which the rabbis *did not* take advantage of (potentially on purpose).

When it comes to *foreign* gods and *demons* that may appear in the Bible, some look to the presence of potential beings like *Resheph* (Deuteronomy 32:24 and Habakkuk 3:5), *Azazel* (Leviticus 16:8, 10, and 26), *Dever*, and *Lilith* (Isaiah 34:14).³⁵ This notion is supported by T. Witton Davies in his work *Magic, Divination and*

³³ Azriel, *Satan in Rabbinic Literature*, 17: Translation of source: Nehemia Tzuri, “Beit Shean v’Banotehah” b-sefer *Ben Tzion Luria*, 332.

³⁴ Namely as leader of the array of demons.

³⁵ Isaacs, *Ascending Jacob’s Ladder*, 98.

Demonology where he points out that, “There are many indications and survivals throughout the Old Testament of this [belief in evil spirits].”³⁶ In looking to a verse where both *dever* and *resheph* appear, Habbakuk 3:5, there is ample room to see how they could be viewed as demonic beings. The verse states: “Pestilence (*dever*) marches before Him, and plague (*resheph*) comes forth at His heels.”³⁷ The rabbis continue in this tradition that the demons fall within the command of God.

In other places, this anthropomorphic notion of *resheph* and *dever* is not evidenced. Instead, they serve as a pestilence, or a plague (disease), which God threatens against the people for not behaving properly. One example is I Kings 8:37: “So, too, if there is a famine in the land, if there is pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts or caterpillars, or if an enemy oppresses them in any of the settlements of the land. In any plague and in any disease...”³⁸ Another example is Exodus 9:3: “Then the hand of the Lord will strike your livestock in the fields—the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep—with a very severe pestilence.”³⁹ In these cases, *resheph* and *dever* look a lot more like a typical illness God could inflict as a weapon, rather than demonic beings. In some places of the Hebrew Bible, pestilence and plague exist as we understand sickness today. In other places, they are entities with feet and are capable of marching *with* God.

The other two, *Azazel* and *Lilith*, are a little different. *Azazel* seems variably to be a place and a being (though whether a demon or not continues to be a

³⁶ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 95. He continues from pages 96-100 with a discourse on connections of various Near Eastern demons and Old Testament words/names.

³⁷ Hab 3:5 (NJPS).

³⁸ I Kgs 8:37 (NJPS).

³⁹ Exod 9:3 (NJPS).

question). During the Yom Kippur ritual, as described in Leviticus chapter sixteen, one goat is “marked for *Azazel*.” Leviticus 16:10 states: “While the goat designated by lot for *Azazel* shall be left standing alive before the Lord, to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for *Azazel*.”⁴⁰ In this context, it is extremely unclear what *Azazel* is. “In the main the following possibilities are under discussion: 1) ‘*Azazel*’ is the name or epithet of a demon. 2) ‘*Azazel*’ is a geographical designation meaning ‘precipitous place’ or ‘rugged cliff’. 3) ‘*Azazel*’ is a combination of terms that means ‘goat that goes (away)’, or scapegoat.”⁴¹

As for *Lilith*, she appears only in Isaiah 34:14. There, in Isaiah’s description of how mad God is at the nations, and the things that may occur, he describes, “Wildcats shall meet hyenas,/Goat-demons shall greet each other;/There too the *Lilith* shall repose/And find herself a resting place.”⁴²

It is easy to see how *resheph* and *dever* have been de-demonologized by the text. *Azazel* could be read as a place, rather than a demon, and while it is difficult to see *Lilith* as anything but a demon, it is an individual speaking, and perhaps Isaiah is playing to the “mistaken” beliefs of the people. Either way there is plenty of evidence of the names of demons being used and transformed in the *Tanakh* into God’s powers or locations. It does not seem to matter whether the authors meant them to be demons, or purposefully were trying to abolish belief in these particular evil spirits.

⁴⁰ Lev 16:10 (NJPS).

⁴¹ B. Janowski, “*Azazel*” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 128-131.

⁴² Isa 34:14 (NJPS).

Demonology is (potentially) present in the Hebrew Bible. Yet, even here it is evident that the writers and redactors were looking to (and maybe even subscribing to) the beliefs of surrounding cultures. They were also clearly looking to show that God is supreme over these foreign powers. The demons that the Assyrians fear, for example, are no match for the Israelite God. "The demons and Satyrs of the north and west Semitic races were, therefore, largely borrowed from Babylonia, ultimately from Sumer, as were their myths and many of their gods. Few traces of truly Hebrew demonology survive in the Old Testament."⁴³ There is a lot of evidence of this when one looks at the words used in Hebrew and links to words of other ancient languages:

"The *Rephaim* or giants inhabited Palestine before the Hebrew occupation...that word *Rephaim* is identical with the Hebrew and Phoenician word for souls of the dead who dwell in Sheol, and there can be no doubt that they are fabulous giants or demons in Semitic mythology, corresponding to *gigim*, *gidim*, 'ghost,' of Sumerian mythology, and the *etimmu* of Accadian demonology. The Semitic verb from which *rapha*, "ghost," plural *rephaim*, is derived means "sink into darkness," and is common in Accadian under the form *rabu*."⁴⁴

Above I noted that Josephus understood the demon to be the ghost of an evil person. Bohak suggests that this was because it would make sense to the non-Jew, and here we see an explanation of why that might be.⁴⁵ In a culture surrounding the Jew, the demon was a ghost (*rapha*), and here is another example of a potentially non-Jewish spirit that made its way into the *Tanakh*.

In short, there can be no doubt that the demonology of the Hebrew Bible is derived from the writers' and redactors' knowledge of the demons of surrounding

⁴³ Langdon, *Mythology of All Races*, Vol 5, 354.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 355.

⁴⁵ Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 92.

cultures they knew personally, as well as their own beliefs. In the context of their writings, they are often able to show how the Israelite God is the omnipotent being that *all* should be worshipping, as He alone has the power to defeat them. Those with trust in God will go into Canaan and defeat the *Rephaim*. *Resheph* and *Dever* are under the command of God as well, and God can direct them against those who are doing wrong.

At the same time, *Lilith* and *Azazel* are seemingly left unexplained. We cannot know what the writers were thinking when they wrote of them. Perhaps the Israelites knew them to be demons. We cannot be sure. But what we can establish is how demonology is present in the Hebrew Bible, and how room existed for expansion upon those ideas in the time of the second Temple by various sects, as well as in the rabbinic era.

Chapter 2: Jewish Sects up to 200CE

In Chapter four, we will be looking at the cultures that the rabbis encountered directly. Here we will investigate briefly the potential traditions of various Jewish sects that could have influenced the rabbis' choices when it came to demonology. This will include the Jesus-sect (which would become Christianity), Jewish Gnosticism (documents from the *Nag Hammadi Library*), and then finally the tannaitic sect which developed the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta* and various midrashim at this time.

Sectarian Judaism complicates our understanding of the situation of late-antiquity in an important way. The notion of demons in Roman paganism, as juxtaposed to the demonologies of the various sects of Judaism, presented the tannaitic rabbis with a new problem. Demons in the pagan sense were nothing new to the Jews of Palestine. These Jews had encountered paganism for a long time. Demons fit into a polytheistic model, but it is much more difficult to explain multiple beings of power in a monotheistic one (especially where they are communicating with humans). Within a monotheistic model, "worship or partnership with demons is not merely viewed as low, unsophisticated, and potentially harmful. It is also heresy, a threat to monotheism."⁴⁶ However, it seems the existence of demons was prevalent among the Jewish people, and so these sects had to come up with ways to argue their method of viewing these evil beings was acceptable within

⁴⁶ Segal, *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity*, 102.

monotheism.⁴⁷ They had to decide, “Whether the ‘demons’ were angels, as some Jewish exorcists were evidently claiming, or devils.”⁴⁸

To be sure, in order to maintain an obviously monotheistic theology, these demons *had* to be under the rule of one god. To be able to argue their sect was the *real* Jewish sect, it had to be YHWH who was that God.

The first Jewish sect to be discussed is the Jesus-sect. Though many early Christians still saw themselves as Jewish, it developed into a religion quite separate. “Christianity accounts for change in Judaism.”⁴⁹ Therefore, it is important to know what was happening in early Christian demonology. Christian Scripture relates to demons as within the power of Jesus to defeat them. Mark 16:9 says, “Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.”⁵⁰ Also, Matthew 8:21-23 describes:

Not every one who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.”⁵¹

Both Matthew and Mark were likely written during the first century CE.⁵²

Another book of Christian Scripture dating to this time period is Revelation.⁵³ This book is very informative for our purposes because it describes the relationship

⁴⁷ This prevalence of demons is not just based on the texts we have looked at, but also on evidence of folk religion from that time such as magic bowls and amulets. See Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, and Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 19-20 and throughout both of these texts for examples.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 100.

⁵⁰ Mark 16:9 (RSV).

⁵¹ Matt 8:21-23 (RSV).

⁵² Herbert and Metzger, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, 1171 and 1213.

⁵³ Ibid., 1493.

between the Jesus-sect and other Jewish sects of the time. The book describes those who “say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”⁵⁴ It also tells us how the Jesus-sect decided to describe demons as fallen angels ruled by Satan because of a war that took place in heaven.⁵⁵

The books that did not make it into the Jewish or Christian canon can help to show the transition of the Jesus-sect, or at least some of the demonological ideas of the world at that time. In 3 Baruch (Slavonic version) chapter four, various angels come down to plant the Garden of Eden. Among those is Satanael, who plants the vine which would bear the fruit Adam and Eve would sin and eat. This text dates from between the first and third centuries CE, and is mimicked somewhat in rabbinic literature (Midrash *Tanhuma* Noah 13) with haSatan involved in Noah’s drunkenness. However, here the adversary’s name is Satanael. This name “is changed to Satan when he loses his favored status. Satanael is mentioned in several other works as well. The earliest is 2 Enoch, where he is the chief of the fallen Watchers. Moreover, he is probably identified with the figure in Isaiah 14:13f, who falls from heaven.”⁵⁶ In the Greek language version of this text, the figure is Samael, another name for the Satan figure.

This sect of Judaism was defining itself against the other Jewish groups of that time period. The synagogue of Satan idea shows just how much animosity there was between the sects. “The Jews are taken to be symbols of the opposition of God.

⁵⁴ Rev 2:9 (RSV).

⁵⁵ Rev 12:7-9 (RSV).

⁵⁶ Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, “3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch,” H.E. Gaylord, Jr., 658.

[They] are said to be the offspring of the Devil.”⁵⁷ This helps them to be able to say that Christianity, or the Jesus-sect, is the proper form of Judaism, and only by following Jesus are you doing the right thing.

The notion that there was a unified “evil hegemony in opposition to God and that the demons, now considered helpers of Satan, are evil—a presupposition central to the New Testament, was only partly shared by the Pharisees and certainly not by all Jews.”⁵⁸ It is important to remember that the Jesus-sect, and Christianity, comes out of Judaism. It makes sense that it would be a potential influence upon rabbinic work (either in negative or positive definition). However, as the rabbis became more established and began to develop a “normative” Judaism to the exclusion of the Jesus-sect (or as the Jesus-sect began to exclude rabbinic Judaism), differences became solidified. Jesus-sect Judaism and nascent Christianity was a response to the life and deification of Jesus. Rabbinic Judaism was a response “to the threat to Jewish identity posed by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE.”⁵⁹

Given this animosity between the Jesus-sect and the other Jews, it is no surprise that differences in how the two present their demonologies are also different. However, while Christianity “demonizes” the Jew, Judaism seems to maintain its demonology in a very minimal way (as we will see below). At the same time, Christianity adopted the Fallen Angel motif, whereas in Judaism the demons are created by God alone, and are therefore creatures of God’s world like anything else.

⁵⁷ Segal, *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity*, 67.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁹ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 6.

There has been significant debate over the years regarding the existence of Jewish Gnosticism at this time. However, “there were likely Jewish Gnostics.”⁶⁰ The evidence from *Nag Hammadi* suggests there is a significant amount of material that seems Jewish and builds upon the Hebrew Bible, but do not rely upon Christianity.⁶¹ These include works like *The Three Steles of Seth*, *the Apocalypse of John*, and *Hypostasis of the Archons*, among others.⁶² While these texts were “usable” by Christians, they appear to derive from a Jewish Gnosticism.⁶³

As time moved forward, Christian Gnosticism became more prevalent than Jewish Gnosticism, and many of the texts were redacted by those of the Christian variety.⁶⁴ “During the second century CE the Christian forms of the new Gnostic religion tend to predominate, while at the same time the Jewish elements in the Gnostic religion begin to recede into the background.”⁶⁵

This presents a second form of Jewish practice and theology that could have influenced the rabbis. “The earliest [Jewish] heretics believed in two *complimentary* powers in heaven.”⁶⁶ Christian theology developed from this complimentary-power idea.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Gnostic idea was that the two powers in heaven are set *against* one another.⁶⁸ There are numerous examples (including the first chapter of *Genesis Rabbah*) where the rabbis out-right admonish and dismiss the notion that

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

⁶² Ibid., 7-8.

⁶³ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴ Pearson, *The Problem of “Jewish Gnostic” Literature from Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, 15-16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁶ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, x.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 262.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 262.

one can be Jewish and serve two powers in the universe. In *Two Powers in Heaven*, Alan Segal shows that a significant amount of rabbinic literature is intended as a polemic against dualism, whether Gnostic or Christian. Also, the rabbis attempted to exert additional control over synagogues while defining Judaism as they saw fit.

“The growing emphasis on strict monotheism characterizes the rabbinic movement and sets it off from the other sects of its time.”⁶⁹ In fact, Pearson suggests that those Jewish intellectuals who were not happy with the normative Judaism as it was developing at this time, in their reinterpreting of Jewish religious traditions into Gnosticism, “burst the bonds of Judaism and created a new religion. We are thus presented with the anomaly of Jews who finally *intended* to be ‘no longer Jews.’”⁷⁰

Gershom Scholem agrees with this notion:

The logical conclusion seems to be, given the historical circumstances, that, initially, Jewish esoteric tradition absorbed Hellenistic elements similar to those we actually find in Hermetic writings. Such elements entered Jewish tradition before Christianity developed, or at any rate, before Christian Gnosticism as a distinctive force came into being. Later, when Judaism and Christianity finally parted ways, these elements, whose development, once borrowed, had been within and in the manner of a distinctly Jewish esotericism, were taken over into Christianity and into early Gnostic circles, rather than the reverse. It is difficult to assume that during the period of extreme strain between the Synagogue and the Church in the second century, Jews who were bent upon keeping their distinctly Jewish character would borrow from Christian circles. And indeed, as I have said, there is no evidence for such borrowings. The contrary, however, would be easily explained by the steady stream of converts from Judaism into Christianity, some of whom could have been recipients of Jewish esoteric doctrine.⁷¹

But what does this mean in terms of demonology? If the rabbis *were* to take in the Gnostic demonic idea, what would it look like? As a matter of fact, it would be

⁶⁹ Ibid., 264.

⁷⁰ Pearson, *The Problem of “Jewish Gnostic” Literature from Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, 35.

⁷¹ Scholem, *Gnosticism, Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 34.

downright impossible, once the rabbis decided that there was one God, one deity in the world, and no competition against Him.

Hypostasis of the Archons, which comes from the third century CE, “is an anonymous tractate presenting an esoteric interpretation of Genesis 1-6.”⁷² It describes a second level of power, the archons, who are below God. They have a hierarchy of their own. The chief is named Samael. They have the power of creation. They will be abolished in the messianic future, and their “angels will weep over their destruction: And their demons will lament their death.”⁷³ In general, this is one of the two ways that the demons appear in the Gnostic texts. Here the demons are under the rule of an alternate force in the universe.

Trimorphic Protennoia, dating from around the second century CE, was found at Nag Hammadi and describes a divine being who descends to the world three times.⁷⁴ In it demons *are* the alternate force (as is developed in Christianity):

There appeared the great Demon who rules over the lowest part of the underworld and Chaos. He has neither form nor perfection, but on the contrary possesses the form of the glory of those begotten in darkness. Now he is called ‘Saklas,’ that is, ‘Samael,’ ‘Yaltabaoth,’ he who had taken power; who had snatched it away from the innocent one (Sophia).⁷⁵

For our purposes, there is a group that fits within this section though it is somewhat different: the Qumranites. This group described in the Dead Sea Scrolls, though it developed different traditions and notions, may be similar as they “struck a similar cord to Persian dualism.”⁷⁶ The scrolls describe the battle of the *Children of the*

⁷² Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 161.

⁷³ Ibid., 169.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 511.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 515.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

Light against the *Children of the Darkness*, and the idea that these two forces would fight until God stepped in to aid the *Children of the Light*. This may be similar to the idea that there are competing forces, or powers, in this world (as was discussed in Chapter One). “The war at the End of Days will bring about the destruction of evil forces. The War Scroll includes this statement within the high priest’s speech before the last battle. Words of the Luminaries describes the future salvation as a time without any Satan.”⁷⁷

Describing Qumranite demonology depends on which document from Qumran one reads. “One has to judge from text to text whether the beings involved are to be understood in modern terms as demons or else as God’s ministers who happen to perform certain acts.”⁷⁸ The figure Belial (sometimes Mastemah) stands opposed to the Qumranite community. “Belial’s reign is a reign of injustice, and he appears to be the “prince of the kingdom of darkness. The destroying angels are placed under his dominion as are the people who do not belong to the community.”⁷⁹ This figure, Belial or Mastemah, is the Angel of Darkness. Depending on the text, the spirits or angels that serve him “are not only the forces that stand against God; they may fulfill his punishment...the world outside the covenant is under Belial’s rule; yet even the covenanters might be afflicted by him. During his reign, Belial lies in wait extending three nets: those of unchasteness, wealth, and defiling the sanctuary.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Mach, “Demons” from *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* vol. 1, 191-192.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 191.

As we will see, some of this could be a short step from rabbinic demonology, while other pieces sound more like Christian demonology. One part of Qumranite practice, which is strikingly similar to the rabbis', is the importance of *halakhah*, or ritual practice, in the art of keeping away demons. "Membership in the covenant and the yearly renewal (a ritual) are part of the community's protective devices against Belial... Prayer is one of the means by which to guard against [them]."⁸¹

We now come to tannaitic literature: *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, *Mekhilta Attributed to R. Ishmael*, *Sifra*, *Sifre Numbers*, and *Sifre Deuteronomy*. This has been introduced briefly in the previous chapter. Here, though, we will go a little bit more in-depth to see what the rabbis actually did with the teachings from the various sects they encountered.

In the *Mishnah* demons are only mentioned twice. Once in terms of their creation, and once in terms of extinguishing the Shabbat lights because of fear of demons. The first is significant to our discussion of influences, because it shows that the rabbis were going to allow neither Gnosticism nor Jesus-sect traditions to become "normative" Judaism.

Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:6 describes that *mazikin* were created by God. This means that they were not fallen angels or the beings created by some secondary force. However there is a complication here. In his commentary to the *Mishnah*, Blackman notes that these *mazikin*, which are here described, "must be taken to refer to evil inclinations as the belief in demonology is forbidden to Jews (which has

⁸¹ Ibid., 191.

been shown to be false).⁸² Albeck disagrees and calls them *rukhot* and *sheidim*.⁸³

Elsewhere in *Mishnah*, the *mazik* is most often considered damage (usually found in *Bava Kama* in terms of the damage an ox may do). It is, therefore, not necessary that one views this reference to be a note on demonology. The rabbis *could* be talking about damages, or those things that cause damage, as having been created by God. However, perhaps by *mazikin* the rabbis meant to define demons as those things which cause damage in the world. Either way, *mazikin* are created by God, rather than some secondary force. They are not aligned or arrayed against the forces of God in some war, nor are they united against mankind to attempt to get them to do evil.

Mishnah Shabbat 2:5 describes the reasons why one may decide to extinguish the Shabbat lights. One of those reasons is because of a *ruakh rah*, or evil spirit. *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* suggests that there is only one place where demons are mentioned in the *Mishnah* (rather than these two, it only regards *Pirkei Avot* 5:6 as a demonological text).⁸⁴ Bernard Bamberger offers *Shabbat* 2:5 as a second place. In the context of this discussion, *ruakh rah*, is included as a demon as it constitutes a supernatural being bent on doing damage or evil. In this case, as we will discuss in the context of amoraic texts, it is being used in a *halakhic* way. Bamberger points out that there are neither references to this text in *Tosefta* nor in either talmud and asks, "Is this significant?"⁸⁵ It seems to me that the fact that discussion of this is not

⁸² *M. Avot* 5:6 from Blackman, *Mishnayoth* vol. 4, 528.

⁸³ *M. Avot* 5:6 from Albeck, *Mishna* vol. 4, 376.

⁸⁴ Hillers, Delbert, Louis Rabinowitz, and Gershom Scholem. "Demons, Demonology." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 5. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 572-578. 22 vols. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Gale. HEBREW UNION COLLEGE. 28 Dec. 2009

⁸⁵ Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 276 note 59.

taken up in either Talmud is a bit of a quandary, given how often the rabbis are interested in talking about demons (especially in the Babylonian text). However, the fact that the point is not mentioned in the *Tosefta* is odd, given that instead the *Tosefta* mentions demons in a context that does not appear in *Mishnah*.

Curiously, in the *Tosefta*, demons do not show up as *mazikin*. Instead, they are called *sheidim* (a term which never appears in *Mishnah*). *Tosefta Shabbat* 7:23 states: “They do not whisper over a matter involving demons. R. Yoke says, ‘Even on an ordinary day they do not whisper over an object involving demons.’” Here the demons are provided for a *halakhic* motive (more on this in chapter three), as these words are intended to keep individuals from discussing evil matters. Still, these are not demons that are capable of forcing evil upon humanity, nor are they in opposition to God. They are defeatable by any Jew who does what the rabbis tell him/her to do. When demons appear in halakhic texts, it reveals the rabbis’ views on how the Jewish individual should behave.

In the tannaitic midrashim demons are described as more active and involved in the life of the Jew. They are more of an issue (in terms of textual portrayal) and they become more prevalent (as would be expected in midrashim as opposed to the *halakhic* texts like *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*). In the *Mekhilta Attributed to R. Ishmael*, demonological material is quite rare. However, Segal raises an important idea for this discussion. He shows that the *Mekhilta* clearly fights against Gnosticism.⁸⁶ This is different from the polemics we will find in the amoraic texts,

⁸⁶ Segal, *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity*, 2-6, 11-14.

which is an important factor because it may help to explain why there is an increased frequency of demonological stories in the later texts than here.

In the case of the *Mekhilta*, *Sifra*, and *Sifre* (both to Numbers and Deuteronomy), we find both *sheid* and *mazik* used to discuss demons. For the most part these discussions do not include any kind of communication between a demon and a human being. Instead, these demons are described as evil, and the discussions are usually *halakhic*—what to do or recite to keep them away, and the danger of not doing so properly. Specifically in *Sifre Deuteronomy*, discussion of a *sheid* comes out of exegesis of Deuteronomy 32:17. This verse in the *Tanakh* is often cited in that rabbinic text in conjunction with the idea of “*sheid*.” In general, demons in these texts are obviously evil beings who can be avoided through *halakhic* means.⁸⁷

Reciting the Shabbat Psalm, for instance, renders the demons ineffective according to *Sifra*.⁸⁸ Psalm 91:11, similarly, protects the individual from *mazikim*.⁸⁹ To be sure, the text of Psalm 91 as a whole is meant to protect one from any harm. At the same time, *Sifre Deuteronomy* discusses the idea that individuals can be possessed by demons, and the existence of those demons is proven by the Biblical text as well.⁹⁰ It says, “(Deut 32:24—‘*ketev meriri*’-According to your way it is taught that all who have a demon (*sheid*) in them are embittered.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ See the following texts (as examples):

ספרי דברים פסקא שו ד'ה דבר אחר
 ספרי דברים פסקא שיח ד'ה (יז) יזבח
 ספרי דברים פסקא שכא ד'ה וקטב מרירי
 ספרא בחוקותי פרשה א ד'ה פרק ב
 ספרי במדבר פסקא מ

⁸⁸ ספרא בחוקותי פרשה א ד'ה פרק ב

⁸⁹ ספרי במדבר פסקא מ

⁹⁰ ספרי דברים פסקא שכא ד'ה וקטב מרירי

⁹¹ My translation of ספרי דברים פסקא שכא ד'ה וקטב מרירי.

There are clearly some foundational things happening in these texts—the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, and the tannaitic midrashim—leading to the development of the rabbinic demonological stories of the Talmud. According to this development the creation of the demons is done by God alone. Also, there can be relief from demons via Jewish sources and *halakhah*. The fallen angel motif is absent from these texts, and they are all consistent with one another that God has the power; there is no other entity capable of combating God.

At the same time, demons exist in the world, and we begin to see the rabbis efforts to show the non-rabbi that rabbinic Judaism offers protection from them. We also begin to see an interchange of terminology in terms of *sheid* and *mazik*. There is no question that the rabbis were aware of the other sects of Judaism that were struggling for the loyalty of the Jewish community. All wished to address it based on the concerns of the day. Without question, demons were a concern and so we see stories of demons introduced in *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*, and grow in the texts of the tannaitic midrashim.

For now, the demonological texts have been limited to descriptions and explanations of what demons are and how to keep them away. This line of thinking continues into the amoraic text. However, it also develops into *stories*, which incorporate demons as characters and even involve communication between demons and human beings.

Chapter 3: Demons in Amoraic Literature

Complexity is created in examining the Jewish worldview in the amoraic period (200CE to 500CE) because the Jewish intellectual communities were located in two different places and therefore different trends developed in different cultural and religious milieus. After the completion of the *Mishnah* its text spread beyond the Palestinian Jewish community to Babylonia where the academies of Sura and Pumbedita became the centers of Jewish study.

The Palestinian Jewish community found itself surrounded by a mostly Christian (and often anti-Jewish) community after the mid-330s, while the Babylonian community was surrounded by Persian Zoroastrians (not nearly as anti-Jewish generally). Therefore, when looking at the texts where demons and human beings communicate, it is important to understand when the text was written and where it was written. Scholars decide this by taking into account many factors. These include the language of the text: what Hebrew forms are used, what kind of Aramaic is used, what loan-words can be found, what grammatical structures are used that are known to be common during some times and not others, and other similar linguistic features. In attempting to date and locate the text scholars also look to the content itself. If the text is repeated in another rabbinic work this may help to place where and when the texts were written (as the number of parallels between *Leviticus Rabbah* and *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* has led some to believe that the texts both come from the same academy around the same time⁹²). Finally, the

⁹² Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 290, 295.

names of the rabbis used in the text can sometimes help to identify the time and place. A text that cites a rabbi or a number of rabbis from certain periods can sometimes help us identify when that text was written. A text that uses a substantial majority of rabbis from a specific location was probably edited there.

As notions of demonology in Zoroastrianism are different from the demonology of the Christianity, when the reader attempts to analyze who the demon is and why he or she is present in the text, the answer *could* be based on the time period and the location of the author. The writing of the rabbinic texts proves the need of Jewish tradition to adapt and change, and it may be that the Jews' understanding of demonology adapted and changed differently based on the culture surrounding them. Below (chapter four) there will be a more in-depth look at Christian and Zoroastrian religious beliefs and cultures as they pertain to demons in order to properly analyze Jewish texts from this period.

The *Babylonian Talmud*, which remained the most authoritative rabbinic document for more than a millennium after its close, was completed in the middle of the sixth century.⁹³ Many of the other rabbinic texts examined here come from the Palestinian schools. The *Palestinian Talmud* was redacted before the middle of the fifth century.⁹⁴ Beyond the two Talmudim, various amoraic midrashim from Palestine include accounts of communication between humans and demons. These are: *Leviticus Rabbah*, ca. 400 CE; *Genesis Rabbah*, ca. 400 CE; *Lamentations Rabbah*, ca. 400 CE; *Peskita d'Rav Kahana*, ca. 500 CE; and *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ca. 550 CE.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid., 193-194.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 170-171.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 290-1, 279-80, 285-6, 295-6, 315-6, respectively.

From the sheer amount of Palestinian and Babylonian material on the subject, demons were on the minds of the Jewish sages no matter where they lived. Aryeh Azriel argues that this was because the demons and evil spirits were present in the mind of the lay Jew. "Before the sages were two choices: one choice was to attempt to stifle foreign myths and practices, a move which could drive followers to mysterious cults...The other choice was to reconcile and mutually coexist with a demonic world—while controlling and supervising it."⁹⁶ The hope was that by presenting a system in which demons were acknowledged but kept under control Jewishly, the common 'folk' Jew would have the support in his or her own religion with which to deal with the demons they already believed existed in the world.

There were some sages who argued that in fact the demons had no place in this world since the creation of the Tabernacle: "Rabbi Yohanan said: 'Before the tabernacle had been established, the demons would aggravate the beings of the world. When the tabernacle was established and the shechinah took up residence there, all of the demons of the world were eradicated. As it says, (Psalm 91:10) "No harm will befall you, no disease touch your tent." This is the Tent of Meeting.'"⁹⁷

Azriel argues that the goal of including demonological material in rabbinic works was to keep the Jew within the religious fold and to show off the power of the religion. If he is correct the rabbis did not necessarily believe in the existence of demons, but merely included them in rabbinic work for the sake of the laity. At the same time, demons probably really did exist for some if not most of the rabbis. To think that the tales they tell are entirely contrived and fabricated with the sole

⁹⁶ Azriel, *Satan in Rabbinic Literature*, 38.

⁹⁷ *Numbers Rabbah* 12:3 (my own translation).

purpose of ‘tricking’ the common Jew into following the rabbis does not make sense when talking about a world in which demons were real for so many people.

There seem to be three types of stories, which relate to demons and communication between them and human beings. These stories are (1) those with *halakhic* motive,⁹⁸ (2) those that seek to prove the powerlessness of demons over human beings,⁹⁹ and (3) those fantastical narratives where human beings and demons engage in significant communication and yet there seems to be no obvious ulterior motive for either party to engage in such communication.¹⁰⁰

Generally (in stories with or without communication), demons were used in a *halakhic* context for the same reasons no matter the sources. An illustration of this comes from *Babylonian Talmud Berakhot* 5a:

Rabbi Yitzchak*¹⁰¹ said: All that recite the bedtime *Sh'ma*, demons keep away from him, as it says (Job 5:7) “Man is born to trouble, the sons of Reshef fly (*uf*) upwards.” *Uf* is the Torah, as it says in Proverbs 23:5, “When your eyes *hitif* upon it, it is gone for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.” Reshef is demons, as it says in Deuteronomy 32:24, “A wasting (*Mazei*) hunger, a burning *Reshef* and *Ketev Meiriri* (the name of a Talmudic demon).¹⁰²

Those who allow the Torah to get away from them, who do not embrace the recitation of the *Sh'ma* just before laying down to sleep, open themselves up to demons. The method of *gezeirah shavah* is used to prove this.

⁹⁸ For the most part, these do not involve communication and therefore I will use a small sampling of examples but will not seek to describe all places where these appear in the rabbinic text.

⁹⁹ For this second type, I will only look to all those which involve communication between demons and human beings, as well as a sampling of others.

¹⁰⁰ I will attempt to fully describe all of those that involve this third type of story, as they all involve communication.

* Over the next several pages I will include information about various rabbinic authorities from the text in footnotes. This information will come from Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Within these footnotes, to be abbreviated SS, page number.

¹⁰¹ 3rd Generation Amora of Palestine who spent some time in Babylonia according to SS, 89.

¹⁰² *B. Berakhot* 5a (My own translation).

A parallel text is found in *Palestinian Talmud Berakhot* 1:1:

Rabbi Huna¹⁰³ in the name of Rabbi Joseph,¹⁰⁴ "For what reason is it said that an individual must recite Shema in his home in the evening? To cause the demons to flee."¹⁰⁵

It is not enough to say the *Sh'ma* at the evening service. The amoraim require that a Jew says the *Sh'ma* before bed as well. Their method for doing this is simple, if you do not abide by their judgment on this matter, the demons will get you while you sleep. Sleep is a dangerous time, when the body is not aware of what is happening in the physical world around it. This would be a very effective way to convince the typical Jew with a tendency towards folk religion that the practice *must* be done. They could have argued the *halakhic* merit of the recitation of the *Sh'ma* before bed, but perhaps that would have been less effective for the Jew who does not spend his or her day in the academy. Whether or not the sage believes that a demon will attack him should he not say the bedtime *Sh'ma* is inconsequential. However, the *halakhic* requirement would probably be enough for a rabbi to convince someone of its necessity.

Both the Babylonian and the Palestinian Talmuds make a point of saying the same thing. However, it should be pointed out that in this instance the rabbis cited are different, and the *Babylonian Talmud* goes into more detail to prove the point while the *Palestinian Talmud* leaves it at the opinion of Rabbi Joseph.

Another example where a demon is similarly used for *halakhic* purposes is found in the *Palestinian Talmud Gittin* 6:6. There the rabbis are in a discussion

¹⁰³ 4th generation amora from Palestine (though he traveled between Babylonia and Palestine according to SS, 94).

¹⁰⁴ Maybe a 3rd generation amora from Babylonia according to SS, 93.

¹⁰⁵ *P. Berakhot* 1:1 (My own translation).

concerning a situation in which a man falls into a pit and asks for anyone who hears him to write a writ of divorce for his wife (so that she may remarry).¹⁰⁶ “Rabbi Haninah¹⁰⁷ said, ‘the rule applies (it is permitted for the divorce to be written) in a case in which people say the shadow of a man.’” A bit further in the text, Rabbi Aha bar Haninah¹⁰⁸ in the name of Rabbi Haninah says, “[The writing of a divorce document based on the voice of a man in a pit when a shadow has been witnessed] applies to a case in a field. But as to what happens in a town, even though people did not see the shadow of a man, [the evidence is acceptable].”¹⁰⁹

The argument continues to go back and forth about whether the shadow of the man must be witnessed and we are left wondering what the reason for the discussion is. Then Rabbi Abin¹¹⁰ informs us, “Said Rabbi Abin, ‘Demons were as commonplace in pits as they were in fields.’” If a demon were to speak from the pit claiming to be a man and asking whoever heard to write a writ of divorce for a woman, there could be potential damage to that community. Therefore, the rabbis require that the witnesses verify there is indeed an actual man down in the pit (by witnessing his shadow).

What is the lesson? Be extremely careful when dealing with writs of divorce. Do what you can to ensure that you are not incidentally wreaking havoc on the community by enacting a *get* that was actually never intended.

¹⁰⁶ *P. Gittin* 6:6 from Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* Vol. II.B., 393. (Neusner’s translation used because of the *halakhic* understandings he imparts to the text in brackets).

¹⁰⁷ 1st generation amora who went to Palestine from Babylonia according to SS, 83.

¹⁰⁸ 3rd generation amora from Palestine who spent some time in Babylonia according to SS, 91.

¹⁰⁹ *P. Gittin* 6:6, from Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* Vol. II.B., 393.

¹¹⁰ 4th generation amora from Palestine who lived in Babylonia according to SS, 93.

A similar issue arises in *Babylonian Talmud Yebamot* 122a, where a man cries out from a hilltop that a specific person had died. When they went up to the top of the hill they found no one and yet they permitted the woman to remarry (*Mishnah*). Whereas the *gemara* in response to this *Mishnah* in the *Palestinian Talmud* goes into the *Gittin* passage about the pit, in the *Babylonian Talmud* the discussion goes into shadows and witnessing without reference to pits. Yet the demon is brought into it anyway: “Rabbi Haninah said, ‘the demon Jonathon told me that they have a shadow but not a shadow of a shadow. Is it not possible that it was a rival?’”

Important to note here is that the texts show two traditions of how Rabbi Haninah responded to the *Mishnah*. In the Palestinian text, Rabbi Haninah is portrayed as concerned with the situation vis-à-vis town and field. In Babylonia, Rabbi Haninah is portrayed as actually speaking with the demon named Jonathon (who only appears here in the texts¹¹¹) and having a conversation with him to find out the true nature of demons as it pertains to the case. It is as if in the *Palestinian Talmud* the situation takes on a more *halakhic* tone than the *Babylonian Talmud* does. It is widely known that this is often the case. “Although to a much lesser extent than *Babylonian Talmud*, *Palestinian Talmud* also includes midrashic material.”¹¹² More often, the Palestinian amoraim left aggadic material for the midrashim being compiled there, and the *Palestinian Talmud* is more *halakhic* in content. The *Babylonian Talmud* includes more midrash along with its *halakhah*.

Thus far, the authorities cited have been Rabbis Yitzchak, Huna, Joseph, Haninah, Aha bar Haninah, and Abin. All of these are amoraim. Rabbi Joseph is

¹¹¹ Dennis, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic and Mysticism*, 138.

¹¹² Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 178.

potentially the third generation amora from Babylonia. The other five rabbis are all from Palestine. Yitzchak is a third generation amora from Palestine, Huna is fourth generation, Haninah is first generation, Aha bar Haninah is third generation, and Abin is fourth generation. However, *all* of these Palestinian authorities spent time in, traveled between, or moved from Babylonia. Rabbi Haninah, who moved from Palestine to Babylonia, even appears in both texts above. Notably, this is the first time thus far that there has been direct communication reported between a human being and a demon. While demons are often referenced in passages meant to define proper practice or procedure, those passages do not often involve communication. Is it significant that in the Babylonian *Yebamot* passage there is communication between a demon and human being, but not in the *Palestinian Talmud* passage? It is not clear. But it will become obvious by the end of the chapter that in some ways, the Babylonian rabbis have a more creative imagination when it comes to demons.

However, the following example from the *Palestinian Talmud* shows that in Palestinian texts too, demons and human beings could communicate. It also shows (like the texts about the *Sh'ma* above) that while some rabbinic demonology involves *halakhic* motivations, other texts are there to show the power that humanity can have over demons. The *Palestinian Talmud Berakhot* 5:1 says:

Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai taught, "And all the people of the earth shall see [that you are called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of you]" (Deuteronomy 28:10). "All"—even the spirits and even the demons [shall be afraid of you]. Rabbi Yannai and Rabbi Yohanan were walking down the street when they saw one [demon]. It greeted them and said to them, "May your peace be increased." They said, "It even addressed us in friendly terms! It cannot do us any harm!"¹¹³

¹¹³ *P. Berakhot* 5:1 from Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* Vol. I: *Berakhot*, 199. (This translation used because of the Aramaic in the text).

The authority commenting on the Deuteronomic text (Simeon bar Yohai) and the characters of the story (Rabbis Yannai and Yohanan) are all from Palestine. Simeon is a third generation tanna. On the other hand, Yannai and Yohanan are both amoraim, Yannai was of the first generation and was Yohanan's teacher.

Another place in Palestinian rabbinic text where human beings communicate with demons (or in this case an "evil spirit") can be found in *Tanhuma Buber* (Kedoshim 9), or in a parallel version in *Leviticus Rabbah* 24:3. In the *Tanhuma* version the character of the story is Rabbi Yosi, a third generation amora from Babylonia, and the narrator is Rabbi Berakhya, a fifth generation Amora from Palestine. In the *Leviticus Rabbah* version, the story's character is Abba Yosi, the third generation tanna, and the narrator is also Berakhya.

Davar Acher: You shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy. 'May He send you help from the Holy/Sanctuary, support from Zion (Psalm 20:2).' Rabbi Berakhya in the name of Rabbi Simon said, 'It happened in *Kartani* to Aba Yosi a man of Tzitur that he was sitting and studying at a spring when a spirit (*ruah*) appeared to him as it was dwelling there. It said to him, 'Do you know how many years I've dwelled here?! And you and your women come and go in the evening and in the afternoon, and you have never been injured (by me). You should know that an evil spirit (*ruah rah*) now wants to dwell here, and it *will* do harm to creatures (humans).' Aba Yosi responded, 'So what should we do?' The spirit said, 'Go and warn the people of the city and say to them that anyone who has a goad or a tool for striking should get it ready. And have everyone come here tomorrow at dawn and the surface of the water can be seen. And when you can see the bubbling/ripples of the surface of the water, you will strike the iron of your tools together and say, 'Victory is ours!' And do not leave from here until you can see a pinpoint of blood on the surface of the water.'

'Aba Yosi went and warned the people of the city and said to them [everything the spirit told him to say—anyone who has a goad or a tool for striking should get it ready. And have everyone come here tomorrow at dawn and the surface of the water can be seen. And when you can see the bubbling/ripples of the surface of the water, you will strike the iron of your tools together and say, 'Victory is ours! Victory is ours!' And do not leave from here until you can see a pinpoint of blood on the surface of the water.]

[*Kal v'khomer*] If this is the case in this instance, where spirits (*rukhot*) that were not created to need any help need help, how much the more so do we who were created to need assistance!¹¹⁴

There are two interactions taking place within this story. The first is the communication between Aba Yosi and the spirit who reveals knowledge on how to kill a demon. The second (which is more important when looking at communication between human beings and demons) is the interaction between the evil spirit and the people of the town. Here we have the notion that the community, not just a learned rabbi, has power over the evil. In both versions of the story the rabbi has to gain the aid of the people of the town to drive away the demon from the spring. This is done through the pandemonium of banging tools together and chanting “victory is ours!” This in itself, without physical contact, draws blood from the demon and eventually defeats him so that the peaceful benign spirit can continue to dwell in peace.

This interaction is a little different from other stories we have in the amoraic text. There is no conversation or back-and-forth between the demon and human beings. The relationship between the demon and human beings exists entirely in the negative, in the attempt and successful killing of the demon. This story aligns with what is typically expected from demon stories. The demon is the evil character to be defeated and the people hopefully succeed and avert disaster. This also fits in with the ancient Jewish text of the Torah where demons are viewed negatively along with idols and false-gods.

¹¹⁴ *Leviticus Rabbah* 24:3 (My own translation).

As is seen in stories where humans and demons interact, it is typical for the Palestinian amoraim to view demons as evil. Despite this they do not receive the same intense negativity as idols or false-gods. Even innocent Jews come in contact with the demons and are able to overcome them. *Genesis Rabbah*, a Palestinian midrash from around 400 or 450 CE,¹¹⁵ tells of a story where the most innocent of innocents, a newborn child, is engaged by the demon Shimadon.

It happened once that a mother bore a child in the night. She said to her son, "Go light a lamp to cut your navel cord." He went and met the demon Shimadon. The demon said, "Go tell your mother that the rooster has crowed. If the rooster had not crowed I would have smitten and killed you." He responded, "Go and tell your mother that my navel cord has not been cut, or I would have smitten and killed you."¹¹⁶

The infant lacks strength or else he could have defeated the demon, and the demon lacks strength or else he could have defeated the child. This demon is the same that convinces Noah to go fifty-fifty on his vineyard with him two paragraphs later in *Genesis Rabbah*, but does not seem to appear anywhere else in the textual tradition of the amoraic period.¹¹⁷ This story accentuates not only the activity of demons: to wreak havoc on *anyone* and to cause pain or death (both Shimadon and the evil spirit of the previous text could have killed if they had their ways), but also the fact that demons' powers are limited. This is perhaps why they tend to attack when their potential victim has some kind of vulnerability: while asleep, in a secluded place, newly born, etc. Therefore certain actions or circumstances are recommended by the rabbis to render demons almost entirely powerless. In this

¹¹⁵ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 279.

¹¹⁶ *Genesis Rabbah* 36:1 (My own translation).

¹¹⁷ *Genesis Rabbah* 36:3—Shimadon and Noah become partners in the vineyard that Noah has planted, and so long as Noah does not trespass on Shimadon's section, he will be safe.

story we learn directly from the demon that he is only capable of doing his will at night. With the rooster having crowed night has ended and the demon can do nothing but make threats; threats that even a newborn infant (who can talk and walk and light a lamp) does not fear. It is important to note that this is the one example of communication between human being and demon that does not involve a rabbi or biblical hero. The other rabbinic stories of this type all involve demons and rabbis engaging one another (where King Solomon is understood as a rabbi himself). In this instance the protagonist is a child.

Certain actions or words which call upon divine protection render demons powerless. We saw that this is the case at the beginning of the chapter. In saying the *Sh'ma*, both according to *Babylonian Talmud* and *Palestinian Talmud*, demons are rendered powerless against sleeping individuals.

The ultimate proof of this comes from our last selection of Palestinian Aramaic texts, *Song of Songs Rabbah*, which comes from the middle of the sixth century. "All give aid to honor the King of Kings, The Holy One Blessed be God, even spirits, even demons (*sheidim*), and even the ministering angels."¹¹⁸ It is important to keep this in mind when discussing the demons of the rabbinic text. Demons exist by the grace of God, not in opposition to Him. Their limits may be enforced by God, but limits may also be placed upon them by those who are righteous. This is where the search for stories where demons and human beings in amoraic literature leaves Palestine and enters the *Babylonian Talmud*.

¹¹⁸ *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:5 (My own translation).

In the Talmud from Babylonia the demons' powerlessness in the face of the pious is accentuated. In fact, according to rabbinic tradition, demons used to go about the world at will, without limits on time or place. That is, of course, until the rabbis came along to stop them.

It is taught on tannaitic authority, do not go out alone at night. Neither on Wednesday nights nor on Shabbat nights, because of Igrat daughter of Makhalat. She and 180,000 destructive angels go out and every one of them causes destruction on his own. At first they would be found every day. One time she met Rabbi Haninah ben Dosa. She said to him, 'If it hadn't been said about you in the heavens to be careful of Haninah and his learning, I would have caused you harm.' He replied, 'If I am important in the heavens, I decree that you shall not pass through settled areas.' She said back to him, 'I pray you, leave me a little space!' So he left her Shabbat nights and Wednesday nights. And it happened once that Abaye met her. She said to him, 'If it hadn't been said about you in the heavens to beware of Nahmani and his learning, I would have caused you harm.' He replied to her, 'If I am important in the heavens, I decree upon you that you shall not pass through settled areas.' But we see that she does come through [those areas]. These are the [113a] narrow paths which horses break loose through [bringing demons into civilized places through them].¹¹⁹

Communication between rabbis and a queen of the demons, Igrat the daughter of Makhalat, confines her not only to time but also place. But this is not the only instance where communication can have such an effect upon a demon. Just before the interaction between Haninah and Igrat, the reader of the *Babylonian Talmud* is taught how to avoid the demons of the water. A man who is thirsty and needs to drink from a river or a pool at night learns here to say: "Beware of Shabrîre, Shabrîre, berîre, rîre, îre, re."¹²⁰ As the word disappears with each properly

¹¹⁹ *B. Pesachim* 112b (My own translation).

¹²⁰ *B. Pesachim* 112a (My own translation).

executed recitation, so too does the demon. Evidence of such practices continued into at least the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.¹²¹

This magical incantation is supposed to protect the Jew from the demon that threatens him when he approaches a body of water at night for a drink. This type of communication, warding away demons, is not only present in Babylonia. In the *Palestinian Talmud* such a practice is known: “They do not recite a verse [of Scripture] for a wound on the Sabbath. The formula which is recited against Yebrohah is forbidden [on the Sabbath].”¹²² There is no reason to prohibit such an activity unless it was known. There is also no reason to prohibit such an activity unless there is no risk to human life. Clearly a demon’s power is limited on Shabbat to the point that there is no concern for life of the injured person. In both situations (Yabrohah and Shabrire), the healing of a wound and the drinking of water, a rabbi is not required. The voicing of the magical formula by anyone is enough (if done correctly) to “scare” or ward off a demon. These examples of communication suggest that anyone can have power over a demon. Not only through proper prayer in a traditional sense, but also through magical formulae, like the amulets found in the Cairo Genizah which date from the Middle Ages “but they follow the tradition of Palestinian Jewish magical texts of Late Antiquity.”¹²³ One such formula is written on an amulet found in the Cairo Genizah, which states:

In the name of He who was, is and will be...Further, I adjure you and command you, you all kinds of male and female demons, male and female liliths, evil spirits, male and female causers of harm...And in particular you,

¹²¹ B. Barry Levy, *Planets Potions and Parchments*, 85 and 90.

¹²² *P. Shabbat* 6:2; (see also *P. Eruvin* 10:11) (My own translation).

¹²³ Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, 12.

the seven spirits, concerning whom Ashmedai, the king of the demons, instructed King Solomon; (spirits) that enter the entrails of women and spoil their offspring.¹²⁴

This amulet intended for an individual to wear or carry with them, exemplifies the intonation of divine power to keep away demons from a pregnant woman.

Returning to the rabbinic text itself, however, most often it is the rabbis who have interactions with demons in the rabbinic literature (they were the ones writing the text after all). Another story of interaction between a demon and a human being appears in *B. Kiddushin 29b*:

R. Jacob, son of R. Aha b. Jacob, was once sent by his father [to study] under Abaye. On his return, he [his father] saw that his learning was dull. "I am better than you," said he to him; "do you [now] remain here, so that I can go." Abaye heard that he was coming. Now, a certain demon haunted Abaye's schoolhouse, so that when [only] two entered, even by day, they were injured. He [Abaye] ordered, "Let no man afford him hospitality; perhaps a miracle will happen [in his merit]." So he [R. Aha b. Jacob] entered and spent the night in that schoolhouse, during which it [the demon] appeared to him in the guise of a seven-headed dragon. Every time he [the Rabbi] fell on his knees [in prayer] one head fell off. The next day he reproached them: "Had not a miracle occurred, you would have endangered my life."¹²⁵

Rabbi Aha bar Jacob survived his encounter with the haunting demon not through magical incantation or special powers but through prayer. Again the Talmud expresses how the demon may be restricted. The lesson is that demons are rendered powerless by human beings via proper action (usually righteous, *halakhic*, Jewish behavior).

The last type of story involving communication between demons and human beings occurs in the *Babylonian Talmud*. It is less often about *halakhic* motivations

¹²⁴ Ibid., 156-157.

¹²⁵ *B. Kiddushin 29b- The Soncino Talmud* translation (Translation used due to amount of Aramaic in the text).

or about accentuating the powerlessness of the demons in regards to the awesome spiritual power of the rabbi (or the individual who says and does the right thing). In these tales the demon is a character like any other and is sometimes not even strikingly evil! The majority of the above interactions are, on the face of it, easily comprehended from a rabbinic point of view. The motivations for the next four tales are more complicated to explain.

Abaye said: "At first I thought the reason why one does not sit under a drainpipe was that there was waste water there, but my Master has told me. It is because demons are to be found there."

Certain carriers were once carrying a barrel of wine. Wishing to take a rest they put it down under a drainpipe, whereupon the barrel burst, so they came to Mar son of R. Ashi. He brought forth trumpets and exorcised the demon that now stood before him. [He said to the demon], "Why did you do such a thing?" [The demon] replied. "What else could I do, seeing that they put it down on my ear?" The other [Mar son Of R. Ashi] retorted: "What business had you in a public place? It is you that are in the wrong, you must therefore pay for the damage." Said the [demon], "Will the Master give me a time wherein to pay?" A date was fixed. When the day arrived, he defaulted. He came to court and [Mar b. R. Ashi] said to him, "Why did you not keep your time?" He replied. "We have no right to take away anything that is tied up sealed, measured or counted; but only if we find something that has been abandoned."¹²⁶

Of course, the demon is supposed to be the antagonist. He has no place dwelling in a town. At the same time the barrel carriers should have known better than placing their burden under a drainpipe (whether or not they knew that a demon would dwell there, why would you put a barrel down where dirty waste water flowed?).

So Mar, the son of Rabbi Ashi, exorcises the demon from the place and then has a conversation with him. Insisting that the demon is in the wrong he expects payment. What happens when the demon cannot pay? The demon itself comes into

¹²⁶ *B. Chullin* 105b. *The Soncino Talmud* translation (Translation used due to amount of Aramaic in the text).

Mar's court! An honest demon? Surely an individual who cannot pay a fine would avoid the court? Instead, this demon comes in and explains his situation. There the story ends and so begins the next one told by the same Rabbi Abaye.

And Abaye said, "At first I reasoned that they pour off water from the mouth of a ewer because of the debris [floating on the surface of the water]. But then my master said to me that they did it on account of water contaminated [by demons at the surface]."

There was a demon (*shidah*) in the house of R. Pappa who went to draw water from the river. It was delayed in returning. When it came back, they asked it, "What delayed you?" It said to them, "I waited for the contaminated water to flow away [before I drew water for you]." (106a) Just then he saw that they were pouring off water from the mouth of the ewer [before drinking from it]. It said, "Had I known that you were accustomed to do this I would not have been delayed [waiting for the contaminated water to flow off]." ¹²⁷

Again the character of the demon in this story is mixed. Obviously the entity is supposed to be a demon as the Aramaic version of Hebrew *sheid* is used. However, the demon's error is that it takes too long to bring back water out of concern for its human master! Rabbi Pappa has the power to make the demon his water-drawing servant. This is a servant whose concern for humanity overwhelms its desire to complete its task. A demon with a human master and concern for humanity? It may seem unusual and in fact, it is. This is the only instance in our stories where a demon has a human master (though the next story will share the characteristic of a demon who concerns himself with making a sacrifice for humans).

These stories seem simply aggadic. There is no lesson to be learned about proper Jewish behavior. Nor do the stories overwhelmingly accentuate a power-dynamic. The third such story causes even more of a problem as it describes the

¹²⁷ B. *Chullin* 105b-106a (My own translation).

selfless act of Ben Temalion, a demon, who helps prominent rabbis get anti-Jewish decrees annulled:

[Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, Rabbi Yose, and Rabbi Eliezer bar Yose¹²⁸ were on the road to Rome to get the decrees against Shabbat, circumcision, and requiring intercourse with menstruant women annulled.] Then Ben Temalion came to meet them. [He said]: "Is it your wish that I accompany you?" Thereupon R. Simeon wept and said: "The handmaid of my ancestor's house was found worthy of meeting an angel thrice, and I not even to meet him once. However, let the miracle be performed, no matter how." Thereupon [Ben Temalion] advanced and entered into the Emperor's daughter. When [R. Simeon] arrived there, he called out: "Ben Temalion leave her, Ben Temalion leave her," and as he proclaimed this he left her. [The Emperor] said to them: "Request whatever you desire." They were led into the treasure house to take whatever they chose. They found that bill, took it and tore it to pieces.¹²⁹

Not only is the demon Ben Temalion presented having a complex character (rather than as purely evil), he is actually responsible for saving Shabbat, circumcision and family purity for the Jewish people under Rome's rule. This story does not help the rabbis prove the requirement of a certain practice, nor does it serve to prove the power of the rabbis. This seems to be unique amongst the rabbinic tales in which human beings and demons communicate. There is no obvious motive to the story. Perhaps it serves to show the strength of the rabbis. Maybe it shows just how important the performance of the commandments was.

The last tale of interaction between humans and demons in the rabbinic texts centers on the king of the demons, Ashmedai. He interacts with King Solomon and it

¹²⁸ All tannaim, Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 65-83.

¹²⁹ *B. Meila* 17a-b (My own translation).

is with his coerced help that King Solomon is able to acquire the *Shamir*, which enables the construction of the Temple.¹³⁰

King Solomon has a male and a female demon captured and brought to him. They tell him that the mythic *Shamir's* (either a creature or a tool capable of cutting through stone) location is known to Ashmedai. When asked where to find this king of the demons, they tell him that he studies every day in the academy of the heavens and then comes down and studies in the academy of the earth. King Solomon's servant, Benaiah, tricks Ashmedai into getting drunk and falling asleep. He then brings him to Jerusalem. There Ashmedai waits for three days until he is allowed to see King Solomon. When he is finally brought in Ashmedai reminds King Solomon that one day he will die and his power over this world will be limited to the four cubits that will be his grave. King Solomon is not threatened and asks for the Shamir. At this point Ashmedai tells Solomon that the Shamir is not in his power but is instead in the power of the "Prince of the Sea" who has given it to the woodpecker. The woodpecker uses it to help obtain food. So the King sends Benaiah again, this time to find the woodpecker's nest. He obtains the Shamir from the woodpecker. During the construction of the Temple King Solomon continues to hold Ashmedai in his palace. At some point Ashmedai convinces King Solomon to unchain him. He then swallows Solomon and spits him far away. King Solomon begs, saying "I, Koheleth, was king of Israel" and no one believes him. In the meantime Ashmedai pretends to be King Solomon. Solomon eventually comes to the Sanhedrin and in

¹³⁰ *B. Gittin* 68a-b. The Shamir is a legendary worm with the mystical power to cut rock by merely touching it. This is the aggadic explanation for how the giant stones of the Temple structure could be cut the way they are.

their wisdom they identify which is the true Solomon. With renewed power, and having an engraved ring with the Name of God on it, Solomon drives Ashmedai away and he “remained in fear of him.”¹³¹

There are three fairly well delineated types of rabbinic stories where human beings and demons interact. The first consists of stories which seek to stress the *halakhic* import of a certain action or type of behavior. This is common outside of stories involving this kind of communication as well. The second type involving communication clearly seeks to accentuate the power of the human over the demon. The third type appears only in the *Babylonian Talmud* during this time and have no obvious reason for having been told. It is possible that Azriel’s conjecture is correct and these stories would prove his point:

The sages, attempting to keep ... the demons within their jurisdiction, tried to demonstrate publicly their own relationships with the spiritual realm. The sages wanted to be role models for the Jews; they wished to demonstrate that they too had to contend with worldly evil and its agents, and in so doing, establish their credibility (in the eyes of the Jews) as authorities on the subject of demonology. To bolster their image as “communicators” with Satan, demons, and evil spirits, the sages pointed out not only that the connections existed, but they also took great care to mention the frequency, the intensity, and the nature of those connections. If the sages could win the confidence of the Jews regarding Satan and evil, and could come to be thought of as authorities in such matters, then the sages could control the beliefs and perceptions of their constituents. At the same time, they could prevent the Jews from being enticed by “outsiders” religious and moral interpretations of Satan.¹³²

Looking into the time and place in which they are being written, the surrounding culture (and their beliefs regarding demonology) may help to inform and explain its purpose. As Joshua Tractenberg notes:

¹³¹ *B. Gittin* 68a-b (My own summary of the text).

¹³² Azriel, *Satan in Rabbinic Literature*, 105-106.

Talmudic Jewry owned a highly elaborated demonology, distinguishing between classes and even individuals, with a wealth of detail concerning the nature and pursuits of the evil spirits. Its elements grew naturally out of the fertile popular imagination, convinced as it was of the reality of the spirit world, and fortified by a rich tradition drawn largely from the folklores of Egypt and Babylonia and Persia.¹³³

These stories all seem to give the Jew the ability to cope with the existence of an evil spiritual realm. Some of the tales teach the rabbinic Jew how to acquire power, while others show the extent of rabbinic power. They are able to communicate with demons without any concern of anything evil happening. Trachtenberg points out that these stories are potentially informed through traditions of other peoples and places. It is important now to turn to examine the cultures which may have influenced rabbinic stories about communicating with demons.

¹³³ Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 30.

Chapter 4: Influences and Demons

Thus far the goal has been to survey Jewish demonology and its transition from the biblical period to the amoraic period based on textual sources and the cultural influences which shaped them. Likewise, material where demons and human beings communicate has been examined. With a fuller understanding of demons in these texts from the rabbinic periods, the possible non-rabbinic cultural influences on the rabbis and their communities can be explained. By looking at the cultures of tannaitic Palestine, amoraic Palestine and amoraic Babylonia, we may be able to discern where the rabbis themselves adapted to surrounding culture, and where they defined Judaism *against* it. This will help in the task of discerning the purpose behind our Talmudic stories of communication between human beings and demons (especially the fantastical narratives).

In the tannaitic period pagan Rome was in control of Palestine. This religion and culture continued there until Constantine's exertion of Christianity when he came to rule in 324 CE.¹³⁴ However, this is not to say that Roman paganism was the only influence on the Jews before this time as early Christianity began to increase in popularity earlier than this. Later, during the amoraic period in Palestine, the Jews confronted potential Christian influence.

In amoraic Babylonia Zoroastrianism was the most likely influence on the Jews. Having become the religion of the Iranian empire in the 6th Century BCE,¹³⁵ there was a Zoroastrian renewal with the Sassanian dynasty's rule of Persia starting

¹³⁴ Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 206.

¹³⁵ Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 102.

in 224 CE¹³⁶ or 226 CE.¹³⁷ (The potential influences of Gnostic sects, based on the texts that still survive today, were discussed in depth in Chapter Two.)

As has been shown, the amount of demonological material in the amoraic sources as compared to the tannaitic ones is vast, especially when looking at texts where demons and humans communicate. “The Mishnah is almost wholly halakhic [...] Then again, it was conceived and put to writing at a period when Jews were very exclusive. In later times the Jews settled numerous in Babylonia, Persia and Egypt, and contact with other religions would make them broader and more ready to adopt new principles and practices.”¹³⁸

The purpose here is not to write a thesis on the influences of Paganism, early Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Gnosticism on Rabbinic Jewry.¹³⁹ Instead the goal is to summarize the scholarship up to this point on these subjects. This will help with understanding the influences that could have been acting upon the Jews of the tannaitic and amoraic periods especially as pertains to demonology. It will clarify whether the rabbis were inventing anew or adapting others’ demonology in their own tales (as per the discussion in Chapter One).

Tannaitic Palestine

In this period there was significant religious development in the area. Both in Rome and in Babylonia religions were changing. “Perhaps the most significant

¹³⁶ Haywood, *Cassell Atlas of World History*, 2.41.

¹³⁷ Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 218.

¹³⁸ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 109.

¹³⁹ For work much more scholarly and informative than mine on the subject, see James Barr, *The Question of Religious Influence: The Case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity*, Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*, Ioan P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis*, Maureen Bloom, *Jewish Mysticism and Magic*, Moore, *History of Religions*, and others quoted in this chapter.

changes in outlook, culture and society in the third and fourth centuries of our era in the Roman and the Sassanian worlds were the changes in religion which marked the end of the old 'pagan' religions and the flowering of 'universal' religions."¹⁴⁰

'Universal' means that the religions and their gods were seen as capable of crossing borders, or rather that borders were no longer relevant to these theologies. This may help to explain why the tannaim were not overly concerned about the religious influence of others and were more exclusive (as was stated above). Living in their home, Palestine, they remained on "home turf" and may have felt little need to acknowledge alternative religious principles and views. With the Jerusalem Temple's destruction by Rome only a few generations before, the basic struggle for survival in the face of the "enemy" and the difficulty of creating Judaism without a Temple-cult may have left little room for the influence of Pagan Rome. This is not to mention, of course, the bitter feelings the Jews had for Rome in the first place.

The existence of demons in *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, and tannaitic midrashim was motivated by *halakhic* concerns. It therefore need not be heavily influenced by the outside world, especially considering the exclusivity of the rabbis at this time. At the same time pagan Rome was a place where there were spirits and gods at every turn in the mind of the population. Coming out of the tradition of Homer and Greek and Roman mythology, it would not be a surprise for the Jews to take in and adapt some demonology (or simply the religious notion of multiple spiritual forces) of pagan society. However, they had little impetus to seriously consider any religious

¹⁴⁰ Frye, "The Sassanians," *Cambridge Ancient History* Second Edition, Volume 12, 474.

influences from their pagan neighbors. “Paganism was what it was, lacking all differentiation to the Jewish eye.”¹⁴¹

Amoraic Palestine

This changed as the amoraim of Palestine began their work. There are many references to demons in the Palestinian amoraic literature such as stories that allude to the power of the rabbis (and common Jews) over demons (including those cited above from *Genesis Rabbah*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, and the *Palestinian Talmud*). These, like the Babylonian texts, build from the very limited demonology of the tannaitic period. It is therefore possible that it too was influenced by the surrounding culture. This period in Palestine saw the rise of Christianity from an early Jewish sect to a separate religious movement, the decline of pagan Rome, and the continued existence of Gnostic groups. While paganism was not extremely attention grabbing for the Jews of the time, “Christianity was something else. It was different. Why? Because it was like Judaism.”¹⁴² This was especially evident around 360 CE when emperor Julian re-established paganism as the state religion and “to embarrass Christianity, he permitted the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem, but he died before much progress could be made.”¹⁴³ There was inherent theological disagreement between Christianity and Judaism at this time, but Judaism was not in conflict with paganism in the same way.

¹⁴¹ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 103.

¹⁴² Ibid., 103.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 102.

“Well into the second century other Jews regarded Christians as Jews, albeit Jews with strange beliefs about the prophet Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁴⁴ Coming out of the tradition of Jubilees and Enoch, that the fallen angels had produced demons here on earth and that there was an evil force (*Mastema*/Devil)¹⁴⁵ attempting to subvert the will of God, the early Christians took a different direction regarding demons from rabbinic Jews.¹⁴⁶

Whereas the rabbis described the creation of demons on the eve of the Sabbath (*Mishnah Avot* 5:6), the Christians held to the “fallen angel” legend based on interpretations of Genesis 6:1-4. Christianity also accepted a belief in the evil angels of 1 Enoch, leading to the conclusion that “human wickedness is inspired and directed by mighty angels who have rebelled against God [...] which the authoritative teachers of Judaism dropped altogether [from the canon].”¹⁴⁷

It also embraced an evil force, a “Satan” quite different from “the satan” who is found in the *Tanakh* and in rabbinic literature, who Jesus would have to control and restrain.¹⁴⁸ The notion that Jesus’s role was to fight the demons was a clear departure from Jewish belief. It points to the idea that God could not adequately control the demonic realm alone and therefore they, and Satan their leader, were a direct threat. Norman Cohn writes about the role of Jesus in fighting against demons:

It was generally believed that physical and mental sickness alike were manifestations of Satan’s power. Physical illness was God’s punishment for

¹⁴⁴ Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 195.

¹⁴⁵ Jub. 10:8 (RSV)

¹⁴⁶ Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 55 and 105.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴⁸ Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 195.

sin—but it was Satan who seduced human beings to sin in the first place. Mental disorder was the result of demonic possession—but again, the demons were Satan’s assistants. God had given Jesus power over demons—as they themselves recognized, crying, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” (Mark 1:24) And because demons belonged to the Satanic hosts, each casting out of a demon was seen as a successful assault on Satan’s realm.¹⁴⁹

In this way, the Gnostic groups and the Christians were similar. For the Gnostics, the demons were a part of the evil realm controlled by the second power. For the Christians, the demons were under the control of the rival power Satan. Either way, they were the host of a leader who sought to defeat God. This notion would have been difficult for the rabbis to accept. To counter the Christian notion that there were demons to rival the power of God, the rabbis of the *Palestinian Talmud* said, “Even the spirits and even the demons [shall be afraid of God].”¹⁵⁰

Clearly for Jews, as portrayed in the *Palestinian Talmud*, demons were much more present and on the forefront of their minds than they were for the tannaitic rabbis of the *Mishnah*. However, there is no evidence from the stories where demons and humans communicate that there was a belief in a secondary power contending for rule. These demons were subject to the rule of God and to the actions of the pious Jew.

Bernard Bamburger points out: “Where did demons come from? According to many apocalypses, the demons issued from the bodies of the giants whom the wicked angels had engendered with the daughters of men. *This opinion never*

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 196.

¹⁵⁰ *P. Berakhot* 1:1 see Chapter Three for full text.

appears in the Talmud sources."¹⁵¹ Instead, the demons were created by God during the creation of the world (on the eve of the sixth day).¹⁵²

When one looks more specifically at the early Christian texts such as the *Synoptic Gospels* and *Revelations*, and the Gnostic texts like *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, it appears that the amoraic rabbis were defining themselves *against* Gnosticism and Christianity.¹⁵³ If there is no Satan and if the hosts of demons are controllable by God, and by the pious Jew, then in fact the apocalyptic texts and the need for the return of Jesus are both negated. This still does not answer the question of whether the rabbis themselves subscribed to the demonology they espoused. However, it makes sense for them to advocate such a demonology especially in the face of outside influence upon the typical Jewish non-rabbi. They would not want Jews to feel rabbinic Judaism was incapable of calming the fear a demon-legend could induce.

This interplay between Judaism and Christianity and the influence that Christianity had on Judaism cannot be overstated. During the fourth century CE many things were changing within Judaism including its fundamental religious structure. At the same time the rabbis continued to advocate for Judaism as the religion that would help the Jew and keep him or her along the right track to a good life (not to mention the world to come).¹⁵⁴ According to Jacob Neusner, during this time "Christianity accounts for change in Judaism."¹⁵⁵ While Jews remained a

¹⁵¹ Bamburgher, *Fallen Angels*, 105—italics original to his work.

¹⁵² *M. Avot* 5:6.

¹⁵³ See Chapter Two for a look at the Christian and Gnostic texts with regard to Demons.

¹⁵⁴ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 99.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

“defeated nation,” they also faced an entirely different situation in terms of regional leadership and power.¹⁵⁶ This is because Christianity proclaimed itself to, “Possess the sole religious truth.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, in the decade after 313CE, “Converts from Judaism were protected and could not be punished by Jews. Christians were freed from the obligation to perform pagan sacrifices. Priests were exempted from certain taxes. Sunday became the obligatory day of rest. Celibacy was permitted.”¹⁵⁸

Some argue, in fact, that “The (re)emergence of Jewish society in late antiquity was...a by-product of the emergence of a Christian society in the Roman Empire at the same time.”¹⁵⁹ The idea that Christianity’s development into a powerhouse religion led to the development of Judaism and Jewish society at the time suggests that Christianity, anti-Christianity, or at least the struggle to hold onto Jews, touched the very fabric of the sages’ mind. Jacob Neusner argues that during this period in Palestine, there were five events of serious importance to Judaism:

These were as follows: (1) the conversion of Constantine; (2) the fiasco of Julian’s plan to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem; (3) the depaganization of the Roman Empire, a program of attacks on pagan temples and, along the way, synagogues; (4) the Christianization of the majority of the population in Palestine; and (5) the creation of the Talmud of the Land of Israel and of the earlier compositions of scriptural exegeses, symbolized by Genesis Rabbah.”¹⁶⁰

Thus, Christianity had an enormous influence upon the amoraim and their texts in Palestine. If such an influence could shape the very fabric of what it meant to be a

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁵⁷ Stroumsa, “Religious Contacts in Byzantine Palestine,” from *Numen* Vol. 36 No. 1, 23.

¹⁵⁸ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 101.

¹⁵⁹ Schwartz, *Some Types of Jewish-Christian Interaction*, 204.

¹⁶⁰ Neusner, *Formation of Judaism*, 103.

Jew at the time, there can be no question about its seepage to the specific issues addressed in the text. Whether the rabbis were concerned about marriage and divorce, circumcision, God, or demons, they were inherently affected by Christianity. Whether they wrote their demonology consciously or unconsciously based on concerns they had with Christianity, it must have influenced them. There does not seem to be a large amount of demon-human communication texts in these materials, so while the idea of demons and human beings does not necessarily come out of a non-Jewish tradition in Palestine, the lessons behind the stories involving communication surely do.

Amoraic Babylonia

In Babylonia the rise of the Sassanians to power meant the renewal and reinforcement of Zoroastrianism as the state religion. Before this Zoroastrianism had been present and was familiar to the people, however it was the Sassanian rulers who re-exerted its authority at a state level. Despite this, Jews and Persians lived mostly peacefully throughout the amoraic period.¹⁶¹

The Religion of Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism stems from the Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Greek-Zoroaster) who may have lived in the middle of the sixth century BCE, though increasing evidence shows he may have lived between 1500 and 1200 BCE.¹⁶² Zarathustra began as the priest of the traditional Iranian religion until he had the

¹⁶¹ Elman, "Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, 165.

¹⁶² Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 77.

vision of the great god Ahura Mazda (Lord of Wisdom). This religion eventually came to Western Iran by the seventh century BCE. Zoroastrianism continued to flourish in the area despite the conquering of the empire by Alexander the Great.¹⁶³

Zoroastrianism's sacred scriptures are known as the *Avesta*. Ahura Mazda was understood as "the wholly wise, just and good" and he was "the one and only god." However the "principle of falsehood or distortion, a force of disorder, incessantly at work in the world" was the great enemy of Ahura Mazda. This was Angra Mainyu. It stemmed from the notion of *druj* or 'falseness,' which corresponded to and expanded upon the notion of *druh*, which was the term the Vedic Indians used.¹⁶⁴ In the *Avesta*, Indra, the most important Vedic god, is turned into a demon. Some other pre-Zoroastrian deities are kept but diminished.¹⁶⁵ (Even Zoroastrianism was adapted and influenced by the culture and religion that surrounded it!)

Demons were representative or even a part of Angra Mainyu. For the Iranians demons were evil spirits who "seduced people into worshipping them."¹⁶⁶ For Zarathustra demons were a threat to the world as Ahura Mazda intended it and he was aware that there were those who worshipped these demons.¹⁶⁷

The number of demons was vast, and all were intent on assisting Angra Mainyu in his efforts to ruin the 'good' world of Ahura Mazda's making. Whatever harmed cattle or blighted crops was personified as a demon. The natural environment was full of demons. The wilderness beyond the limits of the settlement and the grazing ground was a place of dread, not to be entered on pain of death. In the darkness of the night, too, demons flourished. It was

¹⁶³ Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 80-82.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 91.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 91.

only the rising of the sun that prevented them from destroying everything in the world, so that not even the gods would find a place to stay.¹⁶⁸

This sounds familiar to what we learn in *Babylonian Talmud Pesachim* (above), where we are told of the 180,000 demons in existence, which seems like a vast number. Demons are also described in Judaism as causes of disease and could be found in the wilderness, in pits, in water, and in other places outside of the settlement.

As well, Zoroastrianism's limit of demons to the darkness hints at the Jewish texts where the rabbis restrained the demons in *Babylonian Talmud Pesachim* (above). There the demons at first had free reign. Then they were only capable of working their destructive powers at night. Finally Rabbi Haninah ben Dosa ordered the Queen of the demons, Igrat bat Makhalat, to restrict herself to doing damage on Wednesday and Shabbat nights. This was after she pleaded, "I pray you leave me some space!" and he did so out of kindness. Likewise this lesson is taught in *Genesis Rabbah* 36:1 where the newborn baby, still weak and attached to his mother's umbilical cord, is not to be bested by the demon Shimadon because the rooster had already crowed and the daytime had begun.

For Zoroastrianism three of the gods of the previous tradition became demons: Indra, Nanhaioya, and Savul. There were also demons related to the purity laws and there were corrupting demons: the Lie (which had various manifestations including that of the flying demon which corrupted the dead body), Azi (unbridled lust), Basyansta (the demon of over-sleeping). Also, "The Jahi, the primal whore

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 91.

who seduces worshippers of Ahura Mazdah and the demons alike, and Vizaresa, the ugly hag who drags away the soul of the lie-follower into the abyss of hell.”¹⁶⁹

These demons are similar to those that appear in instances of *halakhic* discussion. They teach that one must follow the purity laws or else a demon (disease) may infect the individual. Beware Basyansta, who may come to you because of your laziness and because you have not been praying when expected to. If you decide to follow Angra Mainyu, the Lie, then Vizaresa is going to come and drag your soul into hell. These stories, like those of the rabbis, urge an individual to follow certain rules and regulations.

When it comes to the other kinds of Jewish texts that use demons, (1) showing-off the power of the Rabbi and the rabbinic Jew, and (2) stories of fantastical narrative, there seems to be no clear connection between Zoroastrian tradition and the traditions found in the Rabbinic literature. This idea was illustrated already by James Moulton in his book on *Early Zoroastrianism*, written at the beginning of the last century:

Much more serious is the question whether foreign influence affected Jewish demonology. Here I put on one side the popular belief by which demons took in relation to disease very much the position that microbes take for us. There is no reason for recognizing Persian influence of any kind here, though there are some similarities in Persian as in other religious systems.¹⁷⁰

Beyond the typical similarities that the demons of many religions share, he argues that there was no obvious connection between the demons of Judaism and the demons of Zoroastrianism. When it comes to Lilith, one of the major demons in

¹⁶⁹ Bishop, “When Gods Become Darkness,” *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, 325.

rabbinic Judaism, it is argued that she developed from the Assyrian demon, *ardat Lili*, who had similar characteristics.¹⁷¹ It is also noted more recently, “The Babylonian hag *Lamashtu*, a ‘composite’ demon, was said to kill unborn children and babies.”¹⁷²

Lamashtu was one of the most dreaded figures in Mesopotamian demonology. She attacked young women and small children. The symptoms of her onslaught, according to later medical texts, could be jaundice, fever, fits of insanity, chills, paralysis, and intense thirst. She brought complications in pregnancy and delivery, as well as sudden infant death.¹⁷³

It is also said the demon Lilith was “originally a wind-spirit derived from the Assyrian Lilitu, with long disheveled hair, and wings, and during Talmudic times the confusion of her name with the word *layil*, ‘night,’ transformed her into a night spirit who attacks those who sleep alone.”¹⁷⁴ There are obvious connections with several demons, including similarities in name and behavior, to Lilith.

Another common demon of rabbinic Judaism, Ashmedai the King of the Demons, is often referred to as coming from a similar figure in Zoroastrianism, Aeshma. Here too, however, there is disagreement. Leo Jung writes in his comparison between Aeshma and Ashmedai’s story from *B. Gittin* 68:

In the first part of the Talmudical story he is a jolly, good-natured spirit, fond of drink, in the second part the predominant feature is the punishment of Solomon. So that quite apart from the divergence in details, the two principal differences become emphatic: 1) Aeshma is essentially malevolent, the enemy of man, who is the creature of Ahura Mazda. Ashmedai is a good-natured being; he is the servant of God, and though loose in his morals he is absolutely obedient to Him. 2) Aeshma endeavors to destroy man by the command and in pursuit of the aim of Angromainyus. Ashmedai comes to

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *Semitic Magic: Its Origins and Developments*, 65-66.

¹⁷² Bloom, *Jewish Mysticism and Magic*, 129.

¹⁷³ Foster, *Before the Muses Volume 1*, 130.

¹⁷⁴ Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 41. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 105.

punish Solomon by the command of God. He is prince of the Sheddim, *not* a harmful spirit.¹⁷⁵

Here he points out that Ashmedai “has nothing but the name in common with the Parsee demon Aeshma.¹⁷⁶ Davies agrees:

The great bulk of modern scholars identify this Asmodeus with the Persian Ashma, who in the Avesta is next to Angromainyus, the chief of the evil spirits. Rev. J. M. Fuller (speaker’s commentary), while admitting the Persian origin, holds that the character given to Asmodeus agrees with Babylonian rather than with the Persian belief.¹⁷⁷

At the same time, Davies continues that Ashmedai “resembles the merry if also mischief-making hobgoblins of fairy tales, more than he does the Persian Ashma or the Apocryphal Asmodeus.”¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, Gideon Bohak points out that, “Ashmedai in Jewish literature; this demon, whose name is probably derived from the Iranian Aeshema Daeva, “the demon of wrath”, will be one of the ‘stars’ of Jewish demonology for many centuries to come.”¹⁷⁹

For the Zoroastrian, “The laws of purity were regarded as safeguards against the demonic hosts.”¹⁸⁰ The washing of the hands and taking care to pour out the top bit of the water, among other ritualistic and purity rules the rabbis also observed, kept demons at bay.

However, “above all, death was a triumph for the demons.”¹⁸¹ This is different from the Jewish notion that God and the angel of death (According to Resh

¹⁷⁵ Jung, *Fallen Angels*, 82.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁷⁷ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 102.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷⁹ Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 89.

¹⁸⁰ Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*, 92.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 91.

Lakish: Satan, the angel of death, and the evil inclination are all the same¹⁸²) were in control of death, or that death was a natural function and punishment or reward is based on God's will, not a demon's desires.

The Demons of Zoroastrians and the Babylonian Amoraim

Zoroastrianism's demons were quite possibly influential on the rabbinic mind. However, it is not necessarily clear. True "magic and demonology reached their highest point among the amoraim in the time of Abaya (best known of the Pumbeditha teachers) and Raba, who was head of the Machusa Rabbinical School."¹⁸³ Despite this, "Two main views have been held as to the principal quarter from which Judaism was influenced in its magical and demonological beliefs. On the one hand, Persia with its Zoroastrianism is claimed as the chief factor. On the other, Babylonia and contiguous Aramaic countries are pointed to as that."¹⁸⁴

At the same time the rabbis had to rid themselves of the "Jewish" theology that the demons issued from the mighty fallen angels and replaced it with the notion that is found in the *Mishnah*. Demons were created by God on the eve of the first Sabbath.¹⁸⁵ This makes the belief in demons a possibility for the rabbinic Jew. Demons created by angels who did not follow the desires of God, would undermine the monotheism that the rabbis wished to push. God as the creator of demons allowed for the existence of demons along with the existence of God as Supreme. In

¹⁸² B. Bava Batra 16a.

¹⁸³ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 110.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 114.

¹⁸⁵ Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 105.

this way the deity's power was not threatened and the demon's place in this world was permitted by God.

While the amoraic Jews of Babylonia may have been influenced by the culture surrounding them, there had already existed a Jewish belief in demonology that could have led to the demonological contents of the talmud. The language that the rabbis used could be insightful, as they chose *not* to use the language available to them from Genesis chapter 6, but instead used language that may have been more appropriate to a Babylonian audience:

The sheidim are most commonly found in eastern Aramaic dialects of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and Syriac. This eastern prevalence is certainly related to the etymological origin of the word, which is from the Akkadian *sedu*. In Akkadian...*sedu* does not necessarily refer to a demon or malevolent spirit. In Akkadian, *sedu* may refer to either a demon or a beneficent spirit. ... In later dialects of Hebrew and Aramaic, the shedim are undoubtedly consider[ed] demons that bring harm upon humans.¹⁸⁶

On the other hand there are the *mazikin*, yet another term for “demon” that does not come from the *Tanakh*. These “destroying spirits” or “harmful spirits” are mentioned as early as *Mishnah Avot* 5:6. These *mazikin* were, according to the rabbis, one of the creations that took place the eve of the first Sabbath, a last moment creation by God. It could be thought that these demons have different names and perhaps therefore come from a different set of traditions. However, it turns out that these words most likely are also drawn from “Persian demonology, as were the *lilin*, *roukhin* and *sheidim*... The Jewish religion, always emphasizing and

¹⁸⁶ Everson, *Angels in the Targums*, 41.

guarding its monotheistic character, nevertheless absorbed Zoroastrian ideas about earthly and heavenly forces of Good and Truth, and Evil and Deceit.”¹⁸⁷

According to Davies, many Jews remained in Mesopotamia and Babylonia for centuries after the exile and yet they showed “scant traces of alleged Parsee influence.”¹⁸⁸ What he argues is that Zoroastrianism had less to do with influencing Judaism than did Gnosticism. Also, Zoroastrians and the other Babylonian sects did not see the old Babylonian and Akkadian dogmas that preceded them disappear. In fact, “the Babylonian religion continued to flourish until the second century of our era at least.”¹⁸⁹ Be that as it may, the rabbis of Babylonia were inward focused and “their reality to a significant extent was bounded by the four walls of the study house.”¹⁹⁰

In discussing some of the angelology and demonology of Judaism, Bernard Bamberger wrote, “Different scholars have found the sources of these myths in Babylonia, Persia or Greece. It is almost impossible to decide the matter finally, for there must have been constant interchange of such legendary coin among the nations.”¹⁹¹ What can be said is that the Jews of Zoroastrian lands were not only influenced by Zoroastrianism. The rabbinic literature produced in Babylonia (Mesopotamia) shows significant influence from earlier work, which may reflect Zoroastrianism only in the same way earlier Babylonian and Akkadian work influenced Zoroastrianism as well (like how *sheidim* appears in the Hebrew Bible).

¹⁸⁷ Bloom, *Jewish Mysticism and Magic*, 128-129.

¹⁸⁸ Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology*, 117.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁹⁰ Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine*, 8.

¹⁹¹ Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 7.

This could help to explain why scholars go back and forth over whether or not Zoroastrianism was an influence on rabbinic demonology or not.

An examination of extant Assyrian and Babylonian works shows how early these demon traditions are. The first is an incantation against a demon from the Archaic period, 2300 to 2000BCE: “I have seized him—like water/I have blocked him off, like a watercourse—/Like a dog by his neck/Like a whelp by his scruff.”¹⁹² Here, as in any incantation, the point is to show how to exert power over a demon. Like the examples of rabbinic stories of communication of the second type, where the point is to show that the magicians have power over the spirits.

Another incantation tells us a little bit about the demon involved. It is for the demons mentioned above, Lamashtu, who may be a basis for the Lilith demon in Judaism:

She is singular, she is uncanny,
She is a child born late in life(?), she is a will-o'-the-wisp,
She is a haunt, she is malicious,
Offspring of a god, daughter of Anu,
For her malevolent will, her base counsel,
Anu her father dashed her down from heaven to earth,
For her malevolent will, her inflammatory counsel.
Her hair is askew, her loincloth is torn away.
She makes her way straight to the person without a (protective) god.
She can benumb the sinews of a lion,
She can ... the sinews of a youngster or infant.¹⁹³

Similar to Jewish demonology, Lamashtu was created by a god. Also, like the fallen angels of Second Temple (Enoch) and early Christian literature, she was cast out of heaven for misbehavior. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly in our comparison to the demon texts in rabbinic literature, “She makes her way straight to the person

¹⁹² Foster, *Before the Muses Volume 1*, 54.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 59.

without a (protective) god.” This is precisely the point that much of the demonological rabbinic literature was trying to make and is also the motivation for the first two types of communication stories as outlined in chapter three. The first, the *halakhic* stories, involve the rabbis pushing their agenda regarding the proper rules and behavior for the Jew. The second outlines the power of the rabbi—just as here one who believes is protected from Lamashtu. The one who recited the incantation correctly (from the proper mode of thought and belief) succeeded in keeping Lamashtu away.¹⁹⁴

Lamashtu continued to appear in incantation texts up through the late period of Mesopotamian history, 1000BCE to 100BCE.¹⁹⁵ It is entirely possible that these incantations and others like them were influential either directly or indirectly upon the lay-Jews and the rabbis. Even if the rabbis themselves did not know about them per se, it is easy to understand how the typical Jew could see that their neighbors claimed to have protection against demons. So the rabbis would use one or another as characters in stories which include evil spirits to show that Judaism offers meaning in dealing with these entities as well.

There are significant cross-culture influences between the Zoroastrian demons (and those demons of cultures that preceded them) and the Jewish talmudic (and even biblical) demons. There is no doubt that there was interaction between the Jewish community and surrounding culture. What is significant is the evidence shown within the demonic stories of the Talmud (such as use of the term *sheid*, the

¹⁹⁴ Similarly in rabbinic Judaism there is the Shabriri incantation as shown in Chapter Three, from *B. Pesachim* 112b.

¹⁹⁵ Foster, *Before the Muses* Volumes 1 and 2.

names of Ashmedai and Lilith, etc), and even more narrowly those that involve communication between demons and humans.

At the same time, “pure monotheism is incompatible with dualism in both the physical and the moral world; it regards evil as being mere semblance without reality, an opposing force which can be overcome and rendered a source of new strength for the victory of the good. (Lamentations 3:38) ‘Out of the mouth of the Most High cometh there not the evil and the good?’”¹⁹⁶ In monotheism, where one God is the source of all, that one God is then inherently the creator of both good and evil. There is no reason for the demons of the Zoroastrian tradition (who serve the secondary power competing with Ahura Mazda) to be taken into the Jewish realm. Monolatry as constructed in the Torah, which morphs into the monotheism of rabbinic literature (with an all-powerful God), does not require such a conception, nor would it necessarily want it! With the inclusion of demonological forces in the literature additional explanations are needed to make room for their appearance.

It is obvious that there was no *need* for influence from the outside for the demonology of the Talmud to become what it became. If the lay Jews (or the rabbis themselves) were finding their own beliefs influenced by surrounding culture and a *Jewish answer* was needed to keep their own members in the fold, a solution need not be specific to Babylonia. The rabbis may have brought these demonological stories into the text for the purpose of giving the Jews an answer to their problems. This may be especially important because all four of the fantastical narratives where demons and human beings communicate are from the *Babylonian Talmud*.

¹⁹⁶ Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 86.

However, nothing about these stories solves the potential influences of *strictly* Zoroastrian demonology.

At the same time, there is no evidence of the same kind of relationship evidenced in Babylonia between the Zoroastrians and the Jews as there was in Palestine between the Christians and the Jews. While the *Babylonian Talmud* reflects some use of the language and even demons' names that are present in the Zoroastrian literature, it is not clear that this was intended to do anything more than use a vocabulary known to the Babylonian Jew. This should be seen in contradistinction with Christianity where the religious basis and the original texts were shared with the Jews, only later diverging from one another.

Conclusions regarding influence

Given the potential influences as enumerated above regarding the rabbis of Palestine and Babylonia, they pushed back against the religions surrounding them, and they adapted what they could in order to make Judaism more acceptable to the common Jew. There is disagreement as to whether the demonology of the rabbis was more influenced by Zoroastrianism or Christianity. Perhaps demonology found its way into Judaism through previous cultures and religions. Maybe ancient Babylonian religion, which clearly influenced Zoroastrianism, was the influence that informed Jewish demonology as well. Second Temple sects and Jewish-Christian beliefs could also have played a role in the Jewish demonology that developed.

No matter the influence, the rabbis created a Jewish demonology. This could have come out of Babylonian demonology, Zoroastrianism, and the desire to show non-rabbis that Judaism could handle the same fears and concerns that their

Zoroastrian neighbors were equipped to handle. In terms of the Jewish-Christian and Second Temple texts, the rabbinic move away from the fallen angels and Satan motifs could encourage the notion that “Jewish” demons are inherently *different* from the “Christian” ones.

In attempting to identify the most powerful influence, it is important to remember that the rabbis referred to in the stories of communication between humans and demons had a tendency to physically move between Babylonia and Palestine. Rabbi Yitzchak of the *Babylonian Talmud Berakhot* 5a text about reciting the bedtime *Sh'ma* to keep demons away is a 3rd generation amora from Palestine who spent time in Babylonia. The parallel text from *Palestinian Talmud Berakhot* 1:1 involves Rabbi Huna, a 4th generation amora from Palestine who traveled between Babylonia and Palestine himself. It is recited in the name of Rabbi Joseph who may be the 3rd generation amora from Babylonia. It is possible, from this one example of parallel demon texts, to see how demonological traditions between Palestine and Babylonia may have been shared.

The narratives concerning a demon who imitates a man who calls out as having died (with regards to issues of writ of divorce) from *Palestinian Talmud Gittin* 6:6 and *Babylonian Talmud Yevamot* 122a both involve Rabbi Haninah a 1st generation amora who went to Palestine from Babylonia. The *Palestinian Talmud* also involves Rabbi Aha bar Haninah, a 3rd generation amora from Palestine who spent some time in Babylonia, and Rabbi Abin, a 4th generation amora from Palestine who came from Babylonia.

In the text from *Leviticus Rabbah* and from *Tanhuma Buber* Rabbi Yosi and Abba Yosi respectively are the characters of a story about a town helping a spirit ward off a demon. In this case, Rabbi Yosi is a Babylonian Amora, yet the *Tanhuma* is a Palestinian midrash. Abba Yosi is a 3rd generation Tanna, and with him the editor of *Leviticus Rabbah* makes the story an earlier (and therefore more authoritative) one by several generations.¹⁹⁷

In another text, where rabbis meet with Igrath daughter of Makhalat in *Song of Songs Rabbah*, one of the rabbis is Abaye, a 4th generation Babylonian Amora, though the text is another Palestinian midrash. This same Abaye is the one who introduced the story of the drainpipe demon in *Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin* by stating that the reason why one does not sit under a drainpipe is because demons are found there. He also introduces the story of the water-drawing demon by teaching that one should pour off the top bit of water from the jug because the surface water is contaminated by demons.

In short, it is not surprising that much of the demonology is shaped between Palestinian and Babylonian amoraim. With so much travel back and forth amongst the rabbis cited in this material, ideas were certainly shared. However, this does not explain why stories of the third type, fantastical narratives, can be found only in the *Babylonian Talmud*. Hypothetically, with so many rabbis traveling between Babylonia and Palestine, it is not necessarily the case that they are reacting and being influenced by Zoroastrianism. As a matter of fact, apart from the some of the demons' names, and the words used by the rabbis for "demon" (to appeal to the

¹⁹⁷ It is possible though that this is a copyist's error and both narratives actually involved the same individual.

non-scholar or to unify the language across cultures of what is being discussed) there is no obvious influence from Babylonian literature at all in terms of the demons that appear in rabbinic text, as well as those stories where they communicate with humans. Additionally, Neusner points out that “Three principal periods presently delineate the canonical sequence, the *Mishnah*’s, in the first two centuries; the *Palestinian Talmud*’s, in the next, ca. 200-400; and the *Babylonian Talmud*’s, in the third, ca. 400-600.”¹⁹⁸ That being the case, there was plenty of time during the collation of redaction of the Babylonian work for Palestinian concerns to be appropriated.

What seems more likely is that the rabbis through their travels were more *threatened* by the Gnostic, Jewish-Christian, and later Christian traditions. These sects developed from Judaism and espoused themselves as the new Judaism or the *correct* Judaism. They also used traditionally Jewish ideas and even Jewish texts to back themselves up.

For example, the rabbis make a point of abolishing the fallen angel and Satan motifs removing the need for a Jesus figure. If Jesus were the force that holds the demon hordes back, then Jews would have needed him. However, the rabbis constructed a demonology in which the rabbi and the pious Jew were not only able to hold the demon back, but could strike fear into the demon, and even force the demon to work for the good of the rabbi or Judaism (Ben Tamalion or the water-drawer demon, for instance). Thus, there is no need for Jesus. Now Jews could look to their own religion for the answers to the *demon problem*.

¹⁹⁸ Neusner, *Emergence of Judaism*, 23.

The rabbis used these stories as a method of appealing to Jews. “Realizing that they could not squelch widespread belief in demons as the source of evil, the sages launched a ‘limited attack,’ issuing a variety of edicts (*Gittin* 66a, *Yebamot* 122a) regarding such beliefs and the practices associated with them.”¹⁹⁹ There is no doubt that the world at the time of the rabbis was seen as a world filled with demons and the unknown. Undeniably there was a certain amount of interchange between the Jews and their neighbors. But within these texts of communication between demons and humans, it is not altogether clear that there was an overwhelming influence from the Zoroastrian tradition.²⁰⁰

Should there be an influence from Zoroastrianism, it is (as it would have been in Christian areas) in the form of a polemic against the idea that Judaism is less effective at dealing with the threat of demons. But in this way, the rabbis could kill two birds with one stone; by providing a way to fight demons they inherently guarded Judaism against *any* other religions’ demonologies. Additionally, this presented an additional barrier to Jewish conversion to Zoroastrianism (should conversion have been a concern there). In the context of a fight between groups of Jews arguing over which Judaism is the correct Judaism, it makes more sense for a Jew to move to a different *sect*, than to an entirely different religion.

There is a telling example of the lack of Babylonian demonological influence in the story about Ashmedai, the king of the demons. Previously we discussed the source of the demon’s name. At the same time, we might wonder about the source

¹⁹⁹ Azriel, *Satan in Rabbinic Literature*, 103.

²⁰⁰ This is not to say that there were not influences in other subjects. However, when it comes specifically to demonology, beyond the use of certain *terms*, there does not seem to be a preponderance of evidence of influence.

of the stories themselves. Richard Kalmin points out that *Babylonian Talmud Gittin* 68a-b is “likely an expansion and radical reworking of much shorter Palestinian accounts.”²⁰¹ He points to *Pesikta d’Rav Kahana* 5:3 and 26:2. The former passage discusses the power that King Solomon had over demons, until he sinned and lost that power. The latter relates the tale of Solomon who was removed from the throne. An angel, in this instance, takes his place and Solomon is doomed to wander the land claiming he is Solomon though no one believes him. We can see, again, how traditions moved from Palestine to Babylonia. Through expansion, the rabbis showed that demon’s power came through sin against God, not through evil intentions by some alternative or secondary deity. One of King Solomon’s sins was his “conversion” to other religions because of his many wives. This brings a demon, to punish him, not Satan.

The situation of the Babylonian rabbis was inherently different from that of the rabbis in Palestine. Persian society resembled a caste-system and there was little back-and-forth between Jews and non-Jews (much less rabbis and non-Jews). On the other hand, Palestinian culture was much more open and “movement between classes was relatively common.”²⁰² While Babylonian rabbis were concerned with their work and rarely ran into a non-Jew who knew Hebrew Bible, the “Palestinian rabbis had frequent interactions with Bible-reading non-Jews (for example, Christians and Gnostics) and מיינים (heretics).”²⁰³ Therefore, Palestinian sages had an idea of the potential disaster that Christian ideas could bring to the

²⁰¹ Kalmin, *Holy Men, Rabbis and Demonic Sages*, 241.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁰³ Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, 68.

Jewish people. The Babylonian rabbis, who struggled even to be in touch with non-rabbis, were “oblivious to such concerns.”²⁰⁴ This statement is a generalization and is refuted by some like Yaakov Elman who writes about the potential influences of the Zoroastrians upon Babylonian sages. However, even in his work there is little evidence of Persian influence on major theological concerns.²⁰⁵

In this discussion it becomes clear that the demonology found in amoraic texts, whether Palestinian or Babylonian, is both a natural continuation of the demonology of the tannaim, as well as a response to the situation of the Jews in Palestine. The confrontation of Jews with Christianity led to a need to reinforce monotheism as the rabbis understood it, as well as Judaism itself as a power that could protect the individual from demons and other damages.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁰⁵ Elman, “Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, 165-197.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The idea that demons have been communicating with human beings has persevered for more than two thousand years. It can even be found permeating Hebrew Bible. When various Jewish sects developed during the second Temple period and thereafter demonology became a source of contention between them. With the formation of rabbinic literature, the rabbis told stories about demons that helped separate themselves from other groups and solidify their authority as teachers of “normative Judaism”.

The rabbis’ stories helped to differentiate and defend Judaism in Palestine and Babylonia. *Mishnah Avot* 5:6 was enough to draw a deep division between the beliefs of the tannaim and those of other groups like the Qumranites and Gnostics. In the amoraic period demon stories developed differently than they had before.

In the amoraic period, the period of the talmuds, the rabbis began to write about demons communicating with human beings. While demons had always been something to fear, because they could bring potential harm to the individual, for the first time in this literature demons and humans acknowledged one another verbally and even helped each other. The evidence of demons in the Hebrew Bible and tannaitic literature is at times de-mythologizing, and at other times serves to create divisions between sects. The amoraim continued to embrace using demonology as a way of establishing themselves and developed texts into stories that read more like myth and legend than like legal discussion.

First, we examined the type of story that involved the use of demons for the purposes of *halakhah*. These texts could involve communication, though it was not always clear. Reciting the *Sh'ma* aloud before bed, for example, may have been a warding ritual that involved communicating to a demon that one was protected.²⁰⁶ That being said, whether the texts where demons appeared for *halakhic* motives involved communication or not, the threat of demons was used to increase pressure on Jews to ensure that they were behaving appropriately and following the commandments.

Second, several stories encouraged the reader to see and accept the supernatural power of the rabbis. The rabbi and townspeople who were able to replace an evil spirit with a kind one, the ability of Rabbi Haninah ben Dosa and Abaye to limit Igrat daughter of Makhalat, Rabbi Aha ben Jacob's ability to keep the schoolhouse demon at bay, and so many other stories exemplified the rabbis as heroes. Even when demons continued to survive, the rabbis were able to show how powerful they were and control them.

Clearly the distinctions we have established between these stories can be blurred. The context of ben Dosa and Abaye's actions in limiting Igrat came out of the *halakhic* ruling that one should not be out alone on Wednesday or Shabbat nights. Thanks to the power of the rabbis, the other weeknights were safe. Of course it was out of kindness (not powerlessness) that they gave the demons two nights a week!

²⁰⁶ If the demon is the one who hears the *Sh'ma* and therefore stays away, then this involves communication. If a person merits protection *because* of saying the *Sh'ma*, and the demon stays away because the *Sh'ma* leads to a person's purification and/or increased holiness, then there is no communication between that human being and demon.

The third type of story is the “fantastical narrative.” These stories were much more complicated to understand because they sound more like fables than a legal literature. These stories contained extensive communication between demons and human beings. The human beings, rabbis, talked to these demons as fellows rather than enemies. One can see the almost human nature of the demon. The drainpipe demon was presented as a downtrodden, lonely being. The water-drawing demon served Rabbi Pappa (attesting to the latter’s power), but they spoke with one another as master and misunderstood servant (there is nothing special about the story, to the point where one could replace the demon with the name of a human being and the story would be the same). The interplay between King Solomon and Ashmedai was much more clearly about human versus demon and yet the powers that Ashmedai had were necessary for King Solomon to be able to complete the Temple. At the same time, King Solomon was temporarily pushed out by a demon, suggesting the weakness of a king of Israel when confronted by a demon.

The story of Ben Tamalion is especially complicated. The idea that a demon would actually work together with a group of rabbis in order to save three key *halakhic* components of Judaism is problematic. Tamalion was not a servant, downtrodden, or in any way defeated; he moved against the Roman emperor by his own free will. Afterwards he disappeared without a word against him from any of the rabbis.

These three types of demonological stories: those with *halakhic* motive, those of rabbinic power, and the fantastical narratives, are all present within the rabbinic text for a reason. Those that push a legal agenda are clearly to encourage the

rabbinic Jew to follow the law. The Judaism that the rabbis espoused through the *Mishnah*, the Talmuds, and their other works, are thereby valuable to the non-rabbi. Through the study of the tannaitic and amoraic texts, Jews will learn how to live good lives, free of demons.

Those stories that show how the rabbis were able to control demons encouraged the rabbinic Jew to follow the rabbis. Other groups, Jewish and otherwise, were espousing a fearsome demonic realm. By showing the people that the rabbis had power over the demons Jews could look to Judaism as a religion and way of life that would protect them. In this way the rabbis were able to get directly involved in the demonological disagreements of the time. They could encourage the Jews who were faced with outside influences, that rabbinic Judaism could provide just as much protection against evil, if not more.

The “fantastical narratives” tell of a world where demons and human beings sometimes fight and sometimes work together. At times, the narratives’ purpose is confusing and yet they are entertaining and enlighten the reader about the world as it existed through the eyes of the rabbis. These stories play an integral role in the demonology of the amoraim. In the development of stories involving demons beyond simple *halakhic* statements these tales show the magical and dangerous world that the rabbis navigated.

Chapters one and two explained the traditions that the amoraim built upon. This enabled us to see how they further developed certain ideas and pushed aside others by looking at the amoraic text itself in chapter three. In chapter four, we

examined potential influences on the rabbis while they were writing these stories: Paganism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.

What becomes clear in looking at the periods of the tannaim and amoraim is that the most likely influence upon the rabbis' demonology was Christianity. To be sure, all of these religions were faced with demons of one sort or another and there was a certain amount of common vocabulary for discussing this idea. In chapter one we noted the very basic definition of a demon is an evil being with the ability to cause injury to humans. This was true of all cultures we have discussed, while details about their origin, allegiance, and level of power differed.

What we then looked for were commonalities; these showed what the rabbis were most likely *reacting* to in their demonology as portrayed in these stories. From this there are two conclusions; the second develops from the first. First, the rabbis wrote their demonology specifically to keep non-rabbis from leaving the fold. Their demon mythology (or reality as they saw it) was based on the attempt to use their communities' folk traditions to reinforce Judaism as a religion that could protect them from the dangers their neighbors were warning them about. This helps to explain why various words for demon were used: *mazikin*, *sheidim*, *ruakh rah*. There is absolutely no suggestion within the context of these stories that one word has a different meaning than the other. Instead, whether one's neighbors spoke from a Hebrew or Zoroastrian background, rabbinic stories could be understood within the context of the conversation. This serves to explain how these stories served to protect the Jew against foreign polemics. Through this specific study, we can see how the rabbis were engaged in self-preservation.

Second, the demonology especially as distilled from these stories of communication between demons and human beings is specifically an anti-Christian polemic.²⁰⁷ This is tough argument to make admittedly. However, the evidence seems to outweigh doubt. There are a number of reasons for this:

- All of the rabbis involved in these stories (or telling them) are Palestinian, or spent time in Palestine.
- The Babylonian rabbis transmitted these stories, and yet those rabbis had little interaction with the culture around them.
- The Palestinian rabbis were attuned to the existence of Christianity and its influence upon non-rabbis.
- The situation in Palestine, specifically the growth and strengthening of Christianity, made things worse for the Jews.²⁰⁸ The Jews reacted through defensiveness²⁰⁹ and yet the *Palestinian Talmud* “evinces little interest in Christianity.”²¹⁰ It is also important to note that concern about heresy is almost entirely confined to Palestine.”²¹¹ Therefore, it would make sense for Palestinian rabbis to think they had the ability to voice their concerns more openly when visiting or after having moved to Babylonia.
- The demonology espoused within the *Mishnah*, that God created demons, directly confronts the religious ideas behind Christianity. The stories in the

²⁰⁷ Only within the texts we have examined. No generalities are intended.

²⁰⁸ Schwartz, *Some Types of Jewish-Christian Interaction*, 199.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 201.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 199.

²¹¹ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 147.

rabbinic literature thereafter come from this basic idea and therefore continue to polemicize against Christianity.

- And, given a thorough look at Zoroastrianism, there is no suggestion that the rabbis were reacting against their experience of Babylonian teachings.

Limiting ourselves to stories of communication between demons and human beings presents potential positives and negatives. It allows us to engage in a manageable amount of text. It also enables us to look at stories in which the rabbis have inserted themselves as characters thereby giving us examples of how rabbis hoped to see themselves portrayed to others. Because we have approached a specific type of story it is dangerous to make any broad conclusions about the rabbinic texts generally.

The importance of demonology in the history and development of Judaism cannot be overstated. Even in looking at these relatively few stories, their contexts, and the situation of the rabbis who were writing them, it is clear that a wealth of information is contained in rabbinic materials. Whether being read for religious or academic goals, the text and traditions are unequalled in their beauty and meaning. In these texts we can see the influence of foreign cultures upon Biblical and rabbinic demonology. After a thorough look at the demonology of Zoroastrianism, Second Temple, post-Second Temple Jewish groups, and early Christianity, we can see how the rabbis opted *out* of the potential demonology that Christianity embraced, and purposefully adapted a kind of demonology that rendered it ineffective in explaining the world. At the same time, given a thorough look at Zoroastrianism and its

predecessors, there does not seem to be a significant polemic against Zoroastrian demonology.

By examining rabbinic stories where demons and human beings communicate we have been able to uncover significant information about Jewish history, the methods of the rabbis, and the development of demonology.

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Appendix

Appendix

Another Akkadian Incantation:

Text dated at 1000-100BCE according to Foster, *Before the Muses Volume 2*, 865.

Great is the daughter of Anu, who tortures babies,
 Her hand is a net, her embrace is death.
 She is cruel, raging, wrathful, rapacious,
 A runner, an abductor is the daughter of Anu.
 She touches the bellies of women in labor,
 She yanks out the pregnant woman's baby.
 She suckles it, she stands it up and it goes about.
 Her breasts(?), her belly(?), her muscles are large.
 The daughter of Anu is the one of the gods, her brethren, with no child of her own.
 Her head is the head of a lion,
 Her form is the form of a donkey,
 her lips are a rushing wind, they pour out [].
 She came down from the peaks(?) of the mountains,
 She roars like a lion,
 She keeps up the howling of a demonic dog.

Tannaitic Midrashim:

Sifra, Sifrei Numbers, Sifrei Deut, and Mekhilta Attributed to Rab Ishmael

ספרי במדבר פיסקא מ

וישמרך מן המזיקים וכן הוא אומר כי מלאכיו יצוה לך לשמרך בכל דרכיך
 (שם / תהלים / צא יא)

The one who wishes to guard himself from *mazikim* will say, (Psalm 91:11) "*He will command His angels to guard you in all your paths.*"

ספרא בחוקותי פרשה א"ה פרק ב

אר"ש אימתי הוא שבחו של מקום בזמן שאין מזיקים, או בזמן שיש מזיקים
 ואין מזיקים, אמור בזמן שיש מזיקים ואין מזיקים, וכן הוא אומר מזמור שיר
 ליום השבת, למשבית מזיקים מן העולם משביתן שלא יזיקו.

Rabbi Shimon would say, "When shall he praise God? At a time when there are no *mazikim*, or a time when there are *mazikim* and there are no *mazikim*." He says, "In a

time where there are *mazikin* and there are no *mazikim*--Thus he says Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbat (Psalm 92), to remove the *mazikim* from the world. Remove them so that they will not cause damage."

ספרי דברים פיסקא שכא ד"ה וקטב מרירי

וקטב מרירי, לפי דרכך אתה למד שכל מי שהשד בו הוא מריר.
(Deuteronomy 32:24) And Ketev Mriri--According to your way, it is taught that all that have a demon in them are embittered.

ספרי דברים פיסקא שוד"ה דבר אחר

ואין שער אלא שד שנאמר (ישעיה לד יד) ופגשו ציים את איים ושער אל רעהו יקרא

Seir can only refer to *sheid* (demon).

במדבר רבה (וילנא) פרשה יב

א"ר יוחנן עד שלא הוקם המשכן היו המזיקין מתגרין בעולם לבריות ומשהוקם המשכן ששרה השכינה למטה כלו המזיקין מן העולם הה"ד ונגע לא יקרב באהל זה אהל מועד.

Rabbi Yohanan said: "Before the tabernacle had been established, the demons would aggravate the beings of the world. When the tabernacle was established and the shechinah took up residence there, all of the demons of the world were eradicated. As it says, (Psalm 91:10) "No harm will befall you, no disease touch your tent." This is the Tent of Meeting.

Tanakh text:

Isaiah 14:12-21

¹² אֵיךְ נִפְלְתָּ מִשָּׁמַיִם הֵילֵל בֶּן-שָׁחַר נִגְדַעְתָּ לְאָרֶץ חֹלֶשׁ עַל-גּוֹיִם:
¹³ וְאַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶעֱלֶה מִמֶּעַל לְכוֹכְבֵי-אֵל אֲנִי כְסָאִי וְאִשְׁבֵּה
בָּהֶר-מוֹעֵד בִּירְכְּתִי צָפוֹן:
¹⁴ אֶעֱלֶה עַל-בִּמְתִּי עַב אֲדַמָּה לְעֵלְיוֹן:
¹⁵ אֲךָ אֵל-שָׂאוֹל תּוֹרֵד אֵל-יִרְכְּתִי-בֹר:
¹⁶ רְאִיךְ אֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁגִּיחוּ אֵלֶיךָ יִתְבּוֹנְנוּ הַזֶּה הָאִישׁ מְרִיזֵי הָאָרֶץ מְרַעִישׁ מַמְלָכוֹת:
¹⁷ שָׁם תִּבֹּל בַּמַּדְבָּר וְעָרְיוּ הָרָס אֲסִירָיו לֹא-פֶתַח בֵּיתָה:
¹⁸ כָּל-מַלְכֵי גּוֹיִם כָּלָם שָׁכְבוּ בְּכָבוֹד אִישׁ בְּבֵיתוֹ:
¹⁹ וְאַתָּה הַשְׁלַכְתָּ מִקְבְּרְךָ כְּנָצֹר נִתְעַב לְבוֹשׁ הָרָגִים מְטַעְנֵי חָרֵב יוֹרְדֵי
אֵל-אֲבְנֵי-בֹר כְּפָגַר מוֹבָס:
²⁰ לֹא-תִחַד אַתָּם בְּקִבוּזָה כִּי-אֶרְצְךָ שַׁחַת עִמָּךְ הִרְגָתָ לֹא-יִקְרָא לְעוֹלָם זֶרַע
מְרַעִים:

הִכִּינוּ לְבָנָיו מִטְבַּח בַּעֲוֹן אֲבוֹתָם בַּל־יִקְמוּ וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֶרֶץ וּמְלָאֵוּ פָּנֶי-תִבְלַע עָרִים:²¹

Isaiah 14:12-21 (NJPS)

¹² How are you fallen from heaven, O Shining One, son of Dawn! How are you felled to earth, O vanquisher of nations!

¹³ Once you thought in your heart, "I will climb to the sky; Higher than the stars of God I will set my throne. I will sit in the mount of assembly, On the summit of Zaphon:

¹⁴ I will mount the back of a cloud -- I will match the Most High."

¹⁵ Instead, you are brought down to Sheol, To the bottom of the Pit.

¹⁶ They who behold you stare; They peer at you closely: "Is this the man Who shook the earth, Who made realms tremble,

¹⁷ Who made the world like a waste And wrecked its towns, Who never released his prisoners to their homes?"

¹⁸ All the kings of nations Were laid, every one, in honor Each in his tomb;

¹⁹ While you were left lying unburied, Like loathsome carrion, Like a trampled corpse *In* the clothing of slain gashed by the sword Who sink to the very stones of the Pit.

²⁰ You shall not have a burial like them; Because you destroyed your country, Murdered your people. Let the breed of evildoers Nevermore be named!

²¹ Prepare a slaughtering block for his sons Because of the guilt of their father. Let them not arise to possess the earth! Then the world's face shall be covered with towns.

Christian text:

Tobit 3:7-17 (RSV)

⁷ On the same day, at Ecbatana in Media, it also happened that Sarah, the daughter of Raguel, was reproached by her father's maids,

⁸ because she had been given to seven husbands, and the evil demon Asmodeus had slain each of them before he had been with her as his wife. So the maids said to her, "Do you not know that you strangle your husbands? You already have had seven and have had no benefit from any of them.

⁹ Why do you beat us? If they are dead, go with them! May we never see a son or daughter of yours!"

¹⁰ When she heard these things she was deeply grieved, even to the thought of hanging herself. But she said, "I am the only child of my father; if I do this, it will be a disgrace to him, and I shall bring his old age down in sorrow to the grave.

¹¹ So she prayed by her window and said, "Blessed art thou, O Lord my God, and blessed is thy holy and honored name for ever. May all thy works praise thee for ever.

¹² And now, O Lord, I have turned my eyes and my face toward thee.

¹³ Command that I be released from the earth and that I hear reproach no more.

¹⁴ Thou knowest, O Lord, that I am innocent of any sin with man,

¹⁵ and that I did not stain my name or the name of my father in the land of my captivity. I am my father's only child, and he has no child to be his heir, no near kinsman or kinsman's son for whom I should keep myself as wife. Already seven husbands of mine are dead. Why should I live? But if it be not pleasing to thee to take my life, command that respect be shown to me and pity be taken upon me, and that I hear reproach no more."

¹⁶ The prayer of both was heard in the presence of the glory of the great God.

¹⁷ And Raphael was sent to heal the two of them: to scale away the white films of Tobit's eyes; to give Sarah the daughter of Raguel in marriage to Tobias the son of Tobit, and to bind Asmodeus the evil demon, because Tobias was entitled to possess her. At that very moment Tobit returned and entered his house and Sarah the daughter of Raguel came down from her upper room.

Demons in Halakhic Text

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת גיטין פרק ו הלכה ו

הלכה ח' מי שהיה מושלך בבור כו' אמר רבי חנינה לימדנו רבי יונתן והן שראו בובייה של אדם...רבי אחא בר חנינה בשם רבי חנינה הדא דתימר בשדה אבל בעיר אפי' לא ראו בובייה של אדם

Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* Volume II.B. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, 393.

He who had been cast into a pit and said, "Whoever hears my voice--let him write a writ of divorce for his [my] wife"--lo, these should write and deliver it to her. A healthy man who said, "Write a writ of divorce for my wife"--his intention was to tease her. Said R. Haninah, "The rule applies in a case in which people saw the shadow of a man [so that they know that the voice was not a shade.]"... R. Aha bar Haninah in the name of R. Haninah, "That which you have said applies to a case in a field. But as to what happens in a town, even though people did not see the shadow of a man, [the evidence is acceptable]."

Bavli Berakhot 5a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ה עמוד א

ואמר רבי יצחק: כל הקורא קריאת שמע על מטתו - מזיקין בדילין הימנו, שנאמר +איוב ה'+ ובני רשף יגביהו עוף; ואין עוף אלא תורה, שנאמר: +משלי כ"ג+ התעף עניך בו ואיננו; ואין רשף אלא מזיקין, שנאמר +דברים ל"ב+ מזי רעב ולחמי רשף וקטב מרירי.

[My translation] Rabbi Yitzchak said: All that recite the bedtime Shema, demons keep away from him, as it says (Job 5:7) "Man is born to trouble, the sons of Reshef fly (*uf*) upwards." *Uf* is the Torah, as it says in Proverbs 23:5, "When your eyes *hitif* upon it, it is gone for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven." Reshef is demons, as it says in Deuteronomy 32:24, "A wasting (*Mazei*) hunger, a burning *Reshef* and *Ketev Meiriri* (the name of a Talmudic demon)."

Yerushalmi Berakhot 1:1

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת ברכות פרק א הלכה א

רבי הונא בשם רב יוסף מה טעם אמרו אדם צריך לקרות שמע בביתו בערב בשביל להבריא את המזיקין

[My translation] Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Joseph: "For what reason is it said that an individual must recite the Sh'ma in his home in the evening? To cause the demons to flee."

Narratives of Rabbinic Power

Yerushalmi Berakhot 5:1

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת ברכות פרק ה הלכה א

תני רבי שמעון בן יוחי וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך כל אפילו רוחות אפילו שידים רבי ינאי ורבי יונתן הוו מטיילין באסלטין חמתון חד ושאל בהון אמ' להון שלמכון רביא אמרין אפילו תואר חברות אין עלינו לרעה

Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, Vol. 1: Berakhot. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989, 199.

[Neusner]: "Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai taught, 'And all the people of the earth shall see [that you are called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of you]' (Deuteronomy 28:10). 'All'—even the spirits and even the demons [shall be afraid of you]. Rabbi Yannai and Rabbi Yohanan were walking down the street when they saw one [demon]. It greeted them and said to them, 'May your peace be increased.' They said, 'It even addressed us in friendly terms! It cannot do us any harm!'"

Tanhuma Buber (Kedoshim 9),

מדרש תנחומא (בובר) פרשת קדושים סימן ט

אמר ר' ברכיה מעשה היה בקריתנו ברוח אחד, שהיה שרוי על המעין, בא רוח אחר להזדווג לה, ובקש להוציאה משם, היה שם חסיד אחד, ור' יוסי איש צייתור שמו, נגלה לו אותו הרוח, אמר לו רבי הרי כמה שנים אני נתון כאן, ובצהרים ובלילה לא היזקתי בריה, (ואף לא ביום), והרוח הזה בא עלי ממקום אחר, ומבקש להוציאני מכאן, ולהזיק את הבריות, א"ל מה נעשה, א"ל טלו מקליכם ומגליכם וצאו עליו בשעת הצהרים, ואמרו שלנו נוצח, שלנו נוצח, והוא יברח, כך עשו והבריחוהו משם, אמרו לא זזו משם עד שראו כחררת דם צף על המים, כששמעו חכמים בדבר אמרו ומה אם דבר שלא נברא לצורך סיוע צריך סיוע, בני אדם על אחת כמה וכמה, לכך אמר דוד ישלח עזרך מקדש.

or in the parallel in *Leviticus Rabbah* 24:3.

ויקרא רבה (מרגליות) פרשה כד

ר' ברכיה בש' ר' סימון מעשה בקרתני באבא יוסי בן יוחנן איש ציתור שהיה

יושב ושונה על פתח מעין. איתגלי עילוי ההוא רוחא דהוה שרי תמן, אמ' ליה אתון ידעין כמה שנין אנא שרי הכא ואתון נפקין אתון ונשיכון ובניכון ברמשיא ובקריצתא ובטהריא ולית אתון מתנזקין, וכדון תהון ידעין דהא חד רוח ביש בעי מישרא הכא והוא מזיק ברייתא. אמ' ליה ומה נעביד, אמ' ליה אזיל ואסהיד בבני קרתא ואמור להן מאן דאית ליה מכוש מאן דאית ליה פסא מאן דאית ליה מגרופי יפקון הכא למחר עם מצימחיה דיומא ויהוון מיסתכלין במיא וכד אינון חמיין ערבובא במיא יהוון מקשין בפרזליא ויימרון דידן נצח דידן נצח, ולא יעלון מתמן עד זמן דיחמון חררא דדמא על אפי מיא. אזל ואסהיד בבני קרתא ואמ' להון מן דהוה ליה מכוש מן דהוה ליה פס מן דהוה ליה מגרופי נפקון למחר לתמן עם מצימחיה דיומא ויהוון מסתכלין במיא, כיון דחמון ערבובא במיא הוון מקשין בפרזליא ואמ' דידן נצח דידן נצח, ולא עיילון מתמן עד זמן דחמון כמין חרדא דדמא על אפי מיא. והרי דברים קל וחומר ומה אם הרוחות שלא נבראו לשום סיוע צריכין סיוע אנו שנבראו לשום סיוע על אחת כמה וכמה. הוי ישלח בעזרך מקודש.

(In the Tanhuma version, the character of the story is Rabbi Yosi, a third generation amora from Babylonia, and the narrator is Rabbi Berakhya, a fifth generation Amora from Palestine. In the Leviticus Rabbah version, the story's character is Abba Yosi, the third generation tanna, and the narrator is also Berakhya.)

[My translation to Leviticus Rabbah 24:3] “Davar Acher: You shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy. ‘May He send you help from the Holy/Sanctuary, support from Zion (Psalm 20:2).’ Rabbi Berakhya in the name of Rabbi Simon said, ‘It happened in Kartani to Aba Yosi a man of Tzitur that he was sitting and studying at a spring when a spirit (*ruah*) appeared to him as it was dwelling there. It said to him, ‘Do you know how many years I’ve dwelled here?! And you and your women come and go in the evening and in the afternoon, and you have never been injured (by me). You should know that an evil spirit (*ruah rah*) now wants to dwell here, and it *will* do harm to creatures (humans).’ Aba Yosi responded, ‘So what should we do?’ The spirit said, ‘Go and warn the people of the city and say to them that anyone who has a goad or a tool for striking should get it ready. And have everyone come here tomorrow at dawn and the surface of the water can be seen. And when you can see the bubbling/ripples of the surface of the water, you will strike the iron of your tools together and say, ‘Victory is ours!’ And do not leave from here until you can see a pinpoint of blood on the surface of the water.’

‘Aba Yosi went and warned the people of the city and said to them [everything the spirit told him to say—anyone who has a goad or a tool for striking should get it ready. And have everyone come here tomorrow at dawn and the surface of the water can be seen. And when you can see the bubbling/ripples of the surface of the water, you will strike the iron of your tools together and say, ‘Victory is ours! Victory is ours!’ And do not leave from here until you can see a pinpoint of blood on the surface of the water.]

'[Kal v'khomer] If this is the case in this instance, where spirits (*ruhot*) that were not created to need any help need help, how much the more so do we who were created to need assistance!'"

Genesis Rabbah 36:1

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשה לו

כשהיתה אחת מהם יולדת ביום, היתה אומרת לבנה צא והבא לי צור לחתוך טבורא, בלילה היתה אומרת לבנה צא הדליק לי נר לחתוך טיבורא דילך, עובדא הוה בחדא איתתא דילידת בלילה אמרה לברא זיל אדליק בוצינא דנקטע שורך, נפק ופגע ביה שידא שמדון, א"ל זיל גלוג לאימך דקרא תרנגולא ואלמלא דקרא תרנגולא הוינא מחייתך וקטליתך, א"ל זיל את גלוג לאימך דלא קטעת אמא שורי, דאילמלא דקטעתיה הוינא מחי יתך וקטיל יתך

[My translation] "It happened once that a mother bore a child in the night. She said to her son, 'Go light a lamp to cut your navel cord.' He went and met the demon Shimadon. The demon said, 'Go tell your mother that the rooster has crowed. If the rooster had not crowed I would have smitten and killed you.' He responded, 'Go and tell your mother that my navel cord has not been cut, or I would have smitten and killed you.'

Bavli Pesachim 112b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קיב עמוד ב

אל תצא יחידי בלילה - דתניא: לא יצא יחידי בלילה לא בלילי רביעיות ולא בלילי שבתות, מפני שאגרת בת מחלת, היא ושמונה עשרה רבוא של מלאכי חבלה יוצאין, וכל אחד ואחד יש לו רשות לחבל בפני עצמו. מעיקרא הוו שכיחי כולי יומא, זמנא חדא פגעה ברבי חנינא בן דוסא. אמרה ליה: אי לאו דמכרזן עלך ברקיע הזהירו בחנינא ובתורתו - סכנתך. אמר לה: אי חשיבנא ברקיע - גוזר אני עליך שלא תעבורי ביישוב לעולם. אמרה ליה: במטותא מינך, שבק לי רווחא פורתא. שבק לה לילי שבתות ולילי רביעיות. ותו, חדא זמנא פגעה ביה באביי: אמרה ליה: אי לאו דמכרזי עלך ברקיע הזהירו בנחמני ובתורתו - הוה סכנתך. אמר לה: אי חשיבנא ברקיע - גוזרני עלייכי שלא תעבורי ביישוב לעולם. הא קא חזינן דעברה! - אמרי: הני תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קיג עמוד א

גזייתא נינהו, דשמטי סוסיא, ואתו דברי להו.

[My translation] "It is taught on Tannaitic authority, do not go out alone at night. Neither on Wednesday nights nor on Shabbat nights, because of Igrat daughter of Makhalat. She and 180,000 destructive angels go out and every one of them causes destruction on his own. At first they would be found every day. One time she met Rabbi Haninah ben Dosa. She said to him, 'If it hadn't been said about you in the heavens to be careful of Haninah and his learning, I would have caused you harm.' He replied, 'If I am important in the heavens, I decree that you shall not pass through settled areas.' She said back to him, 'I pray you, leave me a little space!' So he left her Shabbat nights and Wednesday nights. And it happened once that Abaye met her. She said to him, 'If it hadn't been said about you in the heavens to beware of Nahmani and his learning, I would have caused you harm.' He replied to her, 'If I am important in the heavens, I decree upon you that you shall not pass through settled areas.' But we see that she does come through [those areas]. These are the [113a] narrow paths which horses break loose through [bringing demons into civilized places through them]."

Bavli Pesachim 112a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קיב עמוד א

מאי סכנה - סכנת שברירי, ואי צחי מאי תקנתיה? אי איכא איניש בהדיה לימא ליה: פלניא בר פלנטא, צחינא מיא. ואי לא - (נימא) +מסורת הש"ס: [לימא] + איהו לנפשיה: פלניא, אמרה לי אימי איזדהר משברירי שברירי ברירי רירי ירי רי, צחינא מיא בכסי חירי.

A man who is thirsty and needs to drink from a river or a pool at night learns here to say: "Beware of Shabrire, Shabrire, berire, rire, ire, re."

Bavli Kiddushin 29b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף כט עמוד ב

כי הא דרב יעקב בריה דרב אחא בר יעקב שדריה אבוה לקמיה דאביי, כי אתא חזייה דלא הוה מיחדדין שמעתיה, א"ל: אנא עדיפא מינך, תוב את דאיזיל אנא. שמע אביי דקא הוה אתי, הוה ההוא מזיק בי רבנן דאביי, דכי הוה עיילי בתרין אפי' ביממא הוה מיתזקי, אמר להו: לא ליתב ליה אינש

אושפיזא, אפשר דמתרחיש ניסא. על, בת בההוא בי רבנן, אידמי ליה כתנינא
 דשבעה רישוותיה, כל כריעה דכרע נתר חד רישיה. אמר להו למחר: אי לא
 איתרחיש ניסא, סכינתין. ת"ר: ללמוד תורה ולישא אשה - ילמוד תורה
 ואח"כ ישא אשה, ואם א"א לו בלא אשה - ישא אשה ואח"כ ילמוד תורה.
 אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל, הלכה: נושא אשה ואח"כ ילמוד תורה. ר' יוחנן
 אמר: ריחיים בצוארו ויעסוק בתורה? ולא פליגי: הא לן, והא להו.

"[Soncino translation] R. Jacob, son of R. Aha b. Jacob, was once sent by his father [to study] under Abaye. On his return he [his father] saw that his learning was dull. 'I am better than you,' said he to him; 'do you [now] remain here, so that I can go'. Abaye heard that he was coming. Now, a certain demon haunted Abaye's schoolhouse, so that when [only] two entered, even by day, they were injured. He [Abaye] ordered, 'Let no man afford him hospitality; perhaps a miracle will happen [in his merit]'. So he [R. Aha b. Jacob] entered and spent the night in that schoolhouse, during which it [the demon] appeared to him in the guise of a seven-headed dragon. Every time he [the Rabbi] fell on his knees [in prayer] one head fell off. The next day he reproached them: 'Had not a miracle occurred, you would have endangered my life.'"

Fantastical Narratives

Bavli Chullin 105b

ואמר אביי: מריש הוה אמינא, האי דלא יתבי תותי מרזיבא משום שופכים, אמר לי מר: משום דשכיחי מזיקין. הנהו שקולאי דהוו דרו חביתא דחמרא, בעו לאיתפוחי, אותבוה תותי מרזיבא פקעה, אתו לקמיה דמר בר רב אשי, אפיק שיפורי שמתיה, אתא לקמיה, אמר ליה: אמאי תעביד הכי? אמר ליה: היכי אעביד, כי אותביה באונאי? אמר ליה: את בדוכתא דשכיחי רבים מאי בעית? את הוא דשנית, זיל שלים! אמר ליה: השתא נמי ליקבע לי מר זימנא, ואפרע, קבע ליה זימנא. כי מטא זימנא איעכב, כי אתא אמר ליה: אמאי לא אתית בזמנך? אמר ליה: כל מילי דצייר וחתיים וכייל ומני לית לן רשותא למשקל מיניה, עד דמשכחינן מידי דהפקרא

[Soncino Talmud] “Abaye said: ‘At first I thought the reason why one does not sit under a drainpipe was that there was waste water there, but my Master has told me. It is because demons are to be found there.’

“Certain carriers were once carrying a barrel of wine. Wishing to take a rest they put it down under a drainpipe, whereupon the barrel burst, so they came to Mar son of R. Ashi. He brought forth trumpets and exorcised the demon who now stood before him. [He said to the demon], ‘Why did you do such a thing?’ [The demon] replied. ‘What else could I do, seeing that they put it down on my ear?’ The other [Mar son Of R. Ashi] retorted: ‘What business had you in a public place? It is you that are in the wrong, you must therefore pay for the damage’. Said the [demon], ‘Will the Master give me a time wherein to pay?’ A date was fixed. When the day arrived he defaulted. He came to court and [Mar b. R. Ashi] said to him, ‘Why did you not keep your time?’ He replied. ‘We have no right to take away anything that is tied up sealed, measured or counted; but only if we find something that has been abandoned.’”

Bavli Chullin 105b-106a

ואמר אביי: מריש הוה אמינא, האי דשדי מיא מפומא דחצבא משום ציבתא, אמר לי מר: משום דאיכא מים הרעים. ההוא בר שידא דהוה בי רב פפא, אזל לאתויי מיא מנהרא איעכב, כי אתא, אמרו ליה: אמאי איעכבת? אמר להו: עד דחלפי מים הרעים אדהכי חזנהו דקא שדו מיא מפומא דחצבא, אמר: אי הוה ידענא דרגיליתו למיעבד הכי לא איעכבי

“And Abaye said, ‘At first I reasoned that they pour off water from the mouth of a ewer because of the debris [floating on the surface of the water]. But then my master said to me that they did it on account of water contaminated [by demons at the surface].

““There was a demon (*shidah*) in the house of R. Pappa who went to draw water from the river. It was delayed in returning. When it came back they asked it, ‘what delayed you?’ It said to them, ‘I waited for the contaminated water to flow away [before I drew water for you].’ (106a) Just then he saw that they were pouring off water from the mouth of the ewer [before drinking from it]. It said, ‘Had I known that you were accustomed to do this I would not have been delayed [waiting for the contaminated water to flow off].’”

Bavli Meila 17a-b

אמרו: מי ילך ויבטל הגזרות ילך ר' שמעון בן יוחאי שהוא מלומד בנסים, ואחריו מי ילך ר"א בר ר' יוסי. אמר להם רבי יוסי: ואילו היה אבא חלפתא קיים, יכולין אתם לומר לו תן בנך להריגה? אמר להם ר' שמעון: אילו היה יוחאי אבא קיים, יכולין אתם לומר לו תן בנך להריגה? אמר להם רבי יוסי: אנא אזלין דלמא עניש ליה ר' שמעון דקא מסתפינא. קביל עליה דלא ליענשיה, אפילו הכי ענשיה. כשהיו מהלכין בדרך נשאלה שאלה זו בפניהם: מנין לדם השרץ שהוא טמא? עקם פיו ר' אלעזר בר רבי יוסי ואמר: (ויקרא י"א) וזה לכם הטמא. אמר ליה ר' שמעון: מעקימת שפתיך אתה ניכר שתלמיד חכם אתה, אל יחזור הבן אצל אביו! יצא לקראתו בן תמליון: רצונכם אבוא עמכם? בכה ר' שמעון ואמר: מה שפחה של בית אבא נזדמן לה מלאך שלש פעמים. ואני לא פעם אחת יבא הנס מכל מקום. קדים הוא, על בברתיה דקיסר, כי מטא התם, אמר: בן תמליון צא! בן תמליון צא! וכיון דקרו ליה נפק אזל. אמר להון: שאילו כל מה דאית לכון למישאל! ועיילינהו לגנזיה, לשקול כל דבעו. אשכחו ההוא איגרא, שקלוה וקרעוה

[Soncino Talmud translation]

[The Jews] then conferred as to who should go [to Rome] to work for the annulment of the decrees.

Let R. Simeon b. Yohai go for he is experienced in miracles.¹ And who should accompany him? — R. Eleazar son of R. Jose. Said R. Jose to them: And were my father Halafta still alive, would you have said to him to give his son for slaughter?² Answered R. Simeon: Were Yohai [p. 64] my father still alive, would you have said to him to give his son for slaughter? Said R. Jose to them: I shall accompany him, for I fear R. Simeon may punish him.³ He [R. Simeon] undertook thereupon not to inflict any punishment on him. Notwithstanding this, he did punish him, for when they were proceeding on the way the following question was raised in their presence: Wherefrom do we know that the blood of a reptile is unclean? R. Eleazar son of R. Jose curved his mouth⁴ and said: It is written: And these are they that are unclean.⁵ Said R. Simeon to him: From the undertone of thy utterance⁶ one can see that thou art a scholar, yet the son⁷ shall not return to the father.⁸ Then Ben Temalion⁹ came to meet them. [He said]: Is it your wish that I accompany you? Thereupon R. Simeon wept and said: The handmaid of my ancestor's house was found worthy of meeting an angel¹⁰ thrice, and I not even to meet him once. However, let the miracle be performed, no matter how. Thereupon he¹¹ advanced and entered into the Emperor's daughter. When [R. Simeon] arrived there,¹² he called out: 'Ben Temalion leave her, Ben Temalion leave her', and as he proclaimed this he left her. He¹³ said to them: Request whatever you desire. They were led into the treasure house to take whatever they chose. They found that bill,¹⁴ took it and tore it to pieces.

Bavli Gittin 68a-b

אמר רבי יוחנן: שלש מאות מיני שדים היו בשיחין, ושידה עצמה איני יודע מה היא. אמר מר, הכא תרגימו: שידא ושידתין. שידה ושידתין למאי איבעי ליה? דכתיב: (מלכים א' ו') והבית בהבנותו אבן שלמה מסע נבנה וגו', אמר להו לרבנן: היכי אעביד? אמרו ליה: איכא שמירא דאייתי משה לאבני אפוד. אמר להו: היכא אישתכח? אמרו ליה: אייתי שידה ושידתין כבשינהו אהדדי, אפשר דידיעי ומגלו לך. אייתי שידה ושידתין כבשינהו

אהדדי, אמרי: אנן לא ידעינן, דילמא אשמדאי מלכא דשידי ידע. אמר להו: היכא איתיה? אמרי ליה: איתיה בטורא פלן כריא ליה בירא ומליא ליה מיא ומיכסיא בטינרא וחתמיה בגושפנקה, וכל יומא סליק לרקיע וגמר מתיבתא דרקיעא, ונחית לארעא וגמר מתיבתא דארעא, ואתי סיר ליה לגושפנקה ומגלי ליה ושתי, ומכסי ליה וחתים ליה ואזיל. שדריה לבניהו בן יהודע, יהב ליה שושילתא דחקיק עלה שם ועזקתא דחקיק עלה שם, וגבבי דעמרא וזיקי דחמרא. אזל כרא בירא מתתאי, ושפינהו למיא וסתמינהו בגבבי דעמרא, וכרא בירא מעילאי ושפכינהו לחמרא וטמינהו, סליק יתיב באילנא. כי אתא סייריה לגושפנקה, גלייה אשכחיה חמרא, אמר, כתיב: (משלי כ') לץ היין הומה שכר וכל שוגה בו לא יחכם. וכתיב: (הושע ד') זנות ויין ותירוש יקח לב, לא אישתי. כי צחי, לא סגיא ליה, אישתי רוח וגנא. נחית, אתא, שדא ביה שושילתא, סתמיה. כי אתער הוה קא מיפרזל, א"ל: שמא דמרך עלך! שמא דמרך עלך! כי נקיט ליה ואתי, מטא דיקלא חף ביה שדייה, מטא לביתא שדייה, מטא גבי כובא דההיא ארמלתא, נפקא

גיטין דף סח ע"ב

איחננא ליה, כפא לקומתיה מיניה איתבר ביה גרמא, אמר, היינו דכתיב: (משלי כ"ה) ולשון רכה תשבר גרם. חזא סמיה דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסקיה לאורחיה. חזא רויא דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסקיה לאורחיה. חזא חדוותא דהוה קמחדי לה, בכה. שמעיה להוה גברא דהוה קאמר לאושכפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שני, אחיך. חזא ההוא קסמא דהוה קסים, אחיך. כי מטא להתם, לא עיילוה לגביה דשלמה עד תלתא יומי. יומא קמא אמר להו: אמאי לא קא בעי לי מלכא לגביה? א"ל: אנסיה מישתיא שקל לבינתא אותיב אחברתה. אתו אמרו ליה לשלמה, אמר להו, הכי אמר לכו: הדור אשקויה. למחר אמר להו: ואמאי לא קא בעי לי מלכא לגביה? אמרו ליה: אנסיה מיכלא שקל לבינתא מחברתה אותבה ארעא. אתו אמרו ליה לשלמה, אמר להו, הכי אמר לכו: נגידו מיניה מיכליה. [לסוף] תלתא יומי עייל לקמיה שקל קניא ומשח ארבעה גרמידי ושדא קמיה, א"ל: מכדי כי מיית ההוא גברא לית ליה בהדין עלמא אלא ד' גרמידי, השתא כבשתיה לכולי עלמא ולא שבעת עד דכבשת נמי לדידי! א"ל: לא קא בעינא מינך מידי, בעינא דאיבנייה לבית המקדש וקא מיבעי לי שמירא, א"ל: לדידי לא מסיר לי, לשרא דימא מסיר ליה, ולא יהיב ליה אלא לתרנגולא ברא דמהימן ליה אשבועתיה. ומאי עבד ביה? ממטי ליה לטורי דלית בהו ישוב, ומנח לה אשינא דטורא ופקע טורא, ומנקיט מייתי ביזרני מאילני ושדי התם והוי ישוב. והיינו דמתרגמינן: נגר טורא. בדקו קינא דתרנגולא ברא דאית ליה בני, וחפויה לקיניה זוגיתא חיותי. כי אתא בעי למיעל ולא מצוי, אזל אייתי שמירא ואותביה עלויה, רמא ביה קלא שדייה, שקליה, אזל חנק נפשיה אשבועתיה. אמר ליה בניהו: מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא סמיה דהוה קא טעי באורחא, אסיקתיה לאורחיה? אמר ליה: מכרזי עליה ברקיעא דצדיק גמור הוא, ומאן דעבד ליה ניחא נפשיה זכי לעלמא דאתי. ומאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא רויא דקטעי באורחא, אסיקתיה לאורחיה? א"ל: מכרזי עליה ברקיעא דרשע גמור הוא, ועבדי ליה ניחא נפשיה כי היכי דליכליה לעלמא. מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לההוא חדוותא, בכית? אמר ליה: בעי מימת גברא בגו תלתין יומין, ובעיא מינטר ליבם קטן תליסרי שנין. מאי טעמא כי שמעתיה לההוא גברא דאמר ליה לאושכפא עביד לי מסאני לשב שנין, אחיכת? אמר ליה: ההוא שבעה יומי לית ליה, מסאני לשב שנין בעי! מ"ט כי חזיתיה לההוא קסמא דהוה קסים, אחיכת? אמר ליה: דהוה יתיב אבי גזא דמלכא, לקסום מאי דאיכא תותיה. תרחיה גביה עד דבנייה לבית המקדש. יומא חד הוה קאי לחודיה, אמר ליה, כתיב: (במדבר כ"ד) כתועפות ראם לו, ואמרינן: כתועפות אלו מלאכי השרת, ראם אלו השדים, מאי רבותייכו מינך? א"ל: שקול שושילתא מינאי והב לי עיזקתך, ואחוי לך רבותאי. שקליה לשושילתא

מיניה ויהיב ליה עיזקתיה, בלעיה, אותביה לחד גפיה ברקיעא ולחד גפיה בארעא,
פתקיה ארבע מאה פרסי. על ההיא שעתא אמר שלמה: (קהלת א') מה יתרון לאדם בכל
עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש.

[Soncino Talmud translation]

B. Gittin 68a

R. Johanan said: There were three hundred kinds of demons in Shihin, but what a shidah is I do not know.

The Master said: Here they translate 'male and female demons'. For what did Solomon want them? — As indicated in the verse, And the house when it was in building was made of stone made ready at the quarry, [there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building]; He said to the Rabbis, How shall I manage [without iron tools]? — They replied, There is the shamir which Moses brought for the stones of the ephod. He asked them, Where is it to be found? — They replied, Bring a male and a female demon and tie them together; perhaps they know and will tell you. So he brought a male and a female demon and tied them together. They said to him, We do not know, but perhaps Ashmedai the prince of the demons knows. He said to them, Where is he? — They answered, He is in such-and-such a mountain. He has dug a pit there, which he fills with water and covers with a stone, which he then seals with his seal. Every day he goes up to heaven and studies in the Academy of the sky and then he comes down to earth and studies in the Academy of the earth, and then he goes and examines his seal and opens [the pit] and drinks and then closes it and seals it again and goes away. Solomon thereupon sent thither Benaiah son of Jehoiada, giving him a chain on which was graven the [Divine] Name and a ring on which was graven the Name and fleeces of wool and bottles of wine. Benaiah went and dug a pit lower down the hill and let the water flow into it and stopped [the hollow] With the fleeces of wool, and he then dug a pit higher up and poured the wine into it and then filled up the pits. He then went and sat on a tree. When Ashmedai came he examined the seal, then opened the pit and found it full of wine. He said, it is written, Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whosoever erreth thereby is not wise, and it is also written, Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding. I will not drink it. Growing thirsty, however, he could not resist, and he drank till he became drunk, and fell asleep. Benaiah then came down and threw the chain over him and fastened it. When he awoke he began to struggle, whereupon he [Benaiah] said, The Name of thy Master is upon thee, the Name of thy Master is upon thee. As he was bringing him along, he came to a palm tree and rubbed against it and down it came. He came to a house and knocked it down. He came to the hut of a certain widow. She came out

Gittin 68b

and besought him, and he bent down so as not to touch it, thereby breaking a bone. He said, That bears out the verse, A soft tongue breaketh the bone¹ He saw a blind man straying from his way and he put him on the right path. He saw a drunken man losing his way and he put him on his path. He saw a wedding procession making its

way merrily and he wept. He heard a man say to a shoemaker, Make me a pair of shoes that will last seven years, and he laughed. He saw a diviner practising divinations and he laughed. When they reached Jerusalem he was not taken to see Solomon for three days. On the first day he asked, Why does the king not want to see me? They replied, Because he has overdrunk himself. So he took a brick and placed it on top of another. When they reported this to Solomon he said to them, What he meant to tell you was, Give him more to drink. On the next day he said to them, Why does the king not want to see me? They replied, Because he has over-eaten himself. He thereupon took one brick from off the other and placed it on the ground. When they reported this to Solomon, he said, He meant to tell you to keep food away from me. After three days he went in to see him. He took a reed and measured four cubits and threw it in front of him, saying, See now, when you die you will have no more than four cubits in this world. Now, however, you have subdued the whole world, yet you are not satisfied till you subdue me too. He replied: I want nothing of you. What I want is to build the Temple and I require the shamir. He said: It is not in my hands, it is in the hands of the Prince of the Sea who gives it only to the woodpecker, to whom he trusts it on oath. What does the bird do with it? — He takes it to a mountain where there is no cultivation and puts it on the edge of the rock which thereupon splits, and he then takes seeds from trees and brings them and throws them into the opening and things grow there. (This is what the Targum means by *nagar tura*). So they found out a woodpecker's nest with young in it, and covered it over with white glass. When the bird came it wanted to get in but could not, so it went and brought the shamir and placed it on the glass. Benaiah thereupon gave a shout, and it dropped [the shamir] and he took it, and the bird went and committed suicide on account of its oath.

Benaiah said to Ashmedai, Why when you saw that blind man going out of his way did you put him right? He replied: It has been proclaimed of him in heaven that he is a wholly righteous man, and that whoever does him a kindness will be worthy of the future world. And why when you saw the drunken man going out of his way did you put him right? He replied, They have proclaimed concerning him in heaven that he is wholly wicked, and I conferred a boon on him in order that he may consume [here] his share [in the future]. Why when you saw the wedding procession did you weep? He said: The husband will die within thirty days, and she will have to wait for the brother-in-law who is still a child of thirteen years. Why, when you heard a man say to the shoemaker, Make me shoes to last seven years, did you laugh? He replied: That man has not seven days to live, and he wants shoes for seven years! Why when you saw that diviner divining did you laugh? He said: He was sitting on a royal treasure: he should have divined what was beneath him.

Solomon kept him with him until he had built the Temple. One day when he was alone with him, he said, it is written, He hath as it were *to'afoth* and *re'em*, and we explain that *to'afoth* means the ministering angels and *re'em* means the demons. What is your superiority over us? He said to him, Take the chain off me and give me your ring, and I will show you. So he took the chain off him and gave him the ring. He then swallowed him, and placing one wing on the earth and one on the sky he hurled

him four hundred parasangs. In reference to that incident Solomon said, "What profit is there to a man in all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun."