

LILITH – FROM DEMON TO CONTEMPORARY GODDESS

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Any discussion about Lilith amongst a group of spiritual women will often unearth comments such as the “she’s the one who refused to lie beneath that pasty whinger Adam”, or “she withheld her sexual favours and got the hell outta God’s garden”. She is seen as the very first emancipated female, rebelling at not only Adam’s command to lay beneath him, but snubbing her nose at God himself and fleeing to the desert to copulate with a deluge of demons. All very empowered and rebellious. Gotta love Lilith! But while a contemporary archetype for women who want to reclaim their sexual power and independence, the Hebrew faith vilified her and cast her name amongst the most feared of demons who would steal babies from their cots and extract secret emissions from men at night to use in fathering her demon children.

It all started before Eve was even thought of. You won’t find Lilith in the New Testament and there is only one mention of her in the Old, her story was much developed during the Middle Ages and can be found in the Zohar, the holy book of Midrashic Judaic mysticism. After Adam tired of coupling with the beasts - bestiality being a widely spread practice amongst herdsmen of the Middle East - and finding no satisfaction in the act, God decided to give Adam a mate, lest he should be alone of his kind. But instead of using pure dust, he is said to have created Lilith using filth and sediment. Now Lilith saw herself as equal to Adam and when he wished to lie with her, she took offence at the recumbent posture he demanded. “Why must I lie beneath you?” she demanded. Adam, in his pitiful attempt to compel her obedience by force, elicited such a rage within Lilith that she uttered the magic name of God and fled the Garden of Eden forever. Of course Adam took his complaint to God and he sent the angels Sensoy, Sansenoy and Semangel off to fetch Lilith back. They found her beside the Red Sea, a region known to be popular with lascivious demons and where she bore more than 100 demon children to them per day.

And so the angels commanded “Return to Adam without delay, or we will drown you”. She protested at the absurdity of returning to Adam and living like a dutiful housewife after her stay at the Red Sea demon resort. She asked how she could die when God had ordered her to take charge of all newborn children, boys up to the eighth day of life, that of circumcision and girls up to their twentieth day. But in doing a deal, she promised to spare all newborns who displayed an amulet above their beds bearing the images and names of the angels, and if she could not destroy a human infant, she would turn on her own. The angels agreed and God punished Lilith by slaying a hundred of her demon children per day.

The bargain made with Lilith was borne out in the apotropaic or magic ritual performed in many Hebrew households after the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE which was to protect all newborn children, and especially true for a male child as a safeguard before circumcision on the eighth day of life. The spell comprised drawing a ring with natron or charcoal, around the wall of the birthroom, and inside it were written the words “Adam and Eve. Out Lilith!” The names of the three angels were also inscribed on the door and if a child was found to be laughing in his sleep, it was believed that Lilith was fondling him and to avert danger, it was thought wise to strike the sleeping child on the lips, whereupon Lilith would vanish. Fear of Lilith was very widespread, especially throughout the Hebrew communities and amulets, charms and spells against her and her kin were very

commonplace, not only to protect against child snatching, but to ward off disease and safeguard sleeping men.

So Lilith became the Queen of the demons, killing babies in their sleep and snatching them from their cribs. But her other claim to fame is that of evil succubus, the temptress of sleeping men upon whom she would impregnate herself with their nocturnal emissions. Here she is tainted with the title of whore, satisfying herself with the masturbatory semen elicited from the male sex drive. This is sex without love, without procreation, unpartnered, purely for the sake of pleasing the male sexual urge and not at all permitted within the Abrahamic ethos. Men waking to find their sheets stained with semen would believe they had been preyed upon by the succubus Lilith during the night, who crouching over their sleeping form, had stolen their seed to father more demon offspring.

But the history of Lilith is much older than Adam and the Genesis creation myth. The earliest recorded stories of Lilith appear in ancient Sumerian texts around 3000 BCE where she is known as the hand maiden of the great Goddess Inanna, "Queen of Heaven" who presided over sacred sexual rites. In the temples of Inanna, the holy women were known as *qadishtu*, sacred priestesses who were able to mediate the divine sexual gifts of the goddess with the men who came to worship. As Inanna's handmaiden, Lilith was a beautiful young woman, the 'hand of Inanna' who gathered the men from the streets and brought them to the temple for holy rites. Lilith's flower was the *lilu* or lilly or 'lotus' of her genital magic which reflected the maiden virgin aspect of the triple goddess. Lilith from this period is depicted with a beautiful slender body, with wings that fall behind her like an open veil. She has powerful clawed owl's feet, holding a ring and rod symbolising her power, and surrounded by lions. Her name literally means "screech" and she was associated with the nocturnal screech owl, later becoming known as the demon of screeching.

And so Lilith as demon succubus actually began her recorded history as a beautiful seductive young woman, approaching men to take them to Inanna's holy temple for an experience that reflected the liberal freedom of sexual attitudes and practices of Goddess worship.

What happens to Lilith next mirrors the rise of patriarchy from around 2500 BCE where the Goddess' vast empire was attacked at its very core, her inner temple of sacred sexual love. In order for patriarchy to achieve this overthrow, it had to discredit and suppress the sacred sexual rites of Goddess religion, severing the people from its power. This was achieved by the systematic demonizing of women's sexual energy and their ability to mediate the divinity of the Goddess. Over the ensuing centuries Lilith, the young handmaiden of Inanna, came to represent everything that was dangerous and evil in the sexual realm, focusing men's most dreaded fears around the power of the sexual female.

The Epic of Gilgamesh where she is known as *Ki-sikil-lil-la-ke* tells the story of how Lilith was summarily cast out of Sumerian cosmology. Here she takes the form of the great winged bird goddess and takes up residence in the sacred *huluppu* tree which grows in Inanna's garden in Uruk. The story goes that after ten years of growth, Inanna comes to harvest the tree and finds a serpent living at its base, the anzu bird rearing its young at the crown and *Ki-sikil-lil-la-ke* residing in its trunk. Inanna calls upon Gilgamesh to smite the serpent, whereupon the anzu bird flies away with its young and *Ki-sikil-lil-la-ke* takes the form of a demon and destroys Inanna's house and heads for the desolate wilderness.

Lilith's banishment from the temples of the Goddess continued over the following centuries and her legend morphed into various manifestations of sexual demon in the numerous civilisations of the ancient Near East as patriarchy's grip strove to personify the evil found in female sexual power. The Mesopotamian stories tell us of *Lamashtu* who was considered a

demi-goddess and daughter of Anu the sky god. Here her goddess like status sees her as a daughter of heaven, exercising free will over infants. *Lamashtu's* malevolence was well recorded and she was said to seduce men, harm pregnant women and mothers, kill foliage, drink blood and cause disease, sickness and death. It is said at the space between her legs there resides a scorpion, her head is like that of a lion, she bears talon like feet, and her breasts are suckled by a pig and a dog.

Other similar Akkadian (Semitic) language references refer to *Lilitu* as appearing to men in their erotic dreams and the Assyrian *Lilitu* was said to prey upon women and children and was described as being associated with lions, storms, desert and disease. The early descriptions of these demons were known to have zu bird talons for feet and wings. The *Lilitu* was highly predatory towards men but unable to copulate in the normal sense. It was said that the demon *Lilitu* dwelt in desolate waste land and desert places.

Lilith now assumes the form upon which the Hebrew legends were developed and where she is assigned a central place in Jewish demonology. In the early part of the first millennium BCE the Hebrew exile into Canaan and later Babylon, saw patriarchy needing to subdue the female worship of the Fertility Goddess Anath (a later incarnation of Inanna and Ishtar), whose holy rites allowed worshippers prenuptial sexual freedoms which were altogether in conflict with Hebraic traditions. The prophets denounced the practices of the Israelite women, citing Lilith as a sexually demonic example of what this kind of worship was encouraging. For the Hebrew men and their religion in exile to survive, it was imperative that the women be programmed to be submissive and bound to the interests of family, men and society. A key imperative in proving one's maleness also resided in the ability to father children, so any threat to a man's potency and his progeny needed to be suppressed. Because Lilith and her roots in Goddess worship signified a sexually independent woman who had control over pregnancy and infancy, her demonizing was essential to the survival of the Jewish race.

And so Lilith's fall from grace as the beautiful hand maiden representing the liberated sexuality of the goddess temples, to the feared demoness of Hebraic tradition, enters the 21st century quite reinvented.

Lilith has thrown off the shackles of demoness and assumed almost heroine proportions to a modern female audience who is eager to explore the sexual shadow. Women are done with the Christian model of femininity they have been sold for millennia and are exploring a much larger palette of opportunities to express themselves. The fact is, that it is safe once again for women to access the full power and spectrum of their sexuality, spread their wings like Lilith and explore the shadow to see what it holds in both the negative and positive and in doing so, create healing for the long standing wounded feminine. Lilith is the new pin up girl for female sexual emancipation and just as she preceded Eve in the original marital bed, she now heals the shadow feminine by marrying the light as depicted in the sacredness of Eve, and births a new archetype of the divine feminine, one that is powerful enough to heal and forgive the masculine.

Awakened female sexuality has long been denied because of the earthy empowerment it invokes not only in the women who bring it, but in the men who are partnered to it, streaming codes for awakening consciousness, transmitting sacred knowledge that was once the practice of the goddess temples and allowing the sacred marriage of the feminine and masculine to truly be manifest on the planet again.

Lilith today gives permission for women to investigate the sexual shadow. She represents a bold, awakened, sexually promiscuous archetype which allows women to say no, to have

clear boundaries, to enjoy sex and to discover the innate knowledge and wisdom that is held in an awakened woman's body. Marvin Gaye had it right when he talked about sexual healing because sex is a healing balm available not only to awaken the sacred masculine, but to provide an opportunity for sexual healing of the planet. Now the sacred feminine as it was known in the times of the goddess is allowed to re-emerge combining the twin aspects of shadow and light represented in the duality of Eve and Lilith, and providing healing for the split that has existed between the sexes since the rise of patriarchy.

Lilith in her contemporary context has the opportunity to wear a much softer and healed personae, but as every woman knows, as a demoness she was a damn good lay.

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