Check for updates

Article

FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Lilith's Comeback from a Jungian-Feminist Outlook: Contemporary Feminist Spirituality Gets into Bed with Lilith

Feminist Theology
2019, Vol. 27(2) 149–163
© The Author(s) 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0966735018814674
journals.sagepub.com/home/fth
SAGE

Marianna Ruah–Midbar Shapiro

Abstract

The article presents the feminist discourse on Lilith and asks why she has returned to the centre of activity and creation? It begins with *Lilith's Integrative Myth* – a description of the classic Lilith myths – whilst trying to define her image's central characteristics. Following, I offer one integrative myth: a complex essence that contains contrasts, and stems from a variety of sources, each contributing to the formation of Lilith's story's numerous aspects. *Lilith's Revival* is discussed, surveying the different ways in which Lilith appears in today's feminist spiritual discourse, while presenting some of the ways in which her story is re-interpreted and used towards contemporary feminist needs. A *feminist Jungian outlook* on Lilith's Myths is included, deciphering Lilith as a symbol of the life-death-life cycle, which leads to a summary of the Jungian analysis' implications.

Keywords

Lilith, Myth, Jungian-feminist, symbolization, demonology, contemporary spirituality, life-death-life cycle

> Jung once said that God became more conscious as humans became more conscious. He postulated that humans cause the dark side of God to become struck with light when they rout their personal demons out into the light of day (Estes, 1992: 59–60).

Prologue – Lilith's Comeback

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Lilith appears as a satanic force, as an instigator of people, as one who denounces and brings them devastation. From her first appearance in

Corresponding author:
Marianna Ruah–Midbar Shapiro.
Email: m.ruahmidbar@gmail.com

Mesopotamian mythology, through her reincarnations in Judeo-Christian literature, to the folkloristic beliefs associated with her, Lilith has been presented as a negative character. In the myths of the beginning of days, in theological texts, in classical interpretations, and in folkloristic practices – her image amassed layer after layer befitting the original tale about a bloodthirsty demoness (succubus) that lures men into harm's way.[1]

However, from the 1970s onwards, Lilith has been making a comeback (Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, forthcoming): appearing in new myths, receiving creative interpretations, temples and prayers are dedicated to her, and she has become a role model. Sometimes, her story is retold in an entirely different way, whereas, in other instances, its details are ratified, while the context provides a new interpretation. This feminist spiritual discourse is woven primarily by people of various identities – traditional-Jewish, secular-Christian and Neo-Pagan, to name but a few – that offer different, and even contradictory ways of portraying Lilith.

Feminist scholarly discourse on Lilith is also a part of the spiritual discourse that surrounds her, and nourishes it. Scholars attempt to explain her image by various means: psychology, comparative literature and sociology, among others. What does she symbolize? Why was she adopted into Jewish culture? When and where did the interest in her flourish? Why was her image negatively depicted, and to what end?

In this article, I wish to present feminist discourse (including the scholarly) on Lilith as the object of the study, and to ask: why has Lilith returned to the centre of activity and creation? Myth scholar, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964), claimed that any form of myth, including its interpretations, is another mirror to the essence found at the heart of its theme. To expose this essence, one must piece together all of its versions into a unified picture. Accordingly, I will observe contemporary interpretations, not only as attempts at recreating and understanding the myth, but also as additional direct mirrors to Lilith's essence. I will offer a feminist-Jungian interpretation of Lilith's image that will shed light on both her role in the historical myth, as well as on her glorious return to contemporary feminist spiritual discourse. I do not seek to unearth the very truth of Lilith and her essence, but rather to suggest a possible interpretation. Conceivably, this interpretation also provides an explanation for her prosperous presence within today's spiritual discourse.

Therefore, I begin with *Lilith's Integrative Myth* – a description of the classic Lilith myths, whilst trying to define her image's central characteristics. Building on Lévi-Strauss's insight, we won't try to solve the 'problem' of the different contradicting myths, but rather will attempt to describe one integrative myth: a complex essence that contains contrasts, and stems from a variety of sources, each contributing to the formation of her story's numerous aspects. Later, I deal with *Lilith's Revival*, surveying the different ways in which Lilith appears in today's feminist spiritual discourse, while presenting some of the ways in which her story is re-interpreted and used towards contemporary feminist needs. Later, I present a *feminist Jungian outlook* on Lilith's Myths, and, finally, I summarize the Jungian analysis' implications in relation to the questions presented herein.

1. Due to the multitude of myths about Lilith, here, and sometimes further in the article, I avoided noting the many referrals to this and other details of her story. Lilith traditions have been the subject of various studies, e.g. Patai, 1964; Scholem, 1965; Yassif, 1985. Quotes from Hebrew or Aramaic sources appearing throughout this article are my own translations, unless stated otherwise.

Lilith's Integrative Myth

In Ancient Sumer, *Lilitu* appears as a desert-dwelling being who has been banished by Gilgamesh, and who, with the legendary serpent and eagle dwell together inside a tree trunk in the garden of Inanna, the Goddess of fertility, sensual love and wanton sexuality, warfare, sudden death and rebirth (Patai, 1964: 295). Lilith, with Lilin and Alu, were mischievous nocturnal demons in Mesopotamian mythology (Black and Green, 1992: 118). Lilith is mentioned once in the Bible, among the desert animals and demons who haunt the ruins of Edom (Isa. 34.14). According to Rabbinic literature, Lilith and her companions lured Eve and Adam during their lengthy separation in the wake of the primordial sin, and from this match between the Lilithian demons and the first couple, many demons were born.[2] Additionally, the Sages tell of women who gave birth to, or miscarried, winged fetuses, who bore a 'likeness to Lilith' (Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 24b). Sages also warn men of sleeping alone at home, to avoid being 'seized' by Lilith (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath 151b), but all these rabbinic texts are relatively rare fragments. However, when examining the distribution of references made to her amongst sixth century Babylonian Jews, it turns out that she had played a central role in the demonology that populated their day-to-day lives. Many incantation bowls inadvertently give Lilith presence in order to banish her from the home and prevent her from harming its residents (Patai, 1964: 297–98).

Lilith's constitutive story appears in several versions of the pseudepigraphical Ben-Sira literature[3] (Yassif, 1985: 230–34). It is described therein how Lilith was created from the dust of the ground, like Adam and alongside him, and of a quarrel that immediately broke out between the two over the sexual position. Both insisted to lie on top, and in one version Lilith explains: 'You will lie beneath, for we are both equal, and both come from the earth'.[4] Lilith flies away, and Adam turns to God and complains that his wife has left him. God sends three angels after her. According to one version, he tasks them with forcing her to return, while in another version he stresses that she may not come back unless she wants to (Yassif, 1985: 232). The angels find Lilith in the depths of the Red Sea, and try to make her return by threatening to drown her in it, and even kill her sons. In some versions, Lilith states that she had lain with the Great Demon, as a Halachic explanation for her refusal to return. However, her main justification for not

2. Some Rabbinic and Kabbalistic traditions even claim that Cain was Eve's son by the serpent. Seeing as some traditions identify the seductive snake with Lilith, some elements in spiritual-lesbian discourse presented Cain as the result of lesbian intercourse.
3. Pseudepigraphical Ben-Sira literature appeared and became rampant around eighth century AD onwards among Babylonian Jews. It was attributed to Ben-Sira, a second century BC sage (who had had his own apocryphal book). Various versions of this literature's manuscripts survived.
4. This demand was given many interpretations, and a special emphasis is put on the symbolic struggle for control. Lilith's argument may rely on a well-known *Midrash* that appears in both Rabbinic and Ben-Sira literature, according to which, during intercourse each partner looks towards the place in which they were created – the man looks to the earth, while the woman looks to the man. Accordingly, Lilith's words could be interpreted as a demand to look to the earth, since she, too, was created from it.

returning is her announcement that she is destined to harm newborns upon their first days of life. They part ways after Lilith promises that she will do no harm, as long as the three angels are present near the newborn in name or form, and agrees that the payment for not returning will be the daily death of 100 of her demon-children. Following this affair, Eve (the second woman!) is created from Adam's rib.

Lilith was the only woman who did not take part in original sin, and is therefore untouched by the curse of women (Gen. 3.16): male rule, the suffering that comes with pregnancy and childbirth, and death. In medieval Judaism and Christianity, she was associated with the Serpent of Eden[5] that temped the first couple into sin, and therefore bears responsibility for the existence of earthly death and sin.

In mediaeval folktales and later literature (Yassif, 1994), Lilith is described as the mother of demons, summoned to harm and do evil to humanity. However, the father of these demons is not, necessarily, Samael. The demons have many fathers, for Lilith gathers the seed that men spill in vain (with her encouragement), and from these seeds of trouble, begets them. These demons may cause their human stepbrothers harm. Demoness daughters of Lilith may squeeze lust, semen or even marriage out of men – as they dream, as well as when they are awake. In Kabbalah, Lilith's image develops in various ways, and her sexual aspect receives much emphasis. She and her consort, Samael, are described as 'two evil spirits glued as one' (Zohar 3:76b). She comes to the beds of those who engage in those sexual activities forbidden by Jewish law, such as ejaculating in vain. In light of the forbidden deeds that she instigates, it is possible that she herself executes the verdicts of men who had 'strayed after her' and 'fornicated with her' (Zohar 1:148b).

Many legends depict Lilith's companions and offspring and their unique attributes (e.g. Zohar 3:76b). Many charms and incantations were used in folklore to ward off such blights, and particularly to defend neonates. To prevent crib death, Jews would wake babies who smile in their sleep, believing that Lilith is luring them in their dreams, and might kill them should they comply.

Lilith is especially associated with the dark moon, and is mostly nocturnal (Zohar 1:19b) due to her connection to bed-related activities, as well as her dark nature. Her name, 'Lilith', attests to her connection to the night, which is *Lailah* in Hebrew. Beyond the sexual symbolism, particularly the serpent's image, Lilith also represents 'the ruination of the world' (Zohar 3:19a). Some of her names include 'end of all flesh' and 'end of days' (Zohar 1:148a). Her dwelling, accordingly, is in uninhabited places – be it the desert, ruins, or the ocean's depths.[6]

5. This is evident, for example, in Christian paintings that depict the Serpent of Eden with a 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 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.
6. The Red Sea's name in Hebrew hints at the end, as explained later in the article. Additionally, the Red Sea's mythological history also hints at the apocalypse, for the legend names it as the spot where the Egyptians that pursued the Israelites met their end (by drowning). Egypt is the land of demons and sorcerers, and the Red Sea is one of its borders, thus the fitting residence for the mother of all demons; see Louis Ginzberg (1938: 66, fn. 40).

In theosophical Kabbalistic literature, the divine pleroma is described as comprised of different forces. Such texts depict Lilith as one of them – heading the 'Other Side's' (*Sitra Achra*) forces, embodying the powers of impurity as an expression of the divine powers of judgment and punishment. Thus, the divine wholeness and internal equilibrium between the forces, actually necessitate Lilith's existence and activity as an aspect of the divine. Although this side to divinity is far from positive, and though one does not seek it out nor wish to empower it, it is, nonetheless, inevitable. Certain Kabbalistic texts even recount the current severance between the positive male ('theBlessed-Holy-One') and female (the *Shekhinah*) forces, which ceased their holy and harmonious union, thus allowing Lilith to seize the divine female's role. On the Shekhinah's throne, Lilith begets blights unto the world, with the help of the divine male.

Lilith's Revival in Feminist Spirituality

The 1970s saw Lilith come back upon waves of feminism, into the spheres of post-traditional cultural creation, when her story's feminist potential was discovered. Feminist discourse reinterpreted her image, analysed her story, drew her, and dreamt her. Secular feminists were inspired by Lilith due to her proud stand against the angels that were sent by the patriarchal God. Members of the feminist community sought to reinterpret Lilith's tale as an expression of patriarchal oppression. Theologists (The*a*logists, in fact) saw her as an archetype that could assist women in imagining the divine in female terms. Political activists saw her as an archetype that might be used as a tool for psycho-social change. Artists recreated Lilith in sculptures and paintings. In pop-culture, she appeared in fiction, comics and computer games. Neo-Pagans created rituals, prayers and temples to the Goddess Lilith. Spiritual practitioners channelled Lilith, and therapists used her story in women's empowerment groups. Lesbians saw her as a model for gay love. She became the Patron Saint of abortion, and polyamorous discourse viewed her as an exemplary woman with multiple romantic and sexual relationships. Women began adopting her formerly ineffable name, or named their daughters after her.

In 1976, the Jewish-feminist magazine, *Lilith*, was founded, and remains active to this day. The band Virgin Steele's 2006 musical project was named 'The Lilith Project'. In 1994, a version of A Rite of Dark Sexuality that invokes Lilith was published online, widely circulated over the net, and even translated into several languages. In 1998, an anthology titled *Which Lilith*[7] was published (Enid et al., 1998), spanning about 70 interpretations, *Midrashim*, poems and musings from Jewish women who re-created and envisioned Lilith. An amazon.co.uk search brings up several hundred books about Lilith (in English). A growing Israeli Facebook community, called *Bnoth Lilith* (Daughters of Lilith), which numbers over 1,000 women, provides its members with inspiration and legitimacy for social, spiritual, therapeutic and creative work. All these are mere threads in a vast and colourful tapestry of cultural activity that has been woven over the past few decades and remakes Lilith in bold and fresh colours.

7. A comprehensive book. Moreover, the exposition explains the title in relation to the concept of Lilith's many faces. The title may also intentionally evoke the word 'witch' through the use of 'which', and, more generally refer to a movement of Neo-Pagan Jews who call themselves 'Jewitches', and are especially fond of Lilith.

Academic (and semi-academic) studies revolving around Lilith have accompanied this wealth of cultural work, nurtured it, and drew nourishment from her devotees. In his book, *The Hebrew Goddess*, folklore scholar, Raphael Patai (1967) dedicated a chapter to Lilith, and, in fact, presented her as one of the female aspects of the divine in Israelite/Jewish tradition. Feminist sociologist, Barbara Swirski, claimed in her book, *Daughters of Eve, Daughters of Lilith* (1984), that male violence directed at female spouses stems from a tradition of gender inequality, and is an attempt to actualize and perpetuate the balance of power in a society in which all women are educated with Eve and Lilith stories so as to play the role of victim. In 1987, psychologist Barbara Koltuv published her book, *The Book of Lilith*, detailing Lilith's story and offering her as an archetype for men and women to work with today, in order to recognize the awesome power embedded within their self. Psychologist Nitza Abarbanel claimed that Western culture's divide into two feminine models – Eve and Lilith – carried into contemporary literature, originated in boys' psychological development process, and described its toll on us all (Abarbanel, 2002). In his book (2014), in which Lilith also stars, Faxneld describes how Lucifer traditions were used in feminism during the nineteenth century. This, of course, is a coincidental and brief demonstration from dozens of research books on Lilith, whether she is presented herself, as a model and an inspiration, or in relation to other relevant subjects.

Lilith from a Jungian-Feminist Perspective

Scholarly literature has fed the imagination of spiritual practitioners, leading to movies, designs, painting and drawing, writing fiction, constructing empowerment groups, phrasing spiritual-feminist arguments, and even attempts at direct contact with Lilith. Spiritual discourse has espoused and implemented themes from studies in folklore, sociology, and other disciplines, but one field of study stood out from the rest – psychoanalysis. The psychologizing of religion in contemporary spiritual discourse has turned the discussion of Lilith as archetype into a mediation tool between those who believe Lilith to be an actual being (essentialist belief) and those who use her figure as a metaphor: a pragmatic-activist approach (Raphael, 1998).

Spiritual-feminist discourse on Lilith, therefore, has combined texts by academic scholars, teachers, spiritual guides, and layman practitioners. It is practically consensus that Lilith is (also, or mainly) a necessary archetype for positive psychological-spiritual work. The various suggestions regarding this archetype's nature are far too many to review herein – wild sexuality, feminine power, inner beauty and confidence in one's intuition, among others. In this study, I focus on my proposal of a Jungian-feminist analysis that will explain Lilith's reoccurrence within feminist spiritual discourse from the 1970s onwards, to this day. Jungian research seeks to interpret the language of symbols, whether hidden within an ancient cultural myth, shedding light on that culture, or whether in a contemporary private dream, providing insights into that individual. Here, I wish to understand the meaning of Lilith's intensive appearance in collective alternative-spiritual discourse, in order to understand this spirituality, and to interpret the unconscious motivations that drive it.

The Skeleton Woman

> In everything there lies at least one eighth of death. […]
> We carry it wherever we go. […]
> In lovers' conversations, distractedly forgotten at the back of our existence
> Always with us. […] (Leah Goldberg, 1971: 11).

A feminist Jungian analysis views recurring stories from different cultures and times as representations of the same archetype, of the same story of the psyche. I would like to present Lilith's stories as part of the archetype that Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992)[8] calls the 'Skeleton Woman': the life-death-life archetype. Estes does not mention Lilith (or demonology literature), but by analysing the 'Skeleton Woman' family of stories and their analysis, I suggest Lilith be ascribed to them.

According to Estes, the 'Skeleton Woman' archetype represents an inner power within the psyche, one which symbolizes the cyclic nature of the world in general, and of romantic relationships in particular. Although this cyclic nature generates fear of death, it must be overcome and accepted. Death is a symbol of change, as change is the 'death' of one thing (or state), which, in dying, 'makes room' for the 'birth' of another. Therefore, every change in our lives, including our love-lives, is symbolized by the psyche's power as a life-death-life cycle, or as death-and-rebirth. As fear-invoking as these changes may be as they stir the primeval fear of death that inhabits the psyche, so does the life-death-life archetype teach us that changes are vital, for only acceptance of 'death' enables renewal.

As aforementioned, the inner psychological happenings associated with the cycle of death and rebirth may manifest in artistic creativity, in a dream, or in a myth, and are thus sometimes shaped in plot-form. Myths, expose us to the psychological process in which the life-death-life archetype appears, by way of different characters, featured in accordance with the cultural context.

First, I will present this archetype's various expressions in folktales from different cultures, as Estes describes them, whilst analysing their details' symbolic meaning. Later, I will present Lilith's story as part of these stories' family, and finally, I will analyse the meaning of Lilith's connection to the life-death-life archetype.

Estes provides various parallel stories of this archetype, describing a female character cast into the ocean's depths by a patriarch. She loses her human attributes, and especially her physical completeness, and becomes a goddess, a demoness, a monster, or a skeleton. This character is a symbol of death; therefore, people fear her and flee from her, try to keep her from their homes, and sometimes appease her with various sacrifices. However, by so doing, they unintentionally raise her from the sea and bring her to them – into their homes. She comes to them in their dreams, or while they are asleep, and makes use of their physical body's liquid secretions to weave new life.

The different characters that symbolize the life-death-life archetype in myths are female. This is due, according to Estes, to the cyclical nature of women's bodies. The womb is a symbol of the life and death cycle, because the cyclical appearance of

8. The following analysis will be conducted in accordance with chapter 5 of her book, titled 'Hunting: When the Heart is a Lonely Hunter' (129–31). The detailed story of the 'Skeleton Woman' appears on pages 124–26.

menstrual blood testifies to a lack of life in the womb, while during pregnancy, new life forms within it. The woman, in her ability to give birth, symbolizes renewal and the life force.

Now let us examine aspects of the Inuits' 'Skeleton Woman' story, as explored by Estes. The Skeleton Woman gets accidentally caught by a fisherman fishing on his boat and he flees from her, but because his fishing rod holds her captive, *she* 'pursues' him. This 'chase' continues on dry land as he escapes into his house, still holding his fishing rod. After he discovers, to his great distress, that the 'Skeleton Woman' is with him in his closed room, he eventually 'succumbs', lays on his bed, and falls asleep. This series of events symbolizes a human desire for suppressing the need for change (symbolized by the 'Skeleton Woman') and to chase it away into the unconscious (drowning her in the sea), as well as the eventual acknowledgment of the required change (the 'Skeleton Woman' reaches land) and the fear that it evokes (the frightening discovery of the 'Skeleton Woman' in the room), and its acceptance (falling asleep, rather than continuing to struggle).

Next, the 'Skeleton Woman' weaves together a new body (flesh on her bones) from the sleeping fisherman's beating heart and tear. The liquid expelled by the male body symbolizes our innate ability for renewal – for the creation of life. Water is a well-known symbol of the realm of emotion. Thus, Lilith uses impulsive bursts of fluid from the human body (usually in a moment of lost or relinquished control), as shown later. When emotions are held back, hidden, or repressed, and when change is 'prevented' due to fear, rebirth is prevented as well. The expression and realization of emotions enables rebirth (and birth is naturally accompanied by the secretion of amniotic fluid). Thus, the fluids contained within the physical body are a way of communicating with she who dwells deep within the psyche – in the legendary depths of the sea – the life-death-life woman.

Lilith as an Expression of the Life-Death-Life Archetype

> Without death, there would be no life.
> (The Complete Midrash Tmura, ch. 3)

I now describe the particulars of Lilith's character according to her integrative (or 'accumulated') myth in the various traditions, to establish the claim that she ought to be viewed as analogous to the 'Skeleton Woman' story, and therefore as an expression of the life-death-life archetype.

Much like her archetype parallels, Lilith, too, inhabits the depths of the sea according to several versions of the story. Much like the Skeleton Woman, she arrives at this place following a conflict with a patriarchal figure – Adam, three angels, or (the male) God. According to the story in Ben Sira's book, after her altercation with Adam, she escapes, and ends up at the bottom of the Red Sea. The three angels then threaten to drown her in it (under God's command, according to some versions), should she disobey them. In another version (Zohar 1:19b), God rebukes Lilith, and casts her down into the deep.[9]

9. Yet another version of the myth of Lilith, whose details bare an incredible resemblance to Estes's model, can be found in a stamp issued by the Sierra Leon post office. See, e.g. http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~humm/Topics/Lilith/slLilith.html, for explanation see http://jewishchristianlit.com//Topics/Lilith/modPics2.html (accessed 30 November 2018).

The ocean's depths symbolize humanity's unconscious mind, the place in which the cyclic archetype (life-death-life) dwells amongst people's innermost feelings and greatest fears. The desire to control Lilith, to subjugate her to man's will, to subdue her wildness, does not succeed, and she escapes beneath the ocean's waves, beyond the conscious mind, awaiting her chance to return to dry land. In stories of Lilith, the connection between the realm of emotion and the ocean is prominent in the linguistic associations in Hebrew and Aramaic. In the incantation (Zohar 3:19a) that addresses Lilith, she is told: 'Go back! Go back! The sea rages, its waves call for you!'. In Aramaic, the word 'rages' is written: *Itregisha* (and in Hebrew: *Rogesh*), while the Hebrew word for 'emotion' is *Regesh* – both stem from the same word. Of Lilith's companion, Na'ama, it is said (Zohar 3:76b) that she, too, 'rages tempestuous' – and in Aramaic: *Itregishat B'rigshaha*, and lives amongst the ocean's waves – in Aramaic: *rigshei* – from whence she enters humanity's dreams.

Attempts to distance Lilith from the house stand out in folklore when marking transitional areas – Mezuzahs marked with the word *Shaday* (literally: 'my breasts') serve this purpose, as do incantation bowls buried under the threshold in times gone by, markings on the doors to infants' and mothers' rooms, and amulets and spells intended for newborns' beds. The amulets often read *Hutz Lilit* (out Lilith) alongside the words *Adam VeChavah* (Adam and Eve).[10] Paradoxically, much like the fisherman that drags his persecutor along, all attempts at distancing Lilith necessitate her presence – through spells, amulets and thoughts that revolve around her. Efforts to keep her out of homes mirror attempts to remove her from the conscious mind, thus pushing her down into the depths of the unconscious. Naturally, Lilith's comeback would often occur within dreams (in a man's sexual dream, or even in a baby's dream). As people sleep and dream, they lose conscious control, disconnect from the common social surroundings that observes them, privately and secretly dive into the unconscious, summoning Lilith to attend and to act. Lilith also appears and takes part in sexual relations that stem from forbidden passion; in acts of intimacy in which control is lost. Lilith's demand to lie on top of Adam matches the arrangement that has her come to the bed of those already asleep, devoid of control or consciousness. Concern for the unattended infant, and even for the man who sleeps alone at home, are also indicative of the danger that lies in disconnection from the social environment, and the possibility of being swept away into the ocean of the unconscious mind.

The Skeleton Woman archetype is connected to the life-death-life cycle, which symbolizes a person's lack of control over his/her life and state. The archetype's appearance portents the change to come in the inevitable cyclic process, as well as the sea-depths-dwelling character's arrival ashore (even as far as the threshold) teaches of a conscious awakening regarding the need for change. Moments associated with change, fertility and death, summon her especially – birth, menstruation, conception, falling asleep, intercourse, and falling in love, to name a few. Attempts to stop or bind Lilith reflect a need for control over the cycle, as reflected once again by the lingual association: in Hebrew, the word *La'atzor* means both 'to stop' and 'to rule'. Moreover, the word *Asurah* means both 'bound' (in chains) as well as 'forbidden'. The writing within the amulets describes Lilith bound by the hands, feet, neck and mouth, and sometimes depicts her in chains

10. The term *Chitzoni'yim* (outers) is prevalent in Jewish esoteric traditions as a name for the evil forces.

(e.g. Patai, 1967: 216–17). Lilith's many end-related (and ruin-related) names reflect the death that frightens those who seek to stop the cycle. Lilith's seat at the Red Sea also indicates the same, both due to the sea's name as it appears in the myth – *Yam Suf* – as its writing and pronunciation are similar to the word *Sof*, which means 'end', and also because of its explicit mention as the place where the Egyptians were drowned. It is a place of endings, of death, where enslaving rulers are preserved.

Lilith's body itself has metamorphosed – from a woman born of the earth she becomes winged, and is later described as a demoness with an airy body. Her description as a demoness with no physical body symbolizes annihilation and death, but also the void that enables creativity. Some myths also describe a transition in her body's gender – she dons the body of a beautiful prostitute, and having engaged in sexual intercourse with a man, becomes a sword-wielding male (Zohar 1:148a).[11] She is often described using men's sperm in order to conceive and give birth to demons. The change that her body undergoes after absorbing men's bodily fluids is reminiscent of the process that the Skeleton Woman undergoes. While the latter is aided by men's tears, Lilith usually uses semen. The feminine body that undergoes metamorphoses – from girl to fertile woman, to old woman; from bleeding, to fertile, to pregnant, and so on – receives a far more radical transformative flexibility in Lilith's case, as befitting of the life-death-life archetype.

Interestingly, circumcision, which involves bloodletting, is perceived in esoteric Jewish traditions as protection for the newborn against Lilith. The intentional drawing of blood from the male infant's genitals bridges the gap between the use of men's semen in Jewish folktales and the victim's blood in vampire mythology. As a vampire, blood is the bodily fluid that Lilith is after. In vampire mythology, the victim is simultaneously put to death and gains immortality through the sucking of his blood; thus, the semen that she takes enables the creation of new life, therefore inseparably linking life with the fear of death. Lilith is, as aforementioned, immortal, unlike Adam, Eve, and their progeny. The riddle of death-related anxiety in the proximity of the immortal figure is resolved through the cyclical archetype, which promises that death also leads to rebirth.

Both semen and blood represent life and death combined. Inseminating the womb may bring life, and therefore emitting seed in vain, as well as the menstrual blood that leaves the womb 'in vain', represents the 'death' of potential life. Menstrual blood is associated with Lilith by various traditions and interpretations, as is sperm. Blood is the liquid of life – sometimes 'spilling' blood is enough to take a life, and sometime a 'bloodletting' is all that is needed to revive a dying body. The body's blood-flow parallels the spirit's existence in the body, for 'the blood *is* the spirit-of-life [*Nafesh*]' (Deut. 12.23), and without it – man is lifeless. Spilling the liquid of life evokes anxiety, and therefore it is no wonder that vainly emitted sperm archetypically connotes to death, evokes fear, and amasses prohibitions within Jewish Law (*Halakhah*).

Describing the new life Lilith gives birth to as demons, rather than babies, can be interpreted as people's denial of their connection to their offspring, which represent their

11. Usually, Lilith is portrayed in the archetypal story as female, while her victims are portrayed as male, though hers and the victim's implied symbolism is relevant for all sexes. However, in some myths Lilith's gender is turned. Male *Lilin* are mentioned in her party, and in some myths (e.g. Zohar 1:148a) she herself changes her attire, image and gender.

repressed potential future – in fearing death, they remain unaware of the life intrinsic to their progeny. The very depiction of Lilith as a she-demon, rather than a woman, is an expression of that very fear – that same denial – and constitutes a most literal and obvious (not just metaphoric) demonization. Fathers' estrangement of their demon sons has been ritualized in Jewish folklore (Scholem, 1965: 153–57), and in fact, expresses anxiety of a different life on a potentially alternative course. Lilith's persecution of newborn babies is also related to a fear of cyclicality and change – (re)birth reminds us of death; the existence of babies necessitates the death of the life we had without them; the appearance of life immediately gives presence to the danger of losing it. Infants embody life's fragility, and the fear of the exchange of life and death manifests in the presence of the matching archetype, thus Lilith turns up in charms at the infant's side. Similar measures were taken for fear of miscarriage, in bringing the life-death-life cycle's archetype into attendance in amulets. A link is formed between the neonates – actual lives shadowed by mortal danger – and the demons, inhuman lives that threaten the living.

Lilith's time of activity – night-time, especially during the dark moon – can also be understood as a symbol of lack, of death. But much like death, night, too, is connected to the cyclicality that comprises of rebirth, for at its end lies the dawn. In Hebrew, the word *Lehakitz* means 'to wake up', as well as 'to end'. The moon symbolizes the cyclicality of nature, as well as of women's cycle, and Lilith is active in its absence, in a time worthy of death, in the dark and empty womb. Lilith's name, *Black Moon*, is highly interesting in Hebrew, as the female version of the word 'moon' in Hebrew is *Levanah*, which literally means 'white', and therefore constitutes an oxymoron. The dark moon is the phase during which the old moon dies, and a new one is reborn. This sphere enables creation and creativity (in Hebrew: *Yetzirah* and *Yetziratiyut*), and therefore instincts and urges (*Yetzer*) are also intensified. According to the Lurianic Kabbalah's creation myth, the divine's willingness to vacate an empty space within it was a precursor to creation, to the inception of new life, to the creation of change. Making room for new creation necessitates a 'little death'. Sleep is also a little death of sorts,[12] rejuvenating our lives upon the following day. Accordingly, Lilith, the symbol of death, appears in dreams. In the dream, man answers her sexual temptation, uncontrollably and unawares, of course. The Judeo-Christian tradition always connects future ruin with the expected redemption. Accordingly, Lilith's archetypal perception as the life-death-life representative associates her with a forbidden and frightening temptation, with the ruin that it necessitates, and with the renewal that will come in its wake.

In Christian paintings of the Garden of Eden, Lilith is portrayed as the face of the enticing Ancient Serpent. The Kabbalah describes Samael as 'riding on the serpent', identified with Lilith, his consort. The serpent as symbol also reappears in modern paintings in relation to Lilith. Lilith's connection with the serpent can be viewed in light of 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,

12. The connection between sleep and death is common among worldwide cultures. Rabbinic literature (Babylonian Talmud, Brakhoth 57b) makes an interesting connection between death-sleep-dream-prophecy: 'Sleep is one-sixtieth part of death. A dream is one-sixtieth part of prophecy'.

death and resurrection (see also, Num. 21.5–9). Sexuality is another central meaning symbolized by both the serpent and Lilith. Lilith's powers of temptation lead to the ejaculation of sperm, from which comes new life. If so, Lilith's sexuality holds within it the cycle of death and rebirth. People fear Lilith because of death, but once they accede to her, renewal is made possible. As the Serpent of Eden, Lilith seduces the pair of innocent children who inhabit the garden (once their 'father' isn't around) and promises them that they would not die, but become 'as God, knowing good and evil' (Gen. 3.5), which does eventually happen (Gen. 3.22). Take notice that in Hebrew, 'to know' has more than an intellectual meaning – it also means a connection, including one of a sexual nature. Indeed, that is Lilith's message: a connection between good and evil, mating life with its innate death cycles, with their promise of renewal – all symbolized through sex.

Estes mainly links the life-death-life archetype with romantic relationships, in which a fear of the relationship 'maturing' arises after the initial stage of wooing and excitement. Couples perceive the transition into a different stage of the romantic relationship as death, and thus fear dealing with it. We may expect this to be the stage in which Lilith and her gang appear in the couple's dreams, as the unconscious mind's way of saying: 'time for a change'.

Lilith's very powers of temptation evoke fear, for she is portrayed as the perfect substitute for a permanent romantic partner: she isn't real, but rather our dream come true (pun intended); she is beautiful and sexy, a relationship with her does not include any lasting commitment, but rather boils down to temporary sexual pleasure. Due to her great appeal, people would rather 'drown' Lilith's image deep within the psyche, rather than face her. However, her appearance in dreams, in our most private of places, is unavoidable. According to the archetypal interpretation, she appears in dreams to beseech couples to let the relationship 'die', so that it could change and 'mature', and be reborn in a way that would enable its continuance. If so, the secret to the existence of romantic love is by incorporating Lilith into it, by merging life with death. Life may become stale, decay, and lose its essence when devoid of cyclicality and transformation: without Lilith's temptation, without change, without the flavour of death.

Epilogue: Lilith as a Feminist Spiritual Discourse Archetype

In summation, myths of Lilith may be viewed as a parallel for the Skeleton Woman stories, and as an expression of the life-death-life archetype. Her appearance in one's personal life (usually in a romantic context) embodies a time of change, the anxiety it evokes, and a deep unconscious understanding that surrender to the process is inevitable. The Jungian-archetypal analysis foretells the renewed life that awaits beyond the threat of death on the horizon.

What can we learn, then, from Lilith's intensive reappearance in the 1970s, as part of feminist spirituality? This spiritual discourse in itself portents the coming end and the birth of a new age. Institutionalized religions and age-old values make way, in favour of a spiritual revolution, which includes a turn from religion towards spirituality. At the heart of this spirituality, the values of life – body, health, sexuality, relationships, emotion, communication, self-exploration – become central, in contrast to the religious view that dedicates life to God. Accordingly, this movement can be called 'spiritualities of life'

(Heelas, 2009). As spirituality is a turn from religion, so feminist spiritual discourse embodies Lilith's threat to the accepted mainstream norms and values.

We have seen the plethora of symbols and meanings Lilith has donned over the years across many traditions. She has been associated with the Devil, sin, the serpent, sexual instinct, death, blood, semen, darkness, demons, fears, the dark moon – and their interconnections. We have demonstrated how this entire negative array is also linked to attraction, passion, enjoyment, birth, and immortality. The connection between life and death in the 'Skeleton Woman' archetype suggested by Estes, explains the myth of Lilith well, as I have shown.

To understand the novelty of Lilith's current reappearance in feminist discourse, it should be mentioned that these links between symbols and values (which Lévi-Strauss calls 'Relations Bundles') also exist within Jewish tradition. First, Rabbinic and Kabbalistic literature is overflowing with references to the positive side of the 'evil instinct' (Boyarin, 1993: 63–64).[13] Sages interpreted the verse 'it was very good' (Gen. 1.31), spoken after the creation of man, be interpreted thus: '"it was… good" – this is the good instinct; "very" – this is the evil instinct'. Rabbi Meir went further and amended the verse to say: 'it was deathly good'.[14] Sages go on to explain that man fears the changes that he must undergo, but deals with them well only thanks to the evil instinct: 'Were it not for the evil instinct, man would not build a home for himself, nor wed a woman, nor beget children, nor negotiate'. The *Midrash* attributes human capacity for self-renewal and self-development to the 'evil instinct' within.

Moreover, there is an ever-growing perception in the Kabbalah, of the importance of evil powers as part of the cosmic balance. The divine must contain a union of different and contrasting sides, and the divine complexity has room for Lilith's work, as well. Just as the 'shadow' archetype is an inseparable part of the self in Jung's theory, Lilith is eliminated from taking part in the divine union and harmony. Hence, Lilith's status gains an upgrade, and from lowly demoness, she becomes a divine aspect.[15] As aforementioned, Lilith's appearance expresses an acknowledgment of the need for change; the feminist-spiritual movement's innovation, in the adoption and adaption of Lilith's myth, is a call to embrace the life-death-life archetype, to get into bed with Lilith. Thus, in some cases, Lilith is even elevated to the status of a goddess worthy of her own worship.

The various interpretations of Lilith's image in academic and theological discourse can be divided into two. First, the continuation of the traditional negative discourse on Lilith, which discusses her threats, her characteristics, the meaning of her actions, and her comparison to other characters, among other things. Second, the interruption and critique of this discourse, by way of discussing the patriarchal nature of traditional texts, oppressive motivations aimed at women, fear of women's sexuality, and so forth. Either

13. On the original meaning of the expression 'the evil instinct', and its connection to sex, see Boyarin (1993: 61–76).
14. These *Midrashim* have several versions. See Genesis Rabbah 9:5, 7.
15. Patai (1967: 207, 214) comments on the incredible rise of Lilith's career in two unconnected (as far as we know) cultures: Ancient Sumer and the Kabbalah – from lowly she-demon to goddess; and her successful cultural 'survival' leads him to conclude that she is a projection of deep-seated mortal fears and desires.

way, Lilith's negative character lies at the heart of the discussion. In this article, I have suggested an empowering (both for Lilith and for the Judeo-Christian tradition), which enables viewing these portrayals as an expression of powers within the psyche. While the proffered interpretation constitutes a critical feminist explanation, it does not cancel out the sources, and instead enables a new understanding of these ancient stories. I have hoped to avoid an interpretation that 'duplicates' negative discourse on Lilith, for her secret exposes the positive aspect embedded deep within the archetype.

The new interpretation of Lilith's image offered here is in itself death and rebirth. It proposes a fertile and creative death for the discourse that focuses on Lilith's negative characterizations, and suggests social and individual empowerment by way of positively empowering Lilith. If my interpretation is correct, embracing Lilith will, expectedly, lead to a revival.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by Zefat Academic College. I also wish to thank Prof. Haim Hazan for an inspiring conversation I had with him many years ago, in which the seeds of this article's thesis were sown.

Funding

This research was supported by Zefat Academic College.

References

Abarbanel N (1994) *Eve and Lilith*. Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press [in Hebrew].

Black J, Green A (1998) *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*. London: British Museum Press.

Boyarin D (1993) *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Dame E, Rivlin L, and Wenkart H (eds) (1998) *Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Create the World's First Woman.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc.

Estes CP (1992) *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Faxneld P (2014) *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture*. Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei.

Ginzberg L (1938) *The Legends of the Jews: I-VII*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society.

Goldberg L (1971) *What Remains of Life*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim.

Heelas P (2009) *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Koltuv BB (1986) *The Book of Lilith*. York Beach, ME: Nicolas-Hays, Inc.

Lévi-Strauss C (1963) *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I. New York: Basic Books.

Patai R (1964) 'Lilith', *The Journal of American Folklore* 77.306: 295–314.

Patai R (1967) *The Hebrew Goddess*. New York: Ktav.

Raphael M (1998) Goddess religion, postmodern Jewish feminism, and the complexity of alternative religious identities. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 1.2 (1998): 198–215.

Ruah-Midbar Shapiro M (Forthcoming, 2019) The temptation of legitimacy – Lilith's adoption and adaption in contemporary feminist spirituality. *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 39(2).

Scholem G (1965) *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*. New York: Schocken Books.
Scholem G (2004) *Demons, Ghosts and Souls: Studies in Demonology*. In: Liebes E (ed.). Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute and The Hebrew University [in Hebrew].
Swirsky B (1984) *Daughters of Eve, Daughters of Lilith: Women's Lives in Israel*. Givatayim: HaMin HaShenni [in Hebrew].
Yassif E (1985) *Ben-Sira Stories from the Middle Ages: Critical Edition and Research Chapters*. Jerusalem: Magnes [in Hebrew].
Yassif E (1994) *Story of the Hebrew People: Its History, Variations and Meaning*. Jerusalem: Bialik Publishing [in Hebrew].