

The Confluence

Volume 1 | Issue 1

Article 7

August 2021

The Lilith Challenge

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Recommended Citation

Goldblum, Sarah (2021) "The Lilith Challenge," *The Confluence*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/theconfluence/vol1/iss1/7>

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Introduction:

Lilith, the female demon, is found all over ancient Babylonian mythology. She is not unique to Jewish folklore but was a part of ancient Babylonian and Assyrian mythology prior to the time of the Rabbis. In this paper, I will explore how her myth is incorporated into Judaism to help explain why evil happens to people who unwilfully sin. I will explore the cultivation and connection between the demon Lilith in the Jewish tradition, drawing from the Talmudic sources, a separate story in the Alphabet of Ben Sira, and the relation to evil. The Alphabet of Ben Sira was written after the Babylonian Talmud: “The Alphabet of Ben Sira is a medieval popular book with a pseudigraphic character. Its exact date is still a matter of dispute. The majority of experts believe that it was written sometime between the ninth and tenth centuries.”¹ This, and the Talmudic midrash about Lilith, were eventually picked up by popular Judaism. In this paper, I follow the development of the Lilith mythology, her beginning as an evil mother goddess, changing to a desert demon, to a baby killer, then to a succubus, and lastly as an explanation of Adam’s first wife in the book of Genesis, which serves as a bases for the Alphabet of Ben Sira.

I will explore the relationship between early theodicy and Lilith, and how Lilith is related to the serpent in the creation story. We will look at the symbol of the serpent, have a better textual understanding of Lilith mythology in relation to the Genesis story, and the use of Lilith to explain evil that plagues the unwillful sinner. We will look at how Lilith and the snake came to be related, and the possibility that Adam’s failure to please his wife brought about this demon. The

¹ Siegmund Hurwitz and Robert Hinshaw, *Lilith, the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine*. (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 2009), 124.

final section will address how the question of theodicy is also related to the development of the Lilith myth in Judaism.

This paper is written through a Jewish lens, so it is important to note the trivial differences between sin in the Jewish religion and sin in the Christian dogma. In Judaism, it is commonly believed that God punishes people who sin, regardless of their intent. Therefore, the Rabbis of the Talmud grappled with infant mortality; a child could not sin. Since a child could not sin willingly, the Lilith myth was developed to explain why infants died at the hands of a demon rather than a consequence of sin. Likewise, a sleeping man cannot control his body, so the Lilith myth was used to explain nocturnal emissions.

Background of Lilith

The idea of a female demon has been around since ancient civilizations. The Jewish myths of Lilith derived from ancient Assyrian and Babylonian female demons. Prior to the time of the Talmud, Lilith was a part of Babylonian religion, Lilitu. She is later found in amulet texts with different near-eastern goddesses. In the book of Isaiah, she appears as a desert ghost, and then as a child stealing and child killing female demon in Greek-Byzantine mythology. Lastly, in the Talmudic discourse, Lilith is said to be a succubus preying on sleeping men. In this section, I will trace Lilith's development to demonstrate how Lilith's myth was assimilated into Jewish tradition.

The development of Lilith is integral in this paper. Lilith is first seen and, “Was viewed as an archaic goddess who on her first appearance in the historico-religious tradition presented just one single aspect: that of a terrible mother goddess.”² Lilith, in the beginning, was not a

² Hurwitz and Hinshaw, 31 .

child-killing seductress of men. She started off just being a bad mother, still a female demon, but she had not developed into the image that had been used to describe her. Later, she was named Lilitu and changed. This appearance is closer to what is found in the Hebrew scriptures as a desert ghost. “The Babylonian goddess Lilitu later underwent several strange transformations within the Jewish tradition. First, she lost her original divine character and became a colorless, nocturnal desert ghost.”³ Here, we see her name change to Lilitu in Babylonian ancient culture.

Moving even further in Lilith’s development with the other names for female demons (Lamashtu, Gallu and Lilith) we see later that the Greek-Byzantine mythology made her into a child threat:

In amulet texts, sometimes it is Lamashtu, sometimes Gallu, and sometimes Lilith, who is invoked and conjured. Gallu later appeared as Gello, Gylo, or Gyllou in Graeco-Byzantine mythology, in which Gyllou has become a child-stealing and child-killing female demon. This figure was also taken up by Jewish mythology.⁴

This is a part of the development of the demon Lilith, a female demon who spread across many cultures, religions, and time periods. With each transfer, she changed and has become closer to the female demon that is thought of in the Alphabet of Ben Sira and the Talmudic mentions.

Lilith is also found in magical literature. For example, archeologists have found incantation bowls in Southern Babylon. Inscribed in the bowl were magical spells to ward off Lilith. Because of where the inscriptions were, historians believe that they were used by people who were bewitched. After they finished the drink from the bowls, they would say the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

incantation.⁵ When Lilith is written about in Talmudic times, she is written as a succubus, which is new to her myth.⁶ And, over time, Lilith was adapted into many cultures and myths, then later she became a subject to the Rabbis of the Talmud.

Lilith's development in myths has changed constantly. When her myth emerged, she was only an evil mother; later she became a marriage destroyer as she preyed on sleeping men; then, to punish mothers, she killed their babies; and served as an explanation of evil from the rabbis of the Talmud, and, more currently, a feminist icon: "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."⁷ This is an excellent point about the facts of Lilith's power. Given how much Lilith is mentioned in Rabbinic discord, it's clear that, while she is spoken about, her power and revolt shines through. The feminist movements used her as an example of strength. The Rabbis of the Talmud appear to view feminine power and independence of a powerful woman equal to that of a baby-killer and marriage-destroyer.

All this background is important in the understanding of Lilith and how the Rabbis of the Talmud portrayed her and how Jewish tradition and culture understood her. Her appearance and history are important in understanding the Lilith myth of this paper. We will see her myth develop and change, which brings us closer to understanding her relationship with the serpent, as

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Susannah Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 42.

the Rabbis of antiquity and ancient artists depicted her and her relationship with evil, and how the Rabbis used her to explain and answer the question of theodicy.

Biblical Understanding of Lilith

When we look at the Biblical understanding of Lilith, it is important to mention that she is only quoted by name once in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the book of Isaiah. There, she is described as a desert demon, like her portrayal in early Babylonian mythology. (See page 2)

In the book of Isaiah, it states, “And martens shall meet cats, and a satyr shall call his friend, but there the Lilith rests and has found for herself a resting place.”⁸ Here, Lilith is being referred to as a night demon. In other translations of the Bible, instead of saying Lilith, the text says night demon or cactus. This leads us to know that Lilith is thought of at night, in the dryness and death of the desert. Issiah was written before the Talmudic age, and her name in the text leads the reader to infer how she was thought of prior to the Midrash. It can be inferred that the Rabbis of the Talmud use this mentioning of her and other myths and collections of her when forming their retellings of the evil demoness, baby-killer, and man-seducer.

Although Lilith is not mentioned in the book of Genesis, the Alphabet of Ben Sira and other Midrash or stories point us to her connection to Adam. There are two creation stories in the book of Genesis. The first, Genesis 1:26 we find that mankind is created in the image of God. But, in Genesis 2:21, Adam is created and, from Adam’s rib, Eve is made. These creation stories differ from each other because the first shows humans created equally, and the second has a patriarchal theme. Lilith has been used to explain the first creation story and why there needed to be a new wife, for Adam.

⁸ Issiah 34:14

Documentary Hypothesis is the theory that there were more than four different authors of the Tanakh, all written at different times and locations. There are four authorships, (J)Yahwist, (E)Elohist, (P)Priestly and (D) Deuteronomy, there is also (R) the redactor who was thought to have edited the pieces together.

Genesis 1 is thought to be written by the Priestly authors written in the fifth or sixth century BCE. Genesis 2 is written by the Yahwist or (J).

For two centuries (from 922 to 722 BCE) the biblical promised land was divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south. A text known as J was composed during this period. It is called J because, from its very first sentence, it refers to God by the proper name of YHWH.⁹

An important note is that Genesis 2 was written prior to Genesis 1. When first reading the book of Genesis, it looks like a mistake that there are two creation stories, the first where humans are created in Gods image, and the second, where Adam is created from the dirt and Eve is created later from his rib.

Why did the Priestly authors write a contradictory story that challenges the existing story of Adam and Eve? It could be inferred that they were thinking of the creation of Lilith as a demon into the Jewish tradition. The authors wrote a second creation story to make way for another midrash to be written about. Lilith's appearance in the Alphabet of Ben Sira came centuries after the publication and writing of the Priestly sources, but it gave an opportunity to explain why evil exists in the world.

⁹ Richard Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: a New View of the Five Books of Moses* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003).

The Talmud comes after the publication of the Tanakh, and the Alphabet of Ben Sira has not been written yet, but the Rabbis of the Talmud were educated or knew of a female demon named Lilith, because its mentions in the Talmud are like those of ancient Babylon.

Lilith in the Talmud

This paper is asserting that the Rabbis of the Talmud used their prior understandings of the myth of Lilith in their discord about Lilith and how evil of a demon she was. In the Talmud, we see Lilith appear a few times. The Rabbis of the Talmud are clearly informed of other myths of Lilith. For example, we see the Rabbis of the Talmud mention Lilith as a demon with wings; this is clearly taken from ancient mentions of Lilith as a desert demon, which is also seen in the book of Issiah. They add to her demon characteristics as a succubus who preys on men, they even go farther to say that a man should not sleep in a house, as they might be attacked by the evil Lilith.

The Talmud is the latest source in Jewish tradition about Lilith that holds prevalence in traditional Judaism. Because we are living in Rabbinic Judaism, the Talmud is very important to Jewish law and ethics.

We see Lilith related to abortion and stillborn babies. They relate a fetus that has not formed correctly to be Lilith, and the mother is impure because she did not produce a viable offspring; this is also in connection to a child born prematurely:

Rav Yehuda says that Shmuel says: In the case of a woman who discharges a fetus that has the form of a lilith, a female demon with wings and a human face, its mother is impure with the impurity of a woman after childbirth, as it is a viable offspring, only it has wings. This is also taught in a baraita: Rabbi Yosei said: An incident occurred in

Simoni involving a certain woman who discharged a fetus that had the form of a lilit, and the incident was brought before the Sages; and they said that it is a viable offspring, only it has wings.¹⁰

The idea that Lilith has wings is like her appearance in other mythologies like the ancient Babylonian goddess Lilith.

The next quotation of Lilith in the Talmud is of a description of women and how they are very different from men. In this part of the Talmud, Lilith's name is mentioned as “Lilit”.

What is the meaning of ostracized from all people? If you say this is because it is forbidden for her to seclude herself with a man, it is also forbidden for a man to seclude himself with women. Rather, it means that it is forbidden for her to marry two men, whereas a man can marry two women. It was taught in a baraita that the three additional curses are: She grows her hair long like Lilit, a demon; she sits and urinates, like an animal; and serves as a pillow for her husband during relations.¹¹

This gives the scholar and historian insight into the Rabbis' view of women. It is clear that they saw Lilith with long hair, which is another demonic characteristic that they add to her profile.

Lastly, we see the development of Lilith as a succubus, who preys on sleeping men to produce more evil spirits. “Rabbi Ḥanina said: It is prohibited to sleep alone in a house, and anyone who sleeps alone in a house will be seized by the evil spirit Lilith.”¹² This part of the myth of Lilith is where the Rabbis of the Talmud relate Lilith to wet dreams. They saw wet

¹⁰ Israel Wolf Slotki and Harry Freedman, (Nidah 24b) *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1978).

¹¹ Slotki and Freedman, Talmud, Eruvin 100b

¹² Slotki and Freedman, Talmud, Shabbat 151b

dreams as an unclean act that would make one ritually impure, which prevented them from praying. Lilith's development had changed to being a succubus.

After reviewing the Talmudic sources of the mentions of Lilith, it is clear that the Rabbis of the Talmud knew of the Lilith myth and integrated this female demon into Jewish mysticism and knowledge. They added to her myth, stating that she was a succubus who preyed on men sleeping alone. All this knowledge is bringing us closer to understanding why the Rabbis of antiquity used Lilith to explain evil attacking the unwilful sinner. This evil spirit, Lilith, is being changed and used by the Rabbinic discourse in both the Talmud and the Zohar to explain the use of the evil snake in the Tanakh, and why people who do not sin are being punished. Instead of blaming God for this punishment, Lilith is painted with blame.

Lilith in the Alphabet of Ben Sira

We have seen the development of Lilith: her start in ancient Babylonian and Assyrian mythology, moving on to her mention in the Hebrew Scriptures in the book of Issiah, all the way to the time of the Babylonian Talmud where her myth changed again. Now, we move on to her appearance in the Alphabet of Ben Sira, which was written after the sealing and publication of the Talmud in the 8th or 10th century.

The Alphabet of Ben Sira paints Lilith as Adam's first wife, which could have been written to explain the two stories of creation in the book of Genesis.

After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He said: 'It is not good for Adam to be alone.' He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilith. They quarreled immediately. She said: 'I will not lie below you.' He said, 'I will not lie below you, but above you. For you are fit to be below me and I above you.' She responded: 'We

are both equal because we both come from the earth.’ Neither listened to the other. When Lilith realized what was happening, she pronounced the Ineffable Name of God and flew off into the air. Adam rose in prayer before the Creator saying, ‘The woman you gave me has fled from me.’ Immediately the Holy One sent three angels after her. The Holy One said to Adam: ‘If she wants to return all the better. If not, she will have to accept that one hundred of her children will die every day.’ The angels went after her, finally locating her in the sea, in the powerful waters in which the Egyptians were destined to perish. They told her what God had said and she did not want to return. (Alphabet of Ben Sira 23A-B)¹³

In the Alphabet of Ben Sira, we see Lilith created from the same dirt as Adam. She refuses to lie beneath him because they were created as equals. She realizes that she will never win the fight with him and outcasts herself. When analyzing the Lilith story in the Alphabet of Ben Sira, the reader is made aware of a few key elements as follows:

(1) She is created equal to man and becomes his first wife before Eve; (2) she possesses the knowledge of the divine name and its utilization; (3) she inhabits some desolate place; where (4) she engenders her own race of demons, probably with some substitute for Adam; and from where (5) she assaults children unless they are protected by special rites and paraphernalia.¹⁴

The Alphabet of Ben Sira explains how Lilith was the first wife of Adam, and her unwillingness to submit and expectation to be treated as an equal were problematized. The development of

¹³ Heschel, 1995, 40.

¹⁴ Wojciech Kosior., "A Tale of Two Sisters: The Image of Eve in Early Rabbinic Literature and Its Influence on the Portrayal of Lilith in the Alphabet of Ben Sira." (2018)

Lilith is important in our understanding of the implications and importance of her symbolism in Rabbinic discourse. She is first used to explain wet dreams and infant mortality, then is used to explain the evil that the world possesses.

Snake as a Symbol of Evil or Death

Evil in the Hebrew Scriptures is represented by the Serpent. There is textual evidence in the Zohar showing Samael, said to be Lilith's husband, riding a female snake. God was connected to the snake with Moses through the staff that was given to Moses, which proves that the snake is related to God. Here, we see the snake being connected with God and evil and death.

We see the serpent of the Garden of Eden in chapter two of Genesis. There, the snake goes to Eve, and convinces her to eat from the forbidden tree of wisdom. She ate from the tree and then convinced Adam to eat too. God comes down to the Garden of Eden to see Adam and Eve hiding from him, for they feared him seeing them naked without clothes. When God discovers that they ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge, they are punished. Eve and all her female decedents are plagued with pain from childbirth, and "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."¹⁵ The serpent was sentenced to slithering on its belly and eating dust all day. Adam was sentenced to work on the earth and to eat the food that he grew.

In the Bible, snakes appear at the launch of creation and again just before apocalypse.

The first serpent is really a proto snake: He only loses his legs after inciting the first

¹⁵ NRSV, Genesis 3:16

couple to sin. The final serpent is a full-blown dragon, which in ancient mythology is just a snake with wings.¹⁶

In the creation story, the snake tempts Eve. It convinces her that God tricked Adam and Eve into believing that if they ate or touched the forbidden tree, they would die. Eating from the forbidden tree opened Adam and Eve's eyes to know good and evil. The snake was the bringer or the enlightener of evil to humankind:

At the time Genesis was written, Israel didn't have the developed sense of the devil or Satan that we conjure up today. The Genesis serpent is simply the incarnation of danger, which is what any encounter with a snake might be. Since you never know if that sudden rustle underfoot is potentially fatal or not, it pays to act with caution. Adam and Eve make their choice in ignorance, and with a decided lack of caution. So, they're bitten, and the poison spreads across the generations.¹⁷

Genesis is one of the most memorable times that the Hebrew scriptures learns of a serpent, but it's not the only time. For example, in Exodus, while Moses is being instructed by God through the burning bush:

Then the LORD said to him, 'What is in your hand?' 'A staff,' he replied. The LORD said, 'Throw it on the ground.' Moses threw it on the ground, and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.'

¹⁶ John Switzer, *US Catholic*, 2014, 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

So, Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.¹⁸

Moses is one of the most important prophets in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition. He is sent by God to deliver the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Moses uses his staff to unleash all of God's wonders. When the staff turns into a snake, it instills fear in humans, like Moses. This fear is of evil and danger. Yet again, the snake in the Hebrew scriptures instills fear, bringer of evil to humans.

Later, in Exodus, Moses's brother, Aaron, uses the staff to battle Pharaoh and his servants. "Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same thing by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs."¹⁹ Now, we see the snake bringing a form of evil that is new: death. This foreshadows the rest of the story of the Passover, where the final plague kills the first-born child of the unmarked homes. The snake, evil, and death are all connected:

These and the other appearances of the snake in Yahveh's close entourage have led some academics to suppose that this might be the deity's theriomorphic manifestation. If these scholars are right in supposing that the figure of snake was inherently important at least in the early period of Yahvism, then one has solid reason to assume that the serpentine connections of Eve go even further than what is found in the rabbinic retellings.²⁰

¹⁸ NRSV, Exodus, 4:2-4

¹⁹ NRSV, Exodus 7:10-12

²⁰ Kosior, 120.

Antiquity was infatuated with the idea of the snake, and the connection to evil is predominantly biblical. For example, in ancient Greek mythology, snakes were related to life, because they could shed their skin and continue to live. This seemed almost magical to ancient cultures:

In the Near East, snakes were fertility symbols, emblematic of virility and health in general. The dragon in China is likewise a positive symbol of strength. The American Medical Association chose the poled serpent (caduceus) as its icon for precisely this reason. Although fertility is never mentioned in the creation account, many of us were taught (or intuited) that the original sin had something to do with our sexuality. If not, why does the nakedness of Adam and Eve play such a part, not to mention their shame? The story of Eden was written in response to local fertility religions that drew so many worshippers from Israel's ranks. Don't bow to the snake, the sacred writers warned, or it will come back to bite you.²¹

The serpent was found in The Holy Temple in decorations around the prayer and sacrificial mounts but was removed by King Hezekiah. It is unclear why the snakes were removed, possibly because the snakes were related to polytheism or cultic behavior that the Jewish people found as threatening. "[King Hezekiah] removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan (2)" (Kgs 18:4). It follows clearly from the biblical text that the bronze serpent was a cultic object. In light of the reference to Moses, it is hard to perceive Nehushtan in any other way than as a symbol of god—the healer.

²¹ Switzer, 46

It is problematic, however, whether we can trust the biblical text as evidence of a Hebrew origin for the cult.²² Now, the symbol of the snake represents the devil. In the creation story, the snake symbolizes and opens humans' eyes to the evil that now plagues the world. It also brought mortality to humans and banned us from the Garden of Eden. Eve was tempted and lured by the serpent and did not know this because she did not know evil. Moses uses his staff to unleash God's wonders, which includes a violent deadly serpent. One may wonder, is the first serpent also apart of God?

Connecting Lilith and the Snake Together

It is clear now that the snake represents evil, and it could be assumed that this evil is from the hand of God, given that Moses's staff was given to him by God to help him deliver the Israelites back to Israel. Lilith and the snake of the Garden of Eden have been connected. The succubus Lilith is used to explain the evil that the world possesses. For example, in artwork, Lilith and the snake are connected. Of artwork made at the same time as the Alphabet of Ben Sira.

In medieval Judaism and Christianity, she was associated with the Serpent of Eden.

(footnote) This is evident, for example in Christian painting that depict the serpent of Eden and seeing as the woman's face and breasts. In the Zohar (1:148a), one of Lilith's names is 'serpent'. Moreover, according to the Zohar (2:243b-244a) Samael rode the

²² Maciej Münnich, "The Cult of Bronze Serpents in Ancient Canaan and Israel." (2005)

Serpent of Eden and seeing as the Zohar ordinarily describes Samael as riding Lilith, one may hereby deduce that Lilith is the Serpent of Eden.²³

There are many explanations of Lilith in the Zohar, a mystical collection of commentary on the Torah, also known as the Kabbalah. Samael is said to have been Lilith's new husband. He was a demon and they bore many more demons in the world. The connection between him riding the Serpent of Eden and riding Lilith is an important connection made that infers that Lilith and the serpent were the same.

It is also important to note who was writing the Zohar: Rabbis around the 13th century. History and origins are crucial to understanding the messages in the commentaries. Like the Talmud, the Rabbis of the Zohar were trying to explain and fill in gaps of Jewish history and explain evil. Given that they were writing during the diaspora, they were pained with assimilation.

The serpent of Eden and Lilith were connected by the Rabbis of the Zohar in order to relieve God from the possibility of bringing evil into the world, a distraction from the possibility of God being the serpent of Eden. Given that, later, in the book of Exodus, God and the snake are the same. Moses's staff is controlled by God. The evil that cripple's society could have been by Gods hand, but the Rabbis of antiquity came up with Lilith and Samael, in order to protect the Almighty Holy One.

The symbol of the serpent and Lilith are very similar. They each have the same meaning: sin, death, and evil.

²³ Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, "Lilith's Comeback from a Jungian-Feminist Outlook: Contemporary Feminist Spirituality Gets into Bed with Lilith." *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology*

The serpent as symbol also reappears in modern painting in relation to Lilith. Lilith's connection with the serpent can be viewed considering their shared archetype: the snake shedding its skin, or drawn with its tail in its mouth, is the symbol of the cycle of eternity, much like the immortal Lilith. Both represent sin, death and resurrection. Sexuality is another central meaning symbolized by both the serpent and Lilith.²⁴

It is clear that the serpent and Lilith have a connection. It is also clear that Lilith was used to distract people from the evils of the serpent, because the serpent has a direct correlation to God in the Tanakh. Later, this changes in Christianity, where the serpent represents the devil, but, in ancient Jewish times, this was not the case.

Question of Theodicy

Theodicy, or the question of theodicy, is challenging reason for why a perfect and almighty God allows evil to exist in the world. This is an important question for this paper because we have learned about the fall in the Garden of Eden, where Eve is tempted by the snake and eats from the tree of knowledge. This opens Eve's and Adam's eyes to see evil. After Adam, Eve, and the snake are given a punishment from God, they are banished from the heaven on Earth garden never to see it again. For the sake of this paper and argument, if it is understood that God is the creator of all, why would he send a snake to tempt the first innocent humans?

The Zohar was written after the time of the Talmud. Each collection is written by Rabbis. They are each adding commentary but at different time periods. The Zohar was about mysticism and Kabbalah and is pertinent to the conversation of the serpent. The Rabbis of the Zohar connected Lilith to the serpent of the Garden of Eden in order to place blame on her, the

²⁴ Ibid.

succubus who harms the innocent, rather than leave the gaping hole of the question of theodicy. Not placing blame on Lilith would have left an opening to question the morale of God.

To the Rabbis of the Talmudic age, it seems that they were trying to explain infant mortality and wet dreams. This is closely related to theodicy, because children and babies were dying, and it was not because they were breaking God's rules, or living a sinful life; they simply died. The Rabbis could not fathom this idea, and, like many other ancient communities, they used myth to explain the unexplainable. Infants and children were dying because the evil Lilith, who was too powerful, would not submit to her husband and had committed herself to killing 100 children a day.

Wet dreams are also a question of Theodicy because men who are sleeping cannot control having a seminal emission. It also was a huge conundrum because, if they had a seminal emission whether by having sexual intercourse or in their sleep, they were ritually impure for 24 hours and had to immerse themselves in the Mikvah. Wet dreams also bring up the question of theodicy because, if God is all powerful and good, why did he create bodies that would not work the way that they should?

People who are not sinning are punished; this is evil. It was difficult to explain why babies were dying and men were having uncontrollable emissions. Were they sinners? No. The Rabbi's seemed to have a difficult time explaining this kind of evil, where people are punished who don't deserve to be, instead of placing blame on the creator, God. Lilith becomes the explanation.

An all-powerful God making a mistake in creating the world the way he did is not a fathomable thought by the Rabbis, but some thought that the world was evil so that righteousness

would shine through. "If even two righteous persons were to overcome all the obstacles and do some good in those evil worlds, God would have been ungrateful if he did not create them."²⁵ God does not make mistakes, he is all-powerful and knowing, therefore, he allows evil to persist in the world so that he can see the righteous people shine through. This is a similar theory to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham and Lot. This proves that evil exists for a reason: to show what the good is. It was not a mistake by God in creating the world. Yet, it is still a topic of interest for scholars and, similarly, was of interest to the Rabbis of antiquity.

Brining this back to Lilith and the Rabbis of the Talmud is crucial to this paper. Lilith explains the evil that the Rabbis were plagued with in Antiquity: infant and child mortality and involuntary seminal emissions. The innocent children and babies could not control what happened to them, which meant that they had not lost favor with God, and for them to die was a tragedy and a mystery to the Rabbis. Wet dreams were evil to the Rabbis of the Talmud because they became ritually impure without meaning to. There are cases where, for example, the high priest was kept awake all night by other Rabbis so that he would not fall asleep and have the possibility of becoming ritually impure because then he would not be able to communicate with God on the day of atonement. The Rabbis of the Talmud needed to control their seminal emissions so that they could pray and continue with their studies.

This kind of evil is explained by Lilith. The Rabbis molded her to explain the evil and treachery that they were dealing with in their lives. She was taken from other ancient sources and incantation bowls to be used by the Rabbis to explain the evil that they saw plagued the world. Instead of challenging God and asking why he allowed babies and children to die, or why he

²⁵ Joseph Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah." *AJS Review* 5 (1980)

created bodies that were uncontrollable, they accused Lilith of these acts of evil. The question of theodicy in this paper pertains to and wonders if the rabbis were wrong, and that God is the evil bringer to our world.

Rabbinic Discourse

To summarize, the Rabbis of the Talmud were ancient philosophers living in the Rabbinical age of Judaism. They were living in exile and without a holy temple. They wrote about every subject known to man, with stories combined with Gemara and Mishnah – the separation of the two parts of the Talmud. The Mishna is the oral law for what it is, and the Gemara is the collection of Rabbinic commentary and reasoning for the law, disproving it or providing more information. The Gemara is where the Rabbis of the Talmud talked about the obligations that men had to their wives.

One reason as to why Lilith was created and talked about during the time of the Exile was possibly out of fear:

Another fear was woman's power to withhold herself from man, either by refusing comfort or even her very presence (Lilith actually left Adam). In the stress situation of the Exile, Jewish men may have been especially anxious that women would not fulfil their role of providers of emotional support. All these fears of Jewish men were projected onto woman as if she held the power to make them into reality by refusing to stay in the subservient enable role.²⁶

This paper agrees with Heschel – women at this time in history were not viewed as equals to their husbands. The Jewish people were living in foreign land, and the Rabbis possibly feared

²⁶ Heschel

their wives learning other cultures and using that to leave them and not be fully subservient to them. It was and is a patriarchal world where women are viewed as subservient, meek, caregivers that enable the man to do what they want. In the Exile, Jewish men seemed to be fearful of their wives rejecting this kind of relationship. This may have been one reason why the Rabbis of the Talmud spent so much time and effort writing about the evil that is an independent woman, like Lilith.

The Rabbis of the Talmud did not just write about prayer and theology. They also wrote about marital relations, and the obligation a man has to his wife in the bedroom. To note, marital relations in Judaism are not viewed as sinful, nor are they only for procreation. Sexual relations between a Jewish husband and wife are a commandment that should happen often. There are also rules set in place by the Rabbis of the Talmud on how their wives must remain satisfied and a man can do whatever his wife desires to further the pleasurable experience. “With regard to one who says: I do not want to have intercourse with my wife unless I am in my clothes and she is in her clothes, he must divorce his wife and give her the payment for her marriage contract.”²⁷ If a man is denying his wife pleasurable sexual relations, to the Rabbis of the Talmud, this meant being naked. He is to divorce her and give her the money based on the marital contract. A man had a religious obligation to pleasure his wife, and if he refused, she had the right to divorce him and get the money from the marriage.

²⁷ Maggie Anton, *Fifty Shades of Talmud: What the First Rabbis Had to Say about You-Know-What*. Los Angeles, CA: Banot Press, 2016.

Women did not have as many rights when getting a divorce, but not being sexually satisfied was one reason that they were granted a divorce in exchange of the marital money.

Another example of the Talmud teaching states,

With regard to one who vows that his wife may not derive benefit from marital relations with him, Beit Shammai says: He may maintain this situation for up to two weeks, but beyond that he must divorce her and give her the payment for her marriage contract. Beit Hillel says: He must divorce her if it continues beyond one week. Apropos the husband's obligation to his wife regarding marital relations.²⁸

These are just a few examples in the Talmud where the men are giving instructions on how to keep their wives satisfied in the bedroom because they had a religious obligation to do so. Now, this brings us back to what this paper is trying to convey. What about Lilith? Lilith was the first wife, married to Adam, the first man. In the story, she refused to be below him and was denied sexual and marital pleasure from her husband, Adam.

It says that, if a wife is not being pleased, she should be allowed to get a divorce from her husband. Should the Rabbis be penalizing Adam for his inability to serve his wife? I have argued that Lilith is used to explain evil and shift blame of theodicy to her, the evil woman that kills innocent and preys on sleeping men. Yet, the Talmud commentary has left a loophole. They forgot that Jewish law requires the wife to be satisfied in the sexual relations.

Lilith was seeking to have marital relations with her husband, Adam, and he would not lie with her. He did not complete his obligations; therefore, maybe it is his fault that Lilith became a demon that preyed on the innocent.

²⁸ Ibid.

Lilith has not broken any rules. There are no rules in the Talmudic sources that state that she could not be on top, or that she had to stay with Adam forever, or that she could not say the Lord's name. Lilith has not sinned. So why is Lilith associated with evil? She has been associated with evil at the hands of the rabbis of antiquity, and they used her to protect God from the question of theodicy.

The story of Lilith always comes back to Adam, surprisingly. They overlooked the evil of the snake. By connecting Lilith and the snake together, it shows and gives a major hole in the idea of an all-powerful and loving God.

The argument that Lilith was not satisfied by her husband Adam and that he should have given her what she wanted because that was his obligation to her, based on Talmudic sources, is clear. But, a counter argument to this is that Adam and Lilith were living long before any rules of Jewish law became prevalent. Therefore, Adam did not know the rules that were set in place for husbands and wives and could in turn be innocent and exempt from the rules. But, because the Rabbis of the Talmud wrote those rules, and expected them from every married couple, it seems hypocritical that they would look at a wife, Lilith, as evil because she wanted to be sexually satisfied by her husband. The Rabbis go so far as to say that the husband can do anything the wife desires for her to have a pleasurable experience. It is also important to note that Adam should not be innocent in this marriage if Lilith was not. If he is exempt from the rules that were written after his life, so should Lilith. One gender cannot and should not be demonized from this 'first marriage'.

Conclusion

The demon, Lilith, has been seen all over antiquity. Lilith is first seen as an evil archaic goddess who was a terrible mother. Later, she is found in incantation bowls. Even further, she is written about in the Talmud and Zohar, where she becomes a succubus. The only time she is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible is in the book of Isaiah, where she is compared to as a night cactus. Lilith has developed over time. When the Rabbis of the Talmud wrote her myths, she represented an infant killer and marriage destroyer. The Alphabet of Ben Sira, published shortly after the Babylonian Talmud, is where she is described as Adam's first wife, who would not submit to him.

In this paper, we explored the possible interpretation(s) of the Rabbis of the Talmud and their reasoning for writing about her. This paper concludes that the Rabbis of the Talmud took her from other ancient practices and myths and demonized her. They condemned her independence and inability to submit to her husband and related an independent woman to the evils of killing babies and seducing men.

There is also a connection between Lilith and the serpent. The serpent is viewed as bringing evil to humans. The Rabbis of the Zohar connected Lilith to the serpent when they wrote of Samael, said to be Lilith's second husband. Samael is also a demon and, together, it is said that they produced a multitude of other demons that plague the world.

When the Rabbis were writing the Talmud, they wrote about numerous subjects, including the way a husband is to treat his wife. Adam and Lilith were the first couple, and, according to Rabbinic commentary, Adam did not do his part in satisfying his wife, Lilith. Could Adam be to blame for the reason that Lilith left? Had he listened to her and found a new way of consummating, would Lilith have been the mother of humankind?

We have grappled with what Lilith was, how she was portrayed by the Rabbis of antiquity, and her early origins. Her development from start to finish has been immense, as her myth has changed and developed. The patriarchal trope that she is evil, and that any woman who refuses to submit is as evil as a baby killer and marriage destroyer, seems like propaganda set in place to keep women subservient to their husbands and the male world. Yet, after learning and analyzing her myth, it seems clear that she was casted by the Rabbis in their discord to place blame away from the all-powerful God in their quest to answer the ever so prevalent question of theodicy.

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