

## Lilith

Throughout the ancient middle east there were beliefs in malevolent demons, monsters and spirits, including a class of female wind-spirits of the desert which could bring disease. Lilith started out as one of these, and after entering Jewish consciousness some time between 500 BCE and 500 CE, she came to be associated, among Jews in medieval times, with the death of children. She then came to be imagined as a kind of ravenous “anti-mother” and then as a ravenous “anti-wife” as well, a seductive, undomesticated wild spirit who stole children.

Lastly, in medieval times (700-1000 CE) an “origin story” for her was concocted. This was the same time period when demons, elves, faeries and others were given pseudo-Biblical origin stories. In Lilith’s case she was said to be the first, rebellious wife of Adam who left him and mated with Samael, prince of demons, becoming the Queen of the demonic. It seems pretty straightforward that the identity of Lilith as a female demon was wedded to male Jewish anxieties about aspects of women they saw as threatening or uncontrollable to produce the developed demoness of this text, the Zohar (13th century) and other Jewish texts.

One contemporary Occultist, Josephine McCarthy, sees Lilith as a real deity whose truth was distorted by male religious psychological hang-ups:

“The first step is to understand these powers [nature spirits], their functions in our world, and our own responsibility. The outer manifestation of a destroying deity is a human-constructed interface (a form, statue, attributes, etc.) that we used first to communicate with, then control the deity/being. Over the generations, as human power agendas changed, so did our explanations of the mythology, image, and function of the deity. So, for example, a Near Eastern female destroying power of the desert and bringer of disease was transformed, by religious spin, into a sexual predatory vamp that ate babies and turned men mad. The more that people formed that image in their minds, the stronger that construct became, until a parasitical being was more than happy to step into that role, thus making it a ‘reality.’ The original power still raged in the form of desert storms and disease, but the focus of the people was not on that natural power, but on the

image of the 'sex vamp' baby killer that was reviled. By deflecting our attention to a parasite deity form and away from the natural power, we didn't really learn to respect that [original] power, nor learn how to get out of its way. We also didn't learn to look carefully at what that conscious power was doing and why. If a human population does not keep itself in check and balance with its surroundings, then from a magical perspective, the conscious powers of that land will do it for us."

## **Lilith in Text**

*After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." 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 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 Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof, to bring her back.*

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

*The angels said, "We shall drown you in the sea."*

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

*When the angels heard Lilith's words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: "Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an*

*amulet, I will have no power over that infant." She also agreed to have one hundred of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels' names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath, and the child recovers.*

A Kabbalistic text from a century or two later perhaps says the following:

*There is a received tradition from the ancient Sages who made use of the Secret Knowledge of the Lesser Palaces, which is the manipulation of demons and a ladder by which one ascends to the prophetic levels. In this tradition it is made clear that Samael [an evil angel] and Lilith were born as one, similar to the form of Adam and Eve who were also born as one, reflecting what is above. This is the account of Lilith which was received by the Sages in the Secret Knowledge of the Palaces.*

Lilith was also said to be the first of Samael's four wives: Lilith, Naamah, Eisheth, and Agrat bat Mahlat. Each of them are mothers of demons and have their own legions. The marriage of archangel Samael and Lilith was arranged by the "Blind Dragon" (Tannan' Iver) an evil cosmic entity taught about by the great Kabbalist Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570).

*Blind Dragon rides Lilith the Sinful – may she be extirpated quickly in our days, Amen! – And this Blind Dragon brings about the union between Samael and Lilith. And just as the Dragon that is in the sea (Isa. 27:1) has no eyes, likewise Blind Dragon that is above, in the likeness of a spiritual form, is without eyes, that is to say, without colors.... Samael is called the Slant Serpent, and Lilith is called the Tortuous Serpent.*

The marriage of Samael and Lilith forms a being known as the "Angel Satan" or the "Other God". To prevent Lilith and Samael's demonic children *Lilin* from filling the world, God castrated Samael. Lilith, now unable to have children with Samael, sought to couple with men who experience this as nocturnal emissions. The Zohar says, "She [Lilith] roams at night, and goes all about the world and makes sport with men and causes them to emit seed. In every place

where a man sleeps alone in a house, she visits him and grabs him and attaches herself to him and has her desire from him, and bears from him. And she also afflicts him with sickness, and he knows it not, and all this takes place when the moon is on the wane.”

The semen spilt this way becomes food for demons, as does the semen of masturbation, according to pre-modern Kabbalah. Kabbalists emphasized the sinfulness of masturbation so severely that it became needed for Rebbe Nachman and others to disseminate magical cures for the spiritual damage caused by masturbation, such as Rebbe Nachman’s famous Tikkun Klali, which repaired the spiritual/metaphysical damage caused by it when chanted.

In the last few hundred years Lilith was reclaimed as a romantic, faerie-like creature in non-Jewish circles, as well as a goddess of witchcraft and wisdom. In Occult circles Lilith has come to be seen as a goddess of witchcraft and feminine power and reclaimed as a magical ally. Lilith was also one of the middle names of Aleister Crowley's first child, *Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith Crowley*. [One contemporary “Lilian Witch”](#) wrote the following hymn to her:

*Eternal Dark, Womb of Creation, Mistress of Passion and Fury, Lady of Magic,*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Beautiful Goddess wreathed in wisdom, glorious in thy Wrath,*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Luminous Siren of the Lunar Sphere, who walks the Terran Realms at Night,*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Delight of my Heart, Dark Rose emblazoned with the Secret Word,*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Empyrean Bride, Luciferian Wisdom, Portent of Hidden Gnosis,*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Undulating Hair, Wand of the Aeons, Fingers of Dominion, Cup of Bliss,*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Eyes that know no boundaries, as you walk the aethyrs dance with you!*

*Hear my Voice! Rise in me.*

*Lilith! Lilith! Lilith! (beat/chime) Lilith! Lilith! Lilith! (beat/chime) Lilith! We are unleashed!  
(triple beat/chime, then two beats/chimes in close succession).*

Lilith has also become a symbol of women's liberation in Jewish and then non-Jewish circles, as with the 1990s women's concert tour *The Lilith Fair* and the Jewish feminist magazine *Lilith*.

Speaking of the Midrash from the Alefbet of Ben Sirach, in the words of "The Lilith Question", an article from *Lilith*'s premier 1976 issue: "Not only does Lilith immediately recognize tyranny for what it is, but she immediately resists it, too. Nowhere do we see her complain (as Adam does); she states her case and takes risks for her dignity. She is courageous and decisive, willing to accept the consequences of her action."

"Her strength of character and commitment to self is inspiring. For independence and freedom from tyranny she is prepared to forsake the economic security of the Garden of Eden and to accept loneliness and exclusion from society. Her strength of character also comes through in her taking total responsibility for her life. Note that she does not appeal to God to straighten out her relationship with Adam. She draws on her own strength; she is self-nurturing, self-sustaining."

"Lilith is a powerful female. She radiates strength, assertiveness; she refuses to cooperate in her own victimization. By acknowledging Lilith's revolt and even in telling of her vengeful activities, myth-makers also acknowledge Lilith's power. Even if we accept Lilith's vengeful activities (and whether or not to accept them is a subject we will deal with later), we can regard

them as having originated in self-defense against male domination and as a consequence of having to fight on alone, century after century, for her independence. What men are saying, really is that Lilith “fights dirty.” But this is a meaningless concept designed to keep women from developing and utilizing their strength to fight, period. Lilith, it must be emphasized, is a fighter and a fighter in a good cause.”

So in the history of Lilith we see a constantly changing thought-form, or mythos, which first began as a dangerous nature spirit of wind and desert, then became a receptacle for male fears of women, and then transformed into a deity of sexual liberation, witchcraft, and feminine empowerment. Lilith continues to change, and her presence among human beings is far from over.

#### Further Reading

*The Lilith Question, AVIVA CANTOR ZUCKOFF, Lilith September 1976*