

Lilith

Hebrew *lilit*, from Sumerian *lil*, "wind"

(Isa 34:14)

A Sumerian storm demon of the third millennium B.C.E. (see the "Myth of Inanna, Gilgamesh, and the Huluppu Tree"), Lilith, by biblical times, had assimilated traits of the Babylonian demon *Lamashtu*, later associated with night by a false etymology with the Hebrew term *laylâ* ("night"). Lilith is mentioned only once in the Hebrew Bible: in a prophetic oracle (Isa 34:14) directed against Edom, which will be turned into a demon-haunted desert wilderness where even one such as she might be comfortable.

Lilith emerges in postbiblical Jewish and Islamic folklore as Adam's first wife. The most coherent form of the Lilith myth appears in a sophisticated Jewish story called *The Alphabet of Ben Sirah* (c. ninth century C.E.). In that legend, God creates her on the same day and of the same material as Adam. Considering herself the equal of her mate, she refuses Adam's male-dominant sexual advances. She will not let him lie above her, claiming that they are equal because both were made from earth. They come to an impasse, and she escapes by uttering God's ineffable name, which allows her to fly off safely into the desert (or the Red Sea).

Subsequent tradition, probably drawing on ancient Mesopotamian folklore, characterizes Lilith as a demon who especially threatens pregnant women, newborns, and men sleeping alone. This demonic Lilith, with strange sexual behaviors, overshadows the independent Lilith, equal to Adam, of earlier legend.

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SEE ALSO Part I: Eve.

FOR FURTHER READING: Cantor, Aviva. "The Lilith Question."

Hutter, Manfred. "Lilith."

Lassner, Jacob. *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam.*

CAREY A. MOORE

Also Part II: Daughters (and Sons) of Zion (Baruch, etc.); Part III: Weeping Woman — Jerusalem/ Zion as a City Being Built.

FURTHER READING: Fischer, Thomas. "Maccabees, Books of."

Elis, Doron. "Baruch."

Moore, Carey A. *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions.*

Patricia K. "Baruch."

tion to her children is remarkable. She exchanges God with causing their predicament at the same time acknowledging God as the source of salvation: "Take courage, my children, for to God, / for you will be remembered by who brought this upon you. . . . For the one who brought these calamities upon you / will bring everlasting joy with your salvation" (Bar 4:1-5).

The situation described in 1 Maccabees is quite different. Although Jerusalem is again personified as a mother bereft of her children, no mention is made of her widowhood nor of deserving such treatment at the hands of their Seleucid persecutors. Describing the second Syrian attack of Jerusalem (167 B.C.E.) and the establishment of a Syrian colony there, the author says that Jerusalem's "disgrace grew as great as her glory; her exaltation turned into mourning" (1 Macc 1:40). Matthew, father of Judas Maccabeus and his four brothers, laments the ruin of the holy city whose sons and youths have been killed in her streets (1 Macc 9:8-9). "All her adornment has been taken from her no longer free, she has become a slave" (1 Macc 1:11).

Jerusalem/Zion personified as widow and mother vividly portrays the great temple city as a national symbol: bearer of the national disgrace in Judah and special protector of those born there, protected by her walls, and delivered through her intercession with God. This biblical counterbalances the more prevalent tradition that associates Zion with inviolability, justice, faithfulness, security, privilege, peace, and God's invincibility. Jerusalem/Zion as widow and mother tempts a largely triumphalist tradition.

and all I'm left with is
the feeling

But feelings are just sounds
the vowel barking of a mute

My brother is so sure of what he heard
after all he's got a record of it
consonant after consonant after consonant

If we remembered it together
we could recreate holy time
sparks flying

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LILITH AND EVE

Lilith and Eve in the Bible

As you will see, the TaNaKH presents two versions of the creation of Woman. From this, some have concluded that two different women were created, one with Adam and one from him. The First Woman seems to disappear from the narrative as Eve takes center stage.

Eve, and the First Woman, whom some call Lilith, are seen differently than any other of the women that share the pages of the Bible with them. They are the archetypes for all women. Commentators rarely see them as individuals, but rather as the essence of what women are or are supposed to be.

Contemporary scholars see the roots of these stories in the wider culture in which the early Israelites lived, but we have made them our own. Let us take a look at what the Bible has to say about them. Note that Lilith is only alluded to and not directly mentioned in the creation narratives, and that her role as First Woman is absent from the passage from Isaiah.

As you read, compare the two accounts of the creation of woman. What are the key elements that distinguish the two narratives? Compare the way in which God communicates with these new beings in each account. Look especially carefully at God's instructions to Adam concerning the tree of knowledge, the serpent's question to Eve, and her response.

The name Lilith only appears once in the TaNaKH, in the passage cited

"This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was she taken."

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. It is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" The man said, "The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be
Than all cattle

below. Some translations interpret the Hebrew to mean screech owl; others, including this translation, see it as the name of a female demon. What does this passage tell us about the nature of Lilith?



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

... When the Lord God made earth and heaven—when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being (Genesis 2:4–9).

... The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said,

And all the wild beasts:
 On your belly shall you crawl
 And dirt shall you eat
 All the days of your life.
 I will put enmity
 Between you and the woman,
 And between your offspring and hers;
 They shall strike at your head,
 And you shall strike at their heel."

And to the woman He said,

"I will make most severe
 Your pangs in childbearing;
 In pain shall you bear children,
 Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
 And he shall rule over you."

To Adam He said, "Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'

"Cursed be the ground because of you;
 By toil shall you eat of it
 All the days of your life:
 Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
 But your food shall be the grasses of the field;
 By the sweat of your brow
 Shall you get bread to eat,
 Until you return to the ground—
 For from it you were taken.
 For dust you are,
 And to dust you shall return."

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

And the Lord God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also

from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 2:15–3:24)

For it is the Lord's day of retribution,
 The year of vindication for Zion's cause.
 Its streams shall be turned to pitch
 And its soil to sulfur.
 Its land shall become burning pitch,
 Night and day it shall never go out;
 Its smoke shall rise for all time.
 Through the ages it shall lie in ruins;
 Through the aeons none shall traverse it.
 Jackdaws and owls shall possess it;
 Great owls and ravens shall dwell there.
 He shall measure it with a line of chaos
 And with weights of emptiness.
 It shall be called, "No kingdom is there,"
 Its nobles and all its lords shall be nothing.
 Thorns shall grow up in its palaces,
 Nettles and briars in its strongholds.
 It shall be a home of jackals,
 An abode of ostriches.
 Wildcats shall meet hyenas,
 Goat-demons shall greet each other;
 There too the lilith shall repose
 And find herself a resting place. (Isaiah 34:8–14)

Rabbinic Midrashim

As you read these midrashim about Eve and Lilith, compare the qualities and roles that are assigned to each of them. In what ways are these interpretations tied to the biblical text, and where do they depart from it? Why are these particular questions asked and these answers given? Would you ask

the same questions—or give the same answers? How do you think these interpretations may have influenced the way in which Judaism views women?

The last midrash is from a collection dating from the Middle Ages, making it far less ancient than the rest of the midrashic material included in this anthology. "The Alphabet of Ben Sirah" was, according to contemporary scholars, written as a satirical work, although it is generally accepted as part of the midrashic tradition. Many of its more heretical elements were probably censored by the scribes, which may have contributed to its acceptance. Because of the prominence of Lilith in contemporary interpretations of the origins of human beings, I have chosen to include it.



R. Joshua of Siknin said in R. Levi's name: . . . He considered well . . . from what part to create her. Said He: "I will not create her from {Adam's} head, lest she be swellheaded; nor from the eye, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip; nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy; nor from the hand, lest she be light-fingered; nor from the foot, lest she be a gadabout; but from the modest part of man, for even when he stands naked, that part is covered." And as He created each limb He ordered her, "Be a modest woman." Yet in spite of all of this, BUT YE HAVE SET AT NOUGHT ALL MY COUNSEL, AND WOULD NONE OF MY REPROOF (Proverbs 1:25). "I did not create her from the head, yet she is swellheaded, as it is written, THEY WALK WITH STRETCHED-FORTH NECKS (Isaiah 3:16); nor from the eye, yet she is a coquette: AND WANTON EYES (ibid.); nor from the ear, yet she is an eavesdropper: NOW SARAH LISTENED IN THE TENT DOOR (Genesis 18:10); nor from the heart, yet she is prone to jealousy: RACHEL ENVIED HER SISTER (ibid., 30:1); nor from the hand, yet she is light-fingered: AND RACHEL STOLE THE TERAPHIM (ibid., 31:19); nor from the foot, yet she is a gadabout: AND DINAH WENT OUT, etc. (ibid., 34:1)."¹

1. Genesis Rabbah 18:2, in *The Midrash*, ed. and trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon et al. (London: Soncino Press, 1951).

A Caesar once said to Rabban Gamliel: "Your God is a thief, for it is written, AND THE LORD GOD CAUSED A DEEP SLEEP TO FALL UPON ADAM, AND HE TOOK ONE OF HIS RIBS" (Genesis 2:21). Rabban Gamliel's daughter said, "Leave him to me and I will answer him." [Turning to Caesar], she said, "Send me a police officer." "Why do you need one?" he asked. She replied, "Thieves came to us during the night and took a silver pitcher from us, leaving one of gold in its place." "Would that such a thief came to us every day," he exclaimed. "Ah!" said she, "was it not Adam's gain that he was deprived of a rib and given a wife to serve him?"²

R. Joshua was asked . . . why must a woman use perfume? "Man was created from earth," he answered, "and earth never putrefies, but Eve was created from a bone. For example: if you leave meat three days unsalted, it immediately goes putrid." "And why has a woman a penetrating [shrill] voice, but not a man?" "I will give you an illustration," replied he. "If you fill a pot with meat it does not make any sound, but when you put a bone into it, the sound [of sizzling] spreads immediately." "And why is man easily appeased, but not a woman?" "Man was created from the earth," he answered, "and when you pour a drop of water on it, it immediately absorbs it; but Eve was created from a bone, which even if you soak many days in water does not become saturated."³

Moses said to Him: THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND . . . HAVE HEARD THAT THOU LORD ART IN THE MIDST OF THIS PEOPLE . . . NOW IF THOU SHALT KILL THIS PEOPLE AS ONE MAN (Numbers 14:14–15). . . . Another exposition: Do not do it, that the nations of the world may not regard you as a cruel Being and say: "The Generation of the Flood came and He destroyed them, the Generation of the Separation [those that built the Tower of Babel] came and He destroyed them, the Sodomites and the Egyptians came and He destroyed them, and these also, whom he called MY SON, MY

2. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 39a. *The Book of Legends*, ed. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky; trans. William G. Braude (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

3. *Genesis Rabbah* 17:8, in *ibid.*

FIRSTBORN (Exodus 4:22), He is now destroying! As that Lilith (*kelilith*) who, when she finds nothing else turns upon her own children, so BECAUSE THE LORD WAS NOT ABLE TO BRING THIS PEOPLE INTO THE LAND . . . HE HATH SLAIN THEM" (Numbers 14:16).⁴

R. Hanina said: One may not sleep in a house alone, and whoever sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith.⁵

Soon afterward the young son of the king took ill. Said Nebuchadnezzar, "Heal my son. If you don't I will kill you." Ben Sira immediately sat down and wrote an amulet with the Holy Name, and he inscribed on it the angels in charge of medicine by their names, forms, and images, and by their wings, hands, and feet. Nebuchadnezzar looked at the amulet. "Who are these?"

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

"Said the Holy One to Adam, 'If she agrees to come back, fine. If not, she must permit one hundred of her children to die every day.' The angels left God and pursued Lilith, whom they overtook in the midst of the sea,

4. *Numbers Rabbah* 16:25, in *ibid.*

5. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 151b, in *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. and trans. I. Epstein et al. (London: Soncino Press, 1935–1952).

in the mighty waters wherein the Egyptians were destined to drown. They told her God's word, but she did not wish to return. The angels said, 'We shall drown you in the sea.'

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

"When the angels heard Lilith's words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: 'Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I will have no power over that infant.' She also agreed to have one hundred of her demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels' names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath and the child recovers."⁶

Applesauce for Eve

by Marge Piercy

Marge Piercy's poem seems to me to be a midrash especially on Genesis 3:6, WHEN THE WOMAN SAW THAT THE TREE WAS GOOD FOR EATING AND DELIGHT TO THE EYES, AND THAT THE TREE WAS DESIRABLE AS A SOURCE OF WISDOM, SHE TOOK OF THE FRUIT AND ATE. How do you think the Rabbis understood that verse? How did you read it? What do you think of this interpretation?

Those old daddies cursed you and us in you,
damned for your curiosity: for your sin
was wanting knowledge. To try, to taste,
to take into the body, into the brain
and turn each thing, each sign, each factoid

6. "The Alphabet of Ben Sira," in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, ed. David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky; trans. Norman Bronznick et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), pp. 183–184.

Our Story: The Coming of Lilith

by Judith Plaskow

Judith Plaskow's much-quoted story uses biblical figures to address contemporary issues. Do you think the Rabbis did the same thing in their interpretations? How did they do so? How might Jewish tradition have developed had this interpretation of the Garden of Eden tale been the predominant one?



In the beginning, the Lord God formed Adam and Lilith from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. Created from the same source, both having been formed from the ground, they were equal in all ways. Adam, being a man, didn't like this situation, and he looked for ways to change it. He said, "I'll have my figs now, Lilith," ordering her to wait on him, and he tried to leave her the daily tasks of life in the garden. But Lilith wasn't one to take any nonsense; she picked herself up, uttered God's holy name, and flew away. "Well, now, Lord," complained Adam, "that uppity woman you sent me has gone and deserted me." The Lord, inclined to be sympathetic, sent his messengers after Lilith, telling her to shape up and return to Adam or face dire punishment. She, however, preferring anything to living with Adam, decided to stay where she was. And so God, after more careful consideration this time, caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and out of one of his ribs created for him a second companion, Eve.

For a time, Eve and Adam had a good thing going. Adam was happy now, and Eve, though she occasionally sensed capacities within herself that remained undeveloped, was basically satisfied with the role of Adam's wife and helper. The only thing that really disturbed her was the excluding closeness of the relationship between Adam and God. Adam and God just seemed to have more in common, both being men, and Adam came to identify with God more and more. After a while, that made God a bit uncomfortable too, and he started going over in his mind whether he may not have made a mistake letting Adam talk him into banishing Lilith and creating Eve, seeing the power that gave Adam.

round and round as new facets glint and white fractures into colors and the image breaks into crystal fragments that pierce the nerves while the brain cast the chips into patterns.

Each experiment sticks a finger deep in the pie, dares existence, blows a horn in the ear of belief, lets the nasty and difficult brats of real questions into the still air of the desiccated parlor of stasis.

What we all know to be true, constant, melts like frost landscapes on a window in a jet of steam. How many last words in how many dead languages would translate into, But what happens if I, and Whoops!

We see Adam wagging his tail, good dog, good dog, while you and the snake shimmy up the tree, lab partners in a dance of will and hunger, that thirst not of the flesh but of the brain. Men always think women are wanting sex, cock, snake, when it is the world she's after. The birth trauma for the first conceived kid of the ego, I think therefore I am, I kick the tree, who am I, why am I, going, going to die, die, die.

You are indeed the mother of invention, the first scientist. Your name means life: finite, dynamic, swimming against the current of time, tasting, testing, eating knowledge like any other nutrient. We are all the children of your bright hunger. We are all products of that first experiment, for if death was the worm in that apple, the seeds were freedom and the flowering of choice.

Meanwhile Lilith, all alone, attempted from time to time to rejoin the human community in the garden. After her first fruitless attempt to breach its walls, Adam worked hard to build them stronger, even getting Eve to help him. He told her fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night. The second time Lilith came, she stormed the garden's main gate, and a great battle ensued between her and Adam in which she was finally defeated. This time, however, before Lilith got away, Eve got a glimpse of her and saw she was a woman like herself.

After this encounter, seeds of curiosity and doubt began to grow in Eve's mind. Was Lilith indeed just another woman? Adam had said she was a demon. Another woman! The very idea attracted Eve. She had never seen another creature like herself before. And how beautiful and strong Lilith looked! How bravely she had fought! Slowly, slowly, Eve began to think about the limits of her own life within the garden.

One day, after many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, Eve, wandering around the edge of the garden, noticed a young apple tree she and Adam had planted, and saw that one of its branches stretched over the garden wall. Spontaneously, she tried to climb it, and struggling to the top, swung herself over the wall.

She did not wander long on the other side before she met the one she had come to find, for Lilith was waiting. At first sight of her, Eve remembered the tales of Adam and was frightened, but Lilith understood and greeted her kindly. "Who are you?" they asked each other, "What is your story?" And they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of sisterhood grew between them.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, Adam was puzzled by Eve's comings and goings, and disturbed by what he sensed to be her new attitude toward him. He talked to God about it, and God, having his own problems with Adam and a somewhat broader perspective, was able to help out a little—but he was confused, too. Something had failed to go according to plan. As in the days of Abraham, he needed counsel from

his children. "I am who I am," thought God, "but I must become who I will become."

And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.

the tradition which has excluded us. It is impossible to say what exactly will emerge from our endeavours, but one thing is certain: we carry a heavy burden of responsibility. We cannot do anything about the fact that despite our efforts to excavate and re-examine our 'mothers' — from the Bible onwards — their 'sayings' are largely unavailable to us, but we can do something to ensure that the sayings of the *daughters* are passed on, and form an inheritance for future generations.

Our work today is *that* crucial, it is *that* difficult. Fifteen years ago, I engaged in research into the early feminist movement in Britain. In the course of that research, I read my way through the eighty-plus feminist journals which were produced by women while the movement raged from the mid-nineteenth century through to 1930. The early feminist movement disappeared. It disappeared so completely that in the mid-1960s women 'invented' it — again. In an article I wrote in 1980,¹¹ I attempted to make sense of this disappearance, realizing that unless women of today maintain a reference point which exists outside the male framework, our own understanding of our experience in a patriarchal world, our efforts to transform our lives could also disappear. Maintaining our own understanding of our experience involves taking responsibility for sharing it, for writing it and for transmitting it from generation to generation. If we are to develop our understandings as Jewish women today and bequeath our work to those who will both preserve it and re-shape it for themselves after us, we have to create the material conditions — the meeting places, the study houses — in which this vital process can take place. Beruria was not in a position to engage in such a project. *We are.*

Lilith

Barbara Borts

Lilith is a popular sermon topic for Shabbat Bereshit, the sabbath of the reading of the first portion of Genesis. In reading the portion, one notices that there are, in fact, two conflicting accounts about

the order of the creation. In Genesis 1 the natural world is created, and then plants and animal life, from creepy crawlies to birds, fish, mammals, and that grandest mammal of all, humankind. In Genesis 2, humankind in the form of Adam is created after the natural world, before plant and other animal life. That's not the only problem with the text. In Genesis 1.26ff. it is written: 'Let us make adam in our image, after our likeness. . . and God created the adam in God's own image, in the image of God created God him; male and female God created them.' And yet, the next chapter contains a lengthy story about Adam, this time a proper name and no longer a generic term for humanity, a lone male in paradise, searching for a mate, which culminates with God finally creating a female, Chava or Eve, to keep him company.

If you are a modern, you can, of course, resort to *Wissenschaft*, the various scientific and literary methods of biblical study, and explain this discrepancy as the result of oral transmission of traditions, in this case, the stories of two different groups of Hebrews. The redactor either put these clumsily together, or he or she welded them together without attempting to reconcile them, for reasons we cannot really know.

If, however, you were of the conviction that God handed or dictated the whole Torah to Moses, and that as God is perfect, God's teaching, Torah, must also be perfect, then these are neither discrepancies nor humanly transmitted variants, but rather places left free for interpretation and the deriving of extra deeper or hidden meanings.

So the earlier rabbis took this textual opportunity to create a number of different lessons. One of these is quite a lovely one, that originally one half-man half-woman creature was created and the Garden of Eden story only recounts for us the tale of the separation of this one into two complementary halves who find their missing side through coming together as husband and wife. The first part of that is nice, very Jungian, with hints of *animus/animus*; the second, we on the liberal side would feel was rather sexist and heterosexist.

A second lesson that the rabbis derived from this was that there was a first Eve. In a midrash on the Cain and Abel story, Judah B. Rabbi said: 'Their quarrel was about the first Eve.'¹²

From here developed the well-known tales of that first woman

who comes to be known as Lilith. The following midrash combines the first and second stories of the creation of humans in an attempt both to reconcile and to explain them.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first adam as a solitary creature, God said, 'It is not good for Adam to be alone.' God created woman from the earth like him and called her Lilith. Suddenly they began competing/arguing with each other. Said she, 'I will not lie underneath', and he said, 'I will not lie underneath, but rather on top, for you were designated to be on the bottom and I on the top.' She said to him, 'The two of us are equal as we were both created from the earth . . .' and they would not listen to each other. She saw [how things stood]. Lilith then said the Holy Name of God and flew off into the vastness of space. Adam stood in prayer before his God and said, 'Master of the Universe, the woman whom you sent me has fled from me.' God instantly sent three angels after her to bring her back. God said to them, 'If she desires to come back, fine — if not, then it is on her head that one hundred of her children will die, every day one hundred children.' . . . They followed after her and in the midst of the sea, in turbulent water in which, in the future, the Egyptians would drown. They told her the words of God, but she did not wish to return. They exclaimed, 'We will drown you in the sea.' She replied to them, 'Leave me alone, for I was created to sicken babies. When they are eight days old, from the day they are born, I will have this power over him if he is a boy child, and if she is a girl child, from the day she is born until she is twenty days old.'

When they heard her words, they pressed in and grabbed her so she swore to them in the name of the Living God and established that every time she saw them or their names or their image on an amulet, she would not harm that infant. Further, she took it upon herself that one hundred of her children would die each day, and therefore one hundred demons die daily. For this reason, we write their [angels] names on young children's amulets so that when she [Lilith] sees the names she remembers her oath and the child is healed.²

Another teaching about Lilith comes from Talmud and expands for us the nature of her character: 'R. Honina said: "A man

must not sleep alone in a house — one who does will be seized by Lilith.'

Our Jewish Lilith is based on stories from Babylonia about two demons, one male and one female, whose names are similar — Lili and Lilim. This is also interesting for us moderns, in that in the Ancient Near East there were gods, goddesses, demons and demonesses with equal power and equal influence, a way of seeing the world which was radically changed by our biblical and rabbinic forefathers. As with other examples of splitting, a psychological and social technique of dividing qualities up between two parties and disallowing either to claim aspects which the other has claimed for itself or has been assigned by the 'game', Jewish tradition kept the female demon bit — and divinity became male.

These Babylonian demons harmed men, women in childbirth, and children, and this was what was transmuted to the Jewish world — a female demonette with long hair (and, reading between the lines, long legs!), who seduces men sleeping alone in a house, and who kills children by strangulation. This idea was carried into folklore.

The man who married a she-devil

The man who fears the Lord will guard himself against the temptations of the flesh. But if he submits to them he is in imminent danger of losing his soul and of burning in the everlasting fires of Gehenna.

For instance, it could easily happen that Satan, like a cunning fisherman, will cast his net for him. He could make a she-devil take on the shape of an enticing woman and send her to corrupt him with her lecheries. And as the sins of the parents are visited upon their posterity, so the offspring of a man guilty of adultery remain forevermore tainted. Everybody knows that if a man make a compact with Lilith the Temptress or any other she-demon, he and his kind are torn up by the roots by a just, all-knowing God, and their very names are erased from the recollection of mankind.

In a certain large city stood a handsome stone house on a wide street. A clever goldsmith and his wife and children lived

in it. Outwardly this man feigned piety, but secretly he lived in sin with a she-devil who, just as his wife, bore him offspring.

Now this she-devil was very beautiful. She was also very cunning and spun her web of seduction around the goldsmith with great skill. He soon found himself caught irrevocably in her toils. Many a time, while in the synagogue, he would interrupt his devotions and rush off to see her. And so the years sped by one after another.⁴

Having read these texts, it is now time to put them in context. You may also begin to understand why Lilit has been resurected by Jewish feminists as a more appropriate first ancestor for women, and why the first creation story is a more palatable place for teaching about the nature of creation and the two sexes.

Judaism, we are taught, differs from Christianity in its approach to sexuality and women, two topics which are always linked. Christianity promotes a renunciation and separation of the sexes as a path to the highest spiritual existence; Judaism promotes marriage and the disciplining of sexual expression within the context of marriage. Christianity sees marriage as a concession to those unable to forswear the call of the flesh and allows even women the opportunity to escape their physicality through a vocation in a religious order. Judaism sees marriage as good and a positive escape from the improper into the sanctioned through marriage. One is good on religious options for the 'tempting gender'; the other is good on family and marriage for 'them'/us. What the two traditions share, however, is an assumption that women are bounded by their bodies and exist for men solely on a sexual (in its widest sense) plane, whether that be as temptress, seductress, prostitute, wife or mother.

I suggest that these midrashim and folk tales fulfil two major functions in Jewish life. First, they serve as an outlet for male fantasies. Second, they are a powerful means of social control, mostly of women, but also of men.

Although Judaism is not an abstemious religion, it does regulate sexual expression, and has, even until recently, at least in synagogues and houses of study, regulated physical as well as sexual contact between the sexes. For those who are more observant, sexual relations are restricted by the menstrual cycle

of the woman (niddah). I also know that many non-Orthodox Jewish couples find that they observe a kind of niddah of their own. Furthermore, in rabbinic, mediaeval and early modern days, men and women had very little contact. One sees this in the writings of the rabbis. They discuss women, obviously not present in the rooms with the men, as if they were a distinct separate species, with the same fear and awe that are present in locker rooms. Some of the discussions are frankly repugnant, as in the discussion Judith Plaskow cites in her book *Standing Again at Sinai*: a discussion as to whether a woman could be considered a virgin for the purpose of her *ketubah* if a man had intercourse with her when she was under three. They decided yes—but what a ghastly discussion!⁵

None of this is confined to days long gone; many times men have said to me that they just don't understand women, the mysterious creatures so similar to them and yet so incomprehensibly different. And sexual jokes still remain, complete with examples of contempt, fear and loathing of women's sexuality.

Woman is, in the term of Simone de Beauvoir, Other, the projection of one's fears and fantasies on to the unknown. Maybe women had such feelings, but they remain unrecorded. And yet, on the other hand, women's relationship to men is of a different nature, given that all men were babies once, being raised by women. Perhaps women just don't find men as mysterious. Strange, maybe, but not mysterious. As man is the defining being, the Jew, the human, the recipient of the wisdom, the arbiter of the law, his is the power to name woman—as in the second creation story, where Adam gives Eve her appellation. He names her, all too often, not-him, not completely human, because not male.

Woman is thus both frightening because unknown, and tempting because she represents *gashmiut*, the principle of physicality. So Moshe Meiselman in his anti-feminist book *Jewish Women and Jewish Law* writes concerning women's exclusion from public synagogue ritual: 'The sex drive is a very powerful and subtle aspect of the male personality . . . It is easy for a man to be oblivious to the people around him if they are men. It is more difficult, if not impossible, if they are women. The ability of women to catch a man's eye is known to every man and oftentimes forgotten by women . . . In addition, men feel more

self-conscious in the presence of women . . . It is for this reason that women cannot receive *aliyah*.²⁶ I find this kind of writing as insulting to men as it is to women!

One consequence of this projection, this preoccupation with women as sexual beings, mysterious other, is a *fear* of women's sexuality. This might go hand in hand with some of the above things, as many psychologists have pointed out. Sexuality threatens to distract men from prayer and study, as in the quotation from Meiselman; it can tear men away from their homes and wives as in the mediaeval tale; it can terrify men with its threat of impotence and loss of control, as we can infer from the original Lilith story; it can threaten disturbing arousals and nocturnal emissions, as in the comment about being alone at night in a home.

Modern women would add other insights. It is interesting that it is women's sexual freedom which Judaism seeks to control, and not that of men. Despite a legal enactment, a *takkanah*, accepted by all Ashkenazim, that men may only marry one woman, a man can get permission to remarry in the event of his wife not being able to accept a *get* (bill of divorce) — and there were two publicized cases of this in Israel in the last few years — nor will his children be illegitimate, *manzerim*, if he remarries without a *get*. When feminism (women's lib) first hit the scene, many were the writings that women were destroying men's virility and that men by the score were coming in to be treated for impotence in the face of the aggressive feminist onslaught, which asked for such terrible things as shared career and childcare, equal opportunity and pay, and, oh yes, that unreasonable of all unreasonable requests, an enjoyable, satisfying sex life which included women's orgasm.

This is not new, and not old. The earlier Lilith stories provide a potent parable for the controlling of women and their urges. They teach that women are subordinate to men, that they must submit in sex to the position and demands of the man. They posit that women are dangerous seductresses. They tell us that independence in women is akin to death for her children. Many people might be surprised at the claim that Lilith was a modern feminist heroine. But *she* didn't kill her children — *God* did. *She* wasn't created a demon — *God* made her so after her rebellion. The part of the story which finalizes her demise is that she harms babies,

the most innocent of innocents. In reality, it is her male companion and the male God who perceive themselves as the aggrieved parties — but, to teach that she is the villain rounds this tale off nicely, and substituting physical harm to children for dents in the male ego is a much more potent warning. This baby-harming she-devil is the one who will ensnare your husband and cause suffering to your child. Therefore, she is no model for your women to follow!

So a new companion for Adam was formed — and even there women got the worst of it. Here are some further midrashim:

When God was on the point of making Eve, He said: 'I will not make her from the head of man, lest she carry her head high in arrogant pride; not from the eye, lest she be wanton-eyed; not from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; not from the neck, lest she be insolent; not from the mouth, lest she be a tattler; not from the heart, lest she be inclined to envy; not from the hand, lest she be a meddler; not from the foot, lest she be a gadabout. I will form her from a chaste portion of the body, and to every limb and organ as He formed it, God said, 'Be chaste! Be chaste!' Nevertheless, in spite of the great caution used, woman has all the faults God tried to obviate. The daughters of Zion were haughty and walked with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes; Sarah was an eavesdropper in her own tent, when the angel spoke with Abraham; Miriam was a talebearer, accusing Moses; Rachel was envious of her sister Leah; Eve put out her hand to take the forbidden fruit; and Dinah was a gadabout.

The physical formation of woman is far more complicated than that of man, as it must be for the function of childbearing, and likewise the intelligence of woman matures more quickly than the intelligence of man. Many of the physical and psychical differences between the two sexes must be attributed to the fact that man was formed from the ground and woman from bone. Women need perfumes, while men do not; dust of the ground remains the same no matter how long it is kept; flesh, however, requires salt to keep it in good condition. The voice of women is shrill, not so the voice of men; when soft viands are cooked, no sound is heard, but let a bone be put in a

pot, and at once it crackles. A man is easily placated, not so a woman; a few drops of water suffice to soften a clod of earth; a bone stays hard, even if it were to soak in water for days. The man must ask the woman to be his wife, and not the woman the man to be her husband, because it is man who has sustained the loss of his rib, and he sallies forth to make good his loss again. The very differences between the sexes in garb and social forms go back to the origin of man and woman for their reasons. Woman covers her hair in token of Eve's having brought sin into the world; she tries to hide her shame; and women precede men in a funeral cortège, because it was woman who brought death into the world. And the religious commands addressed to women alone are connected with the history of Eve. Adam was the heave offering of the world, and Eve defiled it. As expiation, all women are commanded to separate a heave offering from the dough. And because woman extinguished the light of man's soul, she is bidden to kindle the Sabbath light.⁷

Now one can perhaps understand why Lilith has been resurrected as a model for Jewish women and why her story is being recreated and renewed. The Jewish feminist journal *Lilith* says that 'it is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: "After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilit. Lilit said, we are equal because we both come from the earth."'⁸ This magazine, with all its faults, has been a source of information on Jewish women, their projects, careers and causes, and a forum for serious writings about issues of interest to us. It is also read by many men, an important and hopeful sign.

Lilith can be a good start for the work of 'depatriarchalization',⁹ a way of studying the Bible which searches out the lost, hidden and hinted-at stories of women in the Bible. It is also a valuable first point for the continued creation of that most valuable of rabbinic genres, the midrash, a Jewish category of literature which allows experimentation and the venting of difficult, curious, playful ideas. Lilith has given rise to all of the above and to poems and novels. In many of these, Lilith

speaks to Eve, to help Eve to discover herself and to work together, the angry, rejected partner of man, with the compliant, obliging partner of man. Judith Plaskow has written a midrash about the potential in that relationship of Eve and Lilith.

Applesource

In the beginning, the Lord God formed Adam and Lilith from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. Created from the same source, they were equal in all ways. Adam, being a man, didn't like this situation, and he looked for ways to change it. He said, 'I'll have my figs now, Lilith,' ordering her to wait on him, and he tried to leave to her the daily tasks of life in the garden. But Lilith wasn't one to take any nonsense; she picked herself up, uttered God's holy name, and flew away. 'Well now, Lord,' complained Adam, 'that uppity woman you sent me has gone and deserted me.' The Lord, inclined to be sympathetic, sent his messengers after Lilith, telling her to shape up and return to Adam or face dire punishment. She, however, preferring anything to living with Adam, decided to stay right where she was. And so God, after more careful consideration this time, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and out of one of his ribs created for him a second companion, Eve. For a time, Eve and Adam had quite a good thing going. Adam was happy now, and Eve, though she occasionally sensed capacities within herself which remained undeveloped, was basically satisfied with the role of Adam's wife and helper. The only thing that really disturbed her was the excluding closeness of the relationship between Adam and God. Adam and God just seemed to have more in common, both being men, and Adam came to identify with God more and more. After a while, that made God a bit uncomfortable too, and he started going over in his mind whether he might not have made a mistake letting Adam talk him into banishing Lilith and creating Eve, seeing the power that gave Adam.

Meanwhile Lilith, all alone, attempted from time to time to rejoin the human community in the garden. After her first

fruitless attempt to breach its walls, Adam worked hard to build them stronger, even getting Eve to help him. He told her fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night. The second time Lilith came, she stormed the garden's main gate, and a great battle between her and Adam ensued in which she was finally defeated. This time, however, before Lilith got away, Eve got a glimpse of her and saw she was a woman like herself.

After this encounter, seeds of curiosity and doubt began to grow in Eve's mind. Was Lilith indeed just another woman? Adam had said she was a demon. Another woman! The very idea attracted Eve. She had never seen another creature like herself before. And how beautiful and strong Lilith had looked! How bravely she had fought! Slowly, slowly, Eve began to think about the limits of her own life within the garden.

One day, after many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, Eve, wandering around the edge of the garden, noticed a young apple tree she and Adam had planted and saw that one of its branches stretched over the garden wall. Spontaneously, she tried to climb it, and, struggling to the top, swung herself over the wall.

She did not wander long on the other side before she met the one she had come to find, for Lilith was waiting. At first sight of her, Eve remembered the tales of Adam and was frightened — but Lilith understood and greeted her kindly. 'Who are you?' they asked each other. 'What is your story?' And they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of sisterhood grew between them.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, Adam was puzzled by Eve's comings and goings and disturbed by what he sensed to be her new attitude towards him. He talked to God about it, and God, having his own problems with Adam and a somewhat broader perspective, was able to help him out a little — but he was confused too. Something had failed to go according to plan. As

in the days of Abraham, he needed counsel from his children. 'I am who I am,' thought God, 'but I must become who I will become.' And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.¹⁰

When you read the above, do you tremble with God and Adam, in trepidation at this new power of women? Or do you smile and welcome them back, to begin as partners to heal the relationship between the sexes? If the latter, then Lilith has truly become a Jewish ancestor with the power to begin to bring woman and man together as she wanted it, as equals.

Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh — Names which Became Legends

Margaret Jacobi

It has often been pointed out that women in rabbinic times were rarely considered as independent members of society.¹ Much is written in rabbinic literature about women, but it is as they concern men and men's fulfilment of mitzvot. However, in the realm of aggadic midrash, as opposed to halachah, women do sometimes appear as independent and fully developed characters. Biblical women in particular may be described in midrash with a richness of detail that is absent in the biblical text. Some, such as Miriam, already have some importance in the Bible. Others are barely mentioned, but in midrashim take on a life of their own. The midrashic traditions relating to two such women, Serach bat Asher and Bitiah bat Pharaoh, will be described here, and the way in which these traditions develop from the biblical text will be considered. They appear only as names in the Bible, but a wealth of legends are found about them throughout the centuries.

The name Serach bat Asher appears three times in genealogies (Gen. 46.17; Num. 26.46; 1 Chron. 7.30), but nothing else is known about her. Similarly, the name Bitiah bat Pharaoh is found