ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

Winter 2007

נחש משיח

Table of Contents

Cover Illustration: Based on an original drawing by Allen Ginsberg.

ASHÉ

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY
Winter 2007, Volume V, Number 4
ISSN 1558-4690 (print)
ISSN 1558-4704 (electonic)

Ashé Journal was founded in 2002 by independent religious scholars, spiritual experimenters and investigators of new religious movements. The Journal is published quarterly—issues distributed online in HTML, downloadable PDF and print formats.

PRINT COPIES Current and back issues are available from Lulu Press http://www.lulu.com./ashe-prem/

SUBMISSIONS We encourage unsolicited submissions of original articles, fiction, poetry, photography and artwork. Electronic versions of submissions may be sent to submit@ashejournal.com. Please send material as an attached file not in the body of the email. For text documents MSWord is preferred.

ADVERTISING For information and rates contact the editor.

BOOK REVIEWS Publishers and authors may send review copies for consideration to the Journal's editorial offices, attn: Book Review Editor.

EDITORIAL OFFICES
P.O. Box 363, Hulls Cove, ME 04609

WEBSITE
www.ashejournal.com

From the Editor

Photo: Jewish Lights Publications

I have liked Jay Michaelson, since first encountering his work—his story "The Erotic Mikva" appeared in issue #5.1. When he agreed to do a volunteer stint as guest editor, well, I couldn't resist!

Jay is chief editor of *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture* (www.zeek.net). Founded in 2002, Zeek features innovative writers, artists and critics whose work speaks to questions of Jewish culture, society and spirit. Zeek is available both online (www.zeek.net) and in an expanded content print edition.

Jay has taught Kabbalah, mindfulness and embodied spiritual practive at Yale University, City College, Elat Chayyim, the Skirball Center and the Wexner Summer Institute. He is a regular contributor to the *Forward*, the

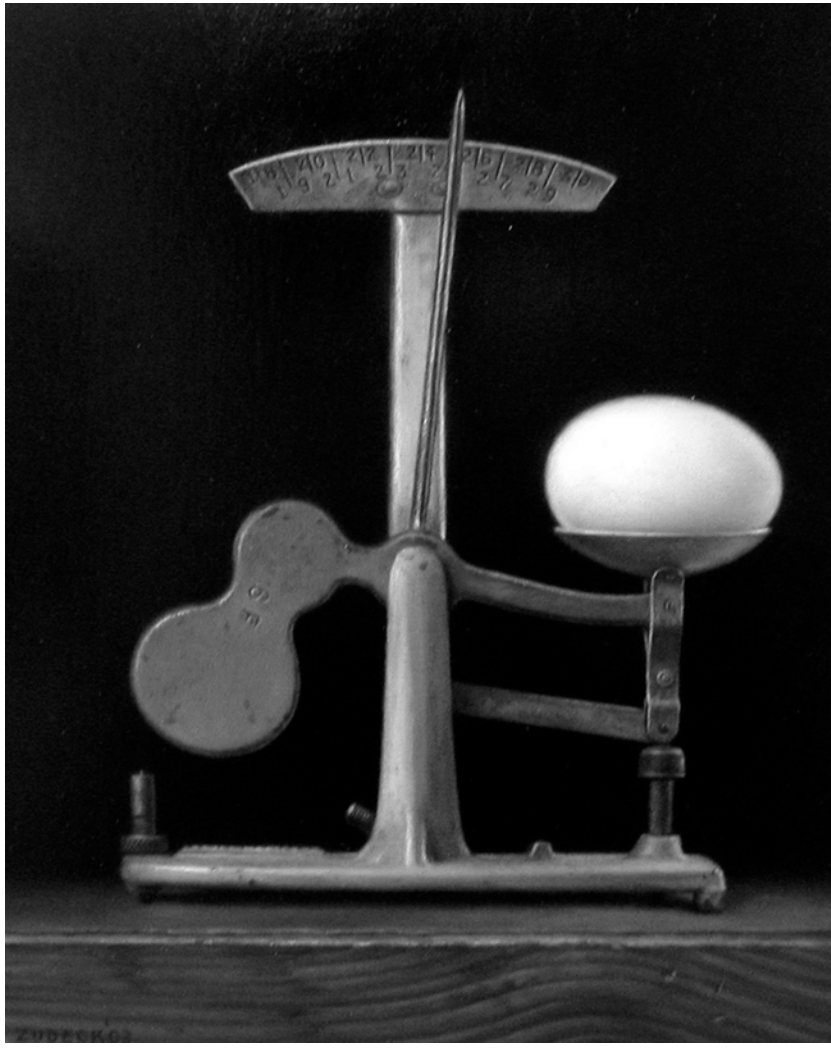
Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 359-360

Jerusalem Post, *Slate*, *White Crane Journal* and other publications. His legal writing has appeared in the *Duke Law Journal*, *Stanford Environmental Law Journal*, the *Journal of Law in Society*, and the *Yale Law Journal*.

Jay's background combines both rigorous academic and serious contemplative work. He is presently a Ph.D. candidate in Jewish Thought at Hebrew University, where his focus is on the antinomian mystical heretic Jacob Frank. He holds an M.A. in Religious Studies from Hebrew University, as well as a J.D. from Yale and a B.A. Magna Cum Laude from Columbia. He completed the Elat Chayyim Jewish Meditation Advanced Training program, sat a six-week silent meditation retreat in 2004, and has learned with spiritual teachers including Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Sharon Salzberg, Rabbi David Cooper, Avraham Leader, Joseph Kramer and Sylvia Boorstein,

Jewish Lights Publishing recently released his book *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*. Here, Jay develops his concept of embodied spiritual practice. He explores how to experience the deep truths of reality in, and through, your body. He fearlessly approaches this seeming contradiction, demonstrating the age-old connectoion between body and spirit. (A full review will appear in the spring issue.)

More information on Jay, his writing, teaching and other projects, can be found at his website: www.metatronics.net



Darryl Zudeck: Eggscale #3

The Paradox of Light

Tom Bland

Paradox is the conjoining of opposites: light and dark, peace and conflict, well-being and woe. In mysticism and religion, paradox is often used to indicate unity, as the two contradictory elements of the paradox exist simultaneously. For example, the psalmist proclaims in Psalm 139, "Even darkness is not dark to You. Night shines like day—light and darkness are the same."

The idea being expressed is different from saying that light and dark are like two sides of a coin, half light and half dark. Instead, the psalm proposes a situation which is fully light and fully dark at the same time, revealing the unity of the divine.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 362-367

Consider the Kabbalah's interpretation of the word *olam*. The word means "world," which is that which is revealed. Yet according to Kabbalistic etymology, it comes from the root *elam*, which means, "to conceal." Kabbalists interpret this to mean that eternity is hidden and concealed within the world, whilst at the same time existing throughout it.

This interpretation of the word has echoes in the Bahir, where "olam," which also connotes eternity, occurs in the text in a number of guises. One of the most interesting is the idea of the *olam haba*, which normally means "world to come," but which in passage 160 of the Bahir is expounded this way:

> Rabbi Berachiah said:
>
> Each day we speak of the World to Come. Do we then understand what we are saying?
>
> In Aramaic, the World to Come is translated 'the world that came.'
>
> And what is the meaning of 'the world that came'?
>
> We learnt that before the world was created, it arose in thought to create an intense light to illuminate it. He created an intense light over which no created thing could have authority.
>
> The Blessed Holy One saw, however, that the world could not endure [this light]. He therefore took a seventh of it and left it in its place for them. The rest He put away for the righteous in the Ultimate Future.
>
> He said, 'If they are worthy of this seventh and keep it, I will give them [the rest] in the Final World.'
>
> It is therefore called 'the world that came,' since it already came [into existence] from the six days of creation. Regarding this it is written (Psalm 31:20), 'How great is

> Your good that You have hidden away for those who fear You.'[1]

The paradox here is an intriguing one, as it contains within it a second paradox: that of the revealed and the concealed light. Here, light is everywhere and nowhere, not only existing throughout the universe, in all directions, but also throughout time, from its beginning to its end. It signifies eternity. But at the same time, there is an apparent split in the light, for most of the light is hidden, and only a strand exists in its revealed state. This in itself creates a sense of time, from the time it is concealed to the time it will be revealed. It creates the beginning and end of the universe. God's creation of the light signifies the creation of eternity, which becomes the creation of time.

The first passage of the Bahir (which literally means "brilliant,"), also addresses the question of light, with recourse to the psalm we quoted above:

> Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKana said:
>
> One verse (Job 37:21) states, 'And now they do not see the light, it is brilliant (*Bahir*) in the skies... [round about God in terrible majesty].'
>
> Another verse, however, (Psalm 18:12), states, 'He made darkness His hiding place.' It is also written (Psalm 97:2), 'Cloud and gloom surrounds Him.' This is an apparent contradiction.
>
> A third verse comes and reconciles the two. It is written (Psalm 139:12), 'Even darkness is not dark to You. Night shines like day—light and darkness are the same.'[2]

---

[1] This is inspired by section 10 of the Bahir. See Aryeh Kaplan, *The Bahir* (Weiser, 1989), pp. 58-9.
[2] Ibid, p. 1.

The passage begins with a contradiction: in scripture, sometimes God is described as being surrounded by light, and at other at times, by darkness. It resolves it by denying any essential difference between opposites. Both originate from within God, and God exists as the point of relation between the light and the dark. This can be seen in Isaiah when God says, "I form light and create darkness." (45:7) The Bahir describes God as the "Unity of unities."[3]

How is it that precisely the light which is brilliant (*bahir*) is unseen? It is possible to say that because it is so brilliant, it blinds, so all that is seen is darkness. Light turns itself into darkness, for it is light insofar as it can be seen, but as soon as it becomes hidden, it becomes darkness.

What, then, of the light which can be seen, the one-seventh which was given to the world? Perhaps light in its unified form is different from light split into two. Light in its original form is *bahir*—brilliance. It exists between all dualities, light and dark, visible and invisible, revealed and concealed. When the light divides, the part which becomes hidden, converts itself into darkness, and the part that reveals itself to the world, takes on form and substance, becoming the light of the world.[4]

Kabbalists are interested in opening the "light of the eye" both to reveal the hidden light to nourish the light of the world, and to conjoin the two types of light into a unified whole. The Zohar refers to the "light of the eye," when it reads:

> This is the light that the Blessed Holy One created at first.
> It is the light of the eye.
> It is the light that the Blessed Holy One showed the first Adam;

[3] Bahir §141.
[4] See Bahir §13

> with it he saw from one end of the world to the other.[5]

Here the light which God first creates embraces the whole of the world, for Adam is able to see from one end of it to the other. So for the kabbalists to see through the "light of the eye," is to see the whole world at once. It is vision of unity. It is a vision of brilliance that radiates throughout the world.

This means that the world that existed before the world (*olam haba*) is still present within the world, although at the same time hidden from it. It is the source of light of the world. The hidden light feeds the revealed light. The Zohar reads:

> If [the light] were completely hidden
> the world would not exist for even a moment!
> Rather, it is hidden and sown like a seed
> that gives birth to seeds and fruit.
> Thereby the world is sustained.
> Every single day, a ray of that light shines into the world
> and keeps everything alive,
> for with that ray the Blessed Holy One feeds the world.[6]

Seeing this light unveils the "world to come," when the hidden light and the visible light, once again become one and the same. Yet this is not an attempt to simply see the world in terms of sameness. The unveiling of the "world to come" marks a different kind of vision, which seeks to conjoin dualities. In terms of sight, this means that the "world to come" will be both fully visible and invisible at the same time. The "world to come" will be full, but it will also be entirely empty. It will have form and it will be formless. It

---

[5] Daniel Chanan Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Paulist, 1983), p. 51.
[6] Ibid, p. 52, 58-59.

will shine in brilliance, unifying the world in God's primal vision of it. It is a vision that mirrors the nature of God. It is a vision of the "Unity of unities."

Tom Bland is a writer, poet and educator. He is researching a book on Rumi and the poetic imagination. He can be contacted at inward@email.com.

Stan Goldberg: untitled

Tzvi and Ghazaala in the Garden of Eden

Mordecai Drache

Gazelle, Gajal, Ghazal, Cervo, Tzvi...
you graze on the periphery
in fields of verse.

In Arabic, in Bengali, in Hebrew, in Spanish,
you remind, denote, emote
libidally, subliminally...
ever since that fateful hour
when Esau, the hunter,
in an attempt to gain
his birthright
from Isaac--
wrested and wrestled from Jacob--
heard, "*Ghazaa-aa-aa-aal*!"
from a wounded doe,
pierced by his arrow's golden tip,
in her heart,
in her fawn's heart.
Upon hearing that anguished cry,
Esau, for the first time,
upon murdering an animal,
collapsed to the ground
and wept.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 369-372

He named the animal, *Ghazaal*,
after her pain,
  and from there,
    that pain,
wore the same velvet coat
as love stolen,
love unconsummated,
        raging
 as fire forever unquenched.

As *Ghazaal*
moved across tongues--
Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish--
she morphed genders,
and transformed into
      Ghazaal and *Ghazaala*,
        Tzvi and *Tzviah*,
        Cervo and *Cerva*.

As Jewish, Muslim and Christian poets
attempted to ensnare him, and her,
they were ensnared by her, and him.
They experienced Eden then...
for is it not
 in the unfulfilled wanting--
in that mingled masochism of pain and
          pleasure just out of reach
          that bliss is achieved,
          like that of Laila
            for Majnun,
          and Majnun
            for Laila?

When Esau killed his fawn,
the doe's cry was heard

even across the mountains,
even across the continents.

She became '*ghajal*' in Bengali,
a love song,
'gazelle' in English,
a deer--
her meaning was obscured,
as she grazed quietly
in the language
of her veldt's roots.

Today,
in the promised land,
where the doe was first killed,
where she was first named by Esau,
her ghost floats
on the birth certificates
of Arab women.
It floats
on the birth certificates
of Israeli men.

Tzvi and *Ghazaala*...
you were not supposed to fight.
You were not supposed to lob
explosives, stones and rubber bullets
at each other.

Do you not remember how,
at one time,
you played and fornicated
in fields of verse,
morphing genders across tongues
as fluently and fluidly
as milk with honey?

Do you not remember
how and when
Moses ibn Ezra wrote:
"O, do not be unrelenting, *Tzvi*.
Show me the wonders of your love...
Kiss your friend and fulfill his desire.
If you wish to let me live,
give me life,
but if you would kill,
then kill me."

Mordecai Drache is a contributing editor to *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*. He lives in Toronto.

Bzura

Susan H. Case

She has three last names
none real.
One for each marriage and

one mangled
from a trip through Ellis Island
(as if that kerchiefed head could pass for English)

the injured one lasting a century
a name taken from the Polish river
Bzura, found on a faded map, a place

marked by nothing
but a history of futile
fighting back. These three names jumble

anagrams in Garamond
recorded in a book of yearnings.
Today she's River Woman

made of dried mud.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 373-374

And tomorrow a package arrives
addressed to another.

Gornisht, she says, glances
backward. Ungrips the past.
Begins to unwrap.

Susan H. Case is a college professor in New York City. Recent work of hers can be found in the anthologies *Yowl* and *Poems for the Mountains*. She is the author of *The Scottish Café*, which is currently being translated into Ukrainian.

Ken Vallario: Twist

Faces of the Shekhinah: Thirteen Archetypes of the Priestess from Jewish Tradition

Jill Hammer

Since the fall of the Second Temple, Jews have identified their primary religious authorities as teachers, interpreters, and lawmakers: that is to say, as rabbis. Rabbi is a title I hold, and it is a powerful title, connecting me to my ancestors who wrote the Talmud and created the fruitful interpretive strategy called midrash. While there have on occasion been women prophets, scholars and mystics throughout Jewish history, women have held the title "rabbi" only recently (except for a few rare exceptions such as Ceti, a "rabbess" of Zaragoza, Spain in the Middle Ages). I am proud and grateful to have received the title rabbi, and I am dedicated to the task of creative interpretation that the title implies. Yet I have often felt there is something missing. How does this title connect me to my female ancestors, who were spiritual practitioners and ritual experts? Does the title "rabbi" in fact erase this female lineage by implying that to be a spiritual leader one must be adopted into a male line of religious leadership?

Yet the practice of female spiritual leadership is ancient, and common to many cultures. Often, these women have been called "priestess" (or that equivalent in the languages of the ancients.) The first named poet in history is Enheduanna, priestess of Inanna. Priestesses are often, though not exclusively, associated with goddesses, and part of their function is to embody the feminine face of Deity (whether that means separate goddesses

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 376-390

or feminine aspects of a unified divinity). They may come from relatively egalitarian traditions or from relatively patriarchal traditions, but in either case, they embody the connection of women with the Divine. They stand next to their male counterparts, in many cases doing similar work, but maintaining their unique identity as females in search of spirit.

It inspires me that as a woman ritualist, I come from a line much longer than the thirty-odd years of the female rabbinate. I have always been drawn to images of the Divine feminine, even while in the heady masculine environment of rabbinical school. Yet only recently have I allowed myself to know that as I conduct the business of spiritual celebration, mourning, healing, and growth, I stand in the line of the priestesses as well as of the rabbis. This realization has led me on a path of discovery, a path full of spiritual surprise.

The Way of the Priestess in Jewish Tradition

Ostensibly, Judaism has not had a great deal to do with goddesses, and yet Jewish sages and mystics invented (or, more likely, harvested from ancient syncretic Hebrew practice) the Shekhinah, a tangible and feminine figure of divinity embodied in the earth and the human community. She was both the same as God (God in the most tangible form) and different from God (a loving spouse of God who would argue with Her husband about the safety of Her children). She was said to dwell in the holy shrine of the people, but also within the substance of the whole world. The sage Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin describes the Tabernacle, Her dwelling place, as follows: "As a cave by the sea: when the waves enter it, it fills with water, but the sea is not diminished. So it was with the Tent of Meeting: the Shekhinah filled it with Her glory, but the world in no way lacked Her presence." (Numbers Rabbah 12:4) The Holy of Holies, the central Temple shrine, embodied Her, and later She was embodied in the Torah. She was called the Tree of Life, as the goddess Asherah had been long before. Yet the lovers and

keepers of the Shekhinah were always men: priests of the Temple, Sages of the Torah, and mystics who imagined themselves as the companions of the Shekhinah.

Modern Jewish feminists and shamans have expanded and changed this concept of the Shekhinah to reflect a non-dual and non-hierarchal model of God and gender. A great deal has been written about the reclamation of the Divine feminine in a Jewish context (Raphael Patai's *The Hebrew Goddess* and Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb's *She Who Dwells Within* are good places to learn about the Goddess in Judaic tradition). This re-shaping provides an opening for a model of female spirituality that embodies the Shekhinah, just as ancient priestesses embodied the Divine feminine in other traditions.

In contemporary times, work has also been done to imagine what the role of a priestess might be or have been in Jewish life: Savina Teubal hypothesizes biblical priestess-matriarchs in her book *Sarah the Priestess*. In her book *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Bernadette Brooten writes of the occasional elusive inscriptions on Jewish tombstones of the Roman period, such as "Maria, *hiereia*" (that is, Maria the priestess). Women in the Jewish Renewal movement have invented the title "*eishet chazon*" (woman of vision) in recognition of women's spiritual achievement. And Deborah Greniman writes of claiming the term *kohenet* (the female term for priest in Hebrew). But what would be the function of a *kohenet*? The term is used in the Talmud solely to mean "the wife or daughter of a priest" (and it is still used that way today among Yemenite Jews). Could there be a place for a priestess in Jewish ritual?

Two years ago, Holly Taya Shere (a Jewish woman who became a pagan priestess and later returned to Judaism) and I (an earth-loving rabbi with a talmudic mind and intense Goddess leanings) met and began to create a program called Kohenet. Our hope was to find out some answers to these questions. The program, still in its infancy, has twenty dedicated and talented women who have committed to two years of study and practice. A

number of respected teachers— Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Rabbi Leah Novick, Rabbi Hanna Tiferet Siegel, Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael, Dr. Alicia Ostriker, Rabbi Melissa Weintraub, Dr. Deborah Grenn, and Shoshana Jedwab—have become part of our faculty. Each of these women imagines the priestesshood differently. My own formulation is that a priestess honors sacred time, space, and soul through the *mitzvot* (holy obligations) of Judaism and through sacred service to the self, the community, the earth (which is the body of the Shekhinah in many mystical texts), and the Divine. The Jewish priestess is not only the hands of the Shekhinah, doing sacred work according to her own understandings and gifts, but she has a practice of sacred be-ing, of becoming both Shekhinah and the one who encounters Shekhinah.

Holly and I, agreeing on this, sought to discover archetypes that represented biblical foremothers, modern ritual and communal acts, and faces of the Shekhinah. We did this, at my suggestion, by using the conceptual structure of the Sefer Yetzirah, a book of Jewish mysticism so old that no one is sure when it was written. The book, which describes how the Hebrew alphabet reflects the structure of creation, speaks of three letters of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph*, *mem*, and *shin*), known as the three mothers, which represent air, water, and fire—each of which exists in the spatial, temporal, and spiritual dimensions. Holly and I began with these nine mothers, and combed the tradition for resources, eventually identifying nine archetypes that spoke to us. Later, sensing gaps, we added the three mothers of the journey itself, making twelve, and a thirteenth, final archetype: the Weaver, the one who binds all things together.

The thirteen archetypes, explained below, are for us a template of how to be the Divine Presence in the world. These facets of being honor women, though they often translate equally well into archetypes for men. They are a good ritual list: a useful set of ideas, though not exhaustive. There are, of course, archetypes and images we did not include. Yet these seem to be the

ones that stand out most clearly for me, at least at this moment in space, time, and soul.

MOTHERS OF THE WORLD/MOTHERS OF SPACE

These three women hold an honored place in their communities and thus can be said to be keepers of space.

Na'arah: The Maiden

The Maiden embodies focused intention and joyful radiance. She appears as Rebecca, the zealous and kind girl in Genesis who draws water for a stranger and his camels, and later becomes the wife of Isaac. She is Miriam, the young prophetess who watches over her baby brother Moses in a basket on the Nile. She appears as the maidens who dance at the sacred shrine of Shiloh to celebrate the harvest. She is the daughters mentioned in the book of Numbers who dare to bring their case before Moses and ask for an inheritance of land. She brings the gifts of action, commitment, and courage, and embraces joy, movement, dance, and fellowship. She is the springtime, when the Exodus from Egypt happened and the Hebrews were reborn.

Eim: The Mother

The Mother is the embodiment of love and nurturing. In the Bible, the Mother appears as Leah, the abundantly fertile matriarch; as Hagar, who searches for water for her son; and as Yocheved, who hides her child from Pharaoh. The Mother appears as Pharaoh's daughter, who has compassion on a child not hers, and as Hannah, who prays to give birth. The Mother is Naamah, Noah's wife, who shepherds animals and people onto the Ark. She appears in the manna that falls on Israel and in the sea that parts to free the people from Egypt. In mystical lore, she appears as the Divine Mother of the world. She brings gifts of sustenance, loving community, compassionate listening, and good parenting. She is the summer, when the sun warms the earth.

Gevirah: The Matriarch

Gevirah is a Hebrew word for mistress, matriarch, or queen mother, and it also means "the powerful one." The *gevirah* or Matriarch is the embodiment of strength and power. She appears as Sarah, who bears a child, Isaac, at ninety and then fights for his inheritance. She comes to us as the Queen of Sheba, who tells riddles to King Solomon, and as the queen mother Maacah mentioned in the Book of Kings, who honors the Goddess in spite of a state law to the contrary. The Matriarch is Esther, the queen who uses her royal authority to save her people, and Vashti, who refuses a cruel king's request. She also appears as Judith, who fights for her people. The Matriarch calls forth the gift of leadership, persistence, and fierceness on behalf of justice. The Book of Proverbs says of her; "Strength and glory are her clothing, and she laughs on the last day." She is the autumn and winter, when the harvest is brought in and the people honor the power of the land.

MOTHERS OF THE CIRCLE OF LIFE/MOTHERS OF TIME

These three women help others through passages in time.

Mekonenet: The Mourning Woman

Jeremiah, as he mourns for his exiled people, asks that the mourning women be called to come and weep. The word *mekonenet* means "one who laments" but can also mean "one who makes a nest." The *mekonenet* represents sorrow, but can also guide us to rebirth. She embodies the pain of change. She appears as Rachel weeping for her exiled children, as the wife of Pinchas, who dies in childbirth, and as the grieving Mother Zion. She also appears in Ezekiel as the women weeping for the god Tammuz, who has gone down into the underworld. She brings the gifts of comforting the bereaved, burying the dead, and healing the mourners, and with the gift of facing cataclysmic change. She acknowledges the power of destruction, and the power of healing and comfort.

Chachamah: The Wise Woman

We are told in the Book of Proverbs: "The wise woman builds her house." The *chachamah*, the female sage, is a guide through human existence, teaching us to build our lives well. She embodies the path of understanding and balance. She appears in the wise women who spin the wool for the Tabernacle, and in the wise woman who advises David not to exile his son. She is Serach, the granddaughter of Jacob, who holds all the secrets of the Israelite tribes and tells Moses where Joseph is buried. She is Wisdom Herself. The Wise Woman brings the gifts of teaching, memory, and storytelling, and with wisdom of all kinds. She is linked to the tides, to the menstrual cycle, and to other cycles of nature. She is a preserver of life, wisdom, and the future.

Meyaledet: The Midwife

Meyaledet means "she who brings to birth." The midwife is connected to air, the first breath of a new human being, and she embodies the birthing process. We find her in Shifrah and Puah, the midwives of Egypt who saved the Hebrew children, and in the midwives who helped Rachel and Tamar to deliver. We also find her in the Holy One who led Israel through the birth canal of the sea. Her gifts are midwifery, gardening, healing, mentoring, and creating new projects of any type. She is linked to growth, trees, animals, and everything that springs from the earth. She is the power of endless creation.

MOTHERS OF THE SACRED RITE/MOTHERS OF SOUL

These three women transmit knowledge of the spirit to others.

Neviah: The Prophetess

The *neviah* is the "one who is sent." She represents the breath of the Divine and embodies inspiration, prophecy, and ecstatic experience. She appears in Miriam the prophet, who dances and drums by the shore of the Sea of Reeds, and in Deborah, the woman who leads the people and sings of her victories. She is in the Levitical women drummers who danced in Temple processions. Her gifts are music, drumming, poetry, dreaming, ecstatic practice, visioning, and the ability to speak out and be heard. She experiences angelic guides and Divine visions, and seeks truth on behalf of her people. She represents revelation.

Tzovah: The Temple Keeper

The *tzovah*, or "one of many hosts of women," once served at the entrance to the *mishkan*. In the Torah, we learn that the priests used the mirrors of these tzovot to make the priestly basin for handwashing. The *tzovot* are associated with water, with divination, with sexuality, and with the affirmation of the self. In *midrash*, they are the Hebrew slave women in Egypt who seduce their tired husbands with games and mirrors. We see the archetype of the *tzovah* in Eve, who chooses the fruit of knowledge, and Lilith, who flies away from Eden. We also find her in Ruth, the stranger who lies down with her lover on a threshing floor. We know her in the women who bake bread and pour out wine for the Queen of Heaven. The *tzovah* embodies the life-spirit. Her gifts are self-awareness, the keeping of the body and the keeping of sacred space, and the performance of ritual and ceremony. She brings the sacred into earthly reality. She represents holiness.

Ba'alat Ov: The Spirit Walker

To be a *ba'alat ov*, or the keeper of a spirit, was a forbidden practice in ancient Israel. Yet in the Bible, the Witch of Endor, a *ba'alat ov*, raises Samuel from the dead so that he may speak to King Saul. The *ba'alat ov* embodies the ability to connect to hidden realities. She represents the underworld deep within the earth. The *ba'alat ov* connects us to our ancestors and to other spirit-beings. We see her in the enchantresses and sorceresses the prophets condemn, and in the mother of Abaye, a Talmudic woman who is an amulet-maker and charmer. Her gifts are spirit-journeying and the making of incantations, amulets, and other spirit-charms. She also offers spiritual protection and the ability to guard the sacred circle of the self. She represents the hidden world of the spirit.

Moving Between Space, Time, and Soul: Mothers of the Journey

These three women are in motion, driven by powerful impulses. They are willing to accept change.

Doreshet: The Seeker

The Seeker's task is to move from her fixed place so that she may learn. In Genesis, we learn that Rebecca the matriarch goes to seek the Divine Presence so that she may learn why her pregnancy is so painful. By seeking, she receives the knowledge she needs to go on. The Seeker is a questioner, always asking why things are the way they are. The Seeker is a listener, desiring to hear the truth of others. And the Seeker is a peacemaker, seeking ways for human beings to hear one another into speech. She is both deeply rooted in her own experience, and a midwife to the truths of others. Her gifts are questioning and listening, traveling, learning from others, and dialogue work.

Leitzanit: The Fool

Between the inexorable march of time and the inner truths of the soul, we find the laughing one. When Sarah is told she will become pregnant at the age of ninety, she lets out a laugh so resonant that the Holy One takes note of it. Sarah's laugh contains joy and heartbreak, anger and relief. So too, the fool, jester, or sacred clown uses laughter to help us confront life's difficult truths. She makes fun of accepted truisms and says what no one else dares to say. She is our shadow, weaving together light and darkness. She is both a midwife who changes us, and a priestess who brings us new vision. Her gifts are humor, cleverness, boldness, honesty, and deep compassion. She is the laughter that brings truth to the surface.

Ohevet: The Lover

The woman of the Song of Songs calls out to her beloved out of deep passion and a desire to share of herself: "Let us go out to the fields!" The Lover, like the Shulamite of the Bible, reaches out of herself with desire and knowing, giving both body and soul. She is both innocent and wise, seizing her moment with zest and openness. Her beloved may be a human being, a song, the world, the Divine, or her own soul. She pursues her love without fear. She is grounded in her personal experience, yet she also embodies the cosmic love of the universe. Her gifts are openness, presence, and the quality of being awake and alive. She is passion, emotion, and the reconciliation of opposites through union.

SPACE, TIME, AND SOUL: THE MOTHER OF THE WEB OF ALL

Oreget: The Weaver

The *oreget*, we are told in the Book of Kings, weaves in the Temple to honor the Divine feminine. What she weaves are *batim* or "houses"—tapestries, garments, or maybe worlds. Like the Fates, the *oreget* weaves space, time, and soul together. She embodies the knowledge of the connectedness of all things, and she is the earth, solid and firm yet multiple. It is she who integrates and connects the many threads of the world. She grasps the whole in its sacred multiplicity and binds it together, adding each new thread with care and love. We see her in the women who spun the goats' hair for the Tabernacle, and in the storytellers and scribes of our people who wove together tales and traditions. Her gifts are the weaving of legends, interpretations, rituals and traditions, as well as weaving, sewing, writing, interpretation, and all the creative arts. She watches over all activities that bring disparate elements into a whole.

OPPOSITES AND THEIR USES:

After sitting with these archetypes for many months, I mapped them onto the Jewish calendar and assigned each one a month (the Maiden the month of Passover when the people is reborn, the Prophetess the month the Torah was given, the Fool the month of the Carneval-like holiday of Purim, and so forth.) This gave the calendar an added dimension, and it also taught me something new about archetypes and priestesses. Once I looked at the calendar, and saw which months were opposite which, I realized that each archetype had its opposite, as follows:

Maiden—Matriarch	Nisan—Tishrei
Midwife—Mourning Woman	Iyar—Cheshvan
Prophetess—Spirit Walker	Sivan—Kislev
Mother—Seeker	Tammuz—Tevet
Wise Woman—Lover	Av—Shevat
Temple Keeper—Fool	Elul—Adar

This gave me a wonderful set of paradigms to work with: the temple keeper or priestess, so serious about her sacred space, and the fool who violates all boundaries; the mother who provides security and the seeker who is always facing change; the maiden in her beginning and the matriarch in her fullness; the prophetess who speaks to God as part of the sanctioned cult, and the witch or shaman who speaks to Spirit outside the protection of organized religion. I saw the complementarity of the archetypes, but also the potential conflicts between them: the wise woman, who believes in trusting her head, may not want to listen to the lover who trusts her heart, and the temple priestess may be angry at the fool. As I meditated on this, I realized the importance, in embodying an archetype of the Shekhinah/the Goddess, of not repressing Her opposite. Holly too accepted this extension of our paradigm and absorbed it into her vision of the priestess.

So, in the Kohenet program, we have instituted the custom that when we work with an archetype, we will always take a minute to honor her opposite. In my personal practice, I am learning to work with the gifts and shadows I repress as well as the parts of myself that feel comfortable and familiar. This too is the work of the priestess: to embody the whole, through careful examination of the parts.

The night before a dear friend of mine was ordained a rabbi, I took her to the ritual bath to immerse—a tradition for Jews undergoing life changes. With both our permissions, however, the ritual turned into a rite in which she became a priestess. As I prepared her for immersion, I told her that a priestess is all the Jewish women throughout time who lit Shabbat candles and recited psalms, and also all the ancient oracles and servants of the Goddess—and also a priestess is the one who walks before the people, from light into darkness, and from darkness into light. That definition has come back to me over and over again. I know that through these complementary and conflicting roles, I will be able to know the light and the darkness equally and honor both clarity and mystery as faces of the Divine.

Conclusion

I believe that the specific skills of guiding a ritual, making a holiday, healing the earth and providing for the needy, making sacred art for delight and inspiration, comforting the mourner and rejoicing with those who celebrate are more important than theoretical archetypes, for these actions embody the Goddess, the Shekhinah, the Holy, more clearly than mere words could ever do. Yet the archetypes enable and enrich the actions. When I am leading a prayer service for bereaved families, I invite myself to embody the *mekonenet*, the mourning woman, and let her project sensitivity and love when I cannot. When I am guiding an event and all seems tangled and confused, I become the Weaver, putting the separate strands into a pattern.

And when I feel overworked as a teacher, I allow myself to become the Maiden, dancing lightly and sharing my burden with others.

I still do not know where the priestesshood will fit in to the traditions of my people. We have just begun to try to figure this out, and I doubt the matter will be settled in my lifetime. I am grateful to all the partners I have in this work and to all the *kohanot* who are yet to come. I am still walking a path of the Shekhinah's making, and even when wrong turns occur, I try to embody Her, or at least to embody myself as one who loves Her. I still love the ever-expanding Torah of the rabbis, which has made room for mystics, radical philosophers, and forest-walkers in the generations before me. I hope that, by awakening these thirteen archetypes of space, time, and soul, I have brought the world of the rabbis a little closer to the world of the priestesses.

Rabbi Jill Hammer is the director of Tel Shemesh, a website and community celebrating and creating earth-based Judaism, and the co-facilitator of Kohenet: The Hebrew Priestess Training Program. She is the author of two books: *The Jewish Book of Days: A Companion for All Seasons*, and *Sisters at Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women*.

The author wishes to thank her Kohenet co-teachers Holly Taya Shere and Shoshana Jedwab; Kohenet eldresses Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael, Rabbi Melissa Weintraub, Dr. Alicia Ostriker, Dr. Deborah Greniman, Rabbi Leah Novick, and Rabbi Hanna Tiferet Siegel; and all the Kohenet women, as well as Mia Cohen, Sarah Shapiro, Chaia Lehrer, Ari Weller, Shir-Yaakov Feinstein-Feit and the staff of Elat Chayyim for their warm support. And special thanks go to Jay Michaelson for introducing Jill and Holly. May he get a full reward for his good works!

This article is dedicated to the memory of Savina Teubal, author of *Sarah the Priestess*, who died the week Kohenet was born. May her spirit continue to guide us.

The Water Queen of Jerusalem

Rahel Chalfi

The Water Queen of Jerusalem
dives into history
history is hard and she grows fins
she has no air and she schemes
gills rowing through memory
the Water Queen of Jerusalem owns
a bathing suit made of Yiddish
the Water Queen of Jerusalem wallows on a stone beach in Ladino
fearing the rise of water level in Arabic
the Water Queen of Jerusalem has no
sea in Jerusalem
she has a history
Jewish
and she holds
holds holds her head
above water

Rahel Chalfi was born in 1945 in Tel Aviv. She studied at Hebrew University, and in the U.S. at the American Film Institute. She published seven volumes of poetry, and her work has been translated into English, German, Spanish and Yiddish. An early feminist, her poems often depict Woman as a mythical, larger-than-life being, but always with a self-deprecating tongue in her cheek. Chalfi lives in Tel Aviv.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 391-391

Orly Cogan: untitled

The Origins of Lilith

Rabbi Ohad Ezrachi

Lilith is the great she-demon of Jewish folklore: a terrifying figure who prowls the night, causes miscarriages, and creates babies from the spilled seed of sinners. For centuries, Jewish women have carried protection amulets against her, and she populated folktales and magical spells alike.

In recent years, Lilith has undergone a curious renaissance: as feminist hero. Lilith is best known by the story, first recorded in *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, of Adam's first wife who rejects his authority. For generations, this made her the archetype of promiscuity, lust, and death. But for our generation, Lilith has become an icon of feminism, a strong woman who stands on her own. And her promiscuity has become a badge of honor.

Few people know, however, that Lilith had a pre-history extending well before this tenth century text. Yet understanding that history enables us to read the foundational Lilith myth in a new light, and perhaps set the stage for a recovery of this much-maligned figure. That will be our project here.

Lilith in the Bible

Lilith is first mentioned in the book of Isaiah, in a section which describes how a settled city will become a desolate hill:

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 393-407

Thorns shall grow up in its palaces,
Nettles and briers in its stronghold.
It shall be a home of jackals,
An abode of ostriches.
Wildcats shall meet hyenas,
Goat-demons shall greet each other;
There too the *lilit* shall repose
And find herself a resting place.

In this verse, the "lilit" finds a place of rest amidst the ruins of a city. But what exactly does the "lilit" here mean? Is it some beast, some bird, or some sort of demon?

The classic Jewish commentaries are divided over this point. *Targum Yonatan* and *Rashi* maintain that we are indeed dealing with a species of demon who likes to frequent ruins. *Radak* is uncertain. He admits that "lilit" may be a demon, but he also raises the possibility that it may be a beast which "screams at night, or a bird who flies at night."[7] What are the Radak's reasons for such an interpretation? He notes that the root of the word "lilit" can be found in two other words—one is "leila" (night), which has a phonetic resemblance, another is the word "y'lala" (howl). Hence, he postulates that this animal is not only active at night-time, but also "screams at night."[8]

[7] "tziyim"—these are animals that dwell in the desolate wilderness (tziya). *Targum Yonatan* translates "iyyim" as 'cats'. 'Seir', like the targum says, is translated as demon, as it says, 'to the 'seirim' demons, after whom they have gone astray'. It is also possible that it is a beast of the desert. This is also the case with the 'lilit'—it is a beast that howls at night, or a bird that flies at night. The Rabbis say: "If a woman miscarries an embryo that looks like a lilit, she receives the impurity of after-birth. It is considered a baby, although it has wings". *Radak* on Isaiah 34:14.

[8] The Zohar (*Idra Zuta* 293/a) discusses certain negative entities called "the masters of wailing and howling" who, like Lilith, emerge from the partzuf Imma (binah).

R. Tzaddok Hacohen of Lublin tries to combine both approaches, asserting that every spiritual entity extant has its terrestrial counterpart.[9] In his view, the damage which these demons cause is very concrete, and yet each of them also has a spiritual dimension to his or her activities. Thus R. Tzaddok maintains that Lilith is a demon who has a physical counterpart:

> The actual meaning of the (word 'lilit' in the) verse "the 'lilit' shall also rest there" is that this is the name of a certain animal, as earlier commentators wrote...It is certainly common to the country of Shva (Africa), in which, because of its "airs", sexual lust is very strong.[10] And the nature of this animal....is great lust, demanding and grabbing any male beast. It is also called the power of the wife of harlotry in the world.[11]

Most contemporary researchers believe that Isaiah is talking about devils, not night-birds, but, rather like R. Tzadok of Lublin, that the devils were themselves based upon actual phenomena. They base this conclusion upon the etymological similarity of 'lilit' to linguistic roots associated with demonic creatures and natural phenomena in languages common to the Near East, such as Sumerian and Acadian.[12] In ancient Sumerian, for example, the word "lil" signifies a spirit or a storm, in both concrete and mythological contexts.

---

[9] R. Tzaddok wrote an entire book on this subject, entitled *The Talk of Demons*.

[10] The ancient "theory of the airs" assumes that every place has a special quality in its air. This quality, be it good or bad, passes into the souls of those who live there. The Rabbis said that the air of Israel makes one wise (Baba Batra 58/b), while R. Zaddok thinks the air of Africa causes unbearable lust and passion.

[11] *Dover Tzedek*, 4, the entry beginning with the word "u'vakasha".

[12] The following discussion is based primarily on the research of Idit Pintel in her book on the development of Lilith, Ashmadai, and Samael in Judaism.

Other scholars have different interpretations. Yehezkal Kaufmann believes that Lilith is the spirit of ruins,[13] and that only at a later stage did the word "lil" become associated with the Semitic word for night (leila). S.R. Driver suggests that the lilit is a type of bird on this link between the word "lilit" and the Sumerian storm spirit.[14] He argues that the lilit is a bird of the night which moves in a circular fashion,[15] which is why, in both the Bible and ancient Sumerian, it was called a "lilit", from the root "lili" or "luli", indicating the circular motion of a storm.

The reference to circularity is borne out by the book of Kings, which, in describing of the Temple, says that it was possible to ascend from one story to another by means of the "lulim" (spiral staircases): "And they went up to the middle story by means of winding staircases, and from the middle to the third."[16] This suggests that Lilith is etymologically associated with

---

13 Y. Kaufmann, *The History of the Faith of Israel*, Tel Aviv: Bialik, Jerusalem, and Dvir, 5736, vol. 1, p. 428.

14 G.R. Driver. (1959) "Lilith: Isaiah XXXIV:14," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 91:56-57.

15 Driver does not identify the biblical lilit with the night raptor owl presently known as a lilit (Strix aluco), but with the night bird called tahmas (Caprimulgus), called, in English, "goat-sucker" or "night jar" since this bird flies at night in circular movements—often around goats and other animals, in order to eat the insects usually found near such animals. See *Animals and Plants of Israel*, published by the Society for the Protection of Nature and the Ministry of Defense 1986, Birds, p. 294.

16 I Kings 6:8. Rashi: "lulim—the *Targum Yonatan* says: a spiral.....which means a stone construction with stairs. One who walks up this is like someone encircling a pillar, which ascends higher and higher, but it does not need a slope like a ladder, as its circumference is already inclined." Interestingly, this verse comes directly after the verse which tells us that the Temple was built without the usage of metal tools: "And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone that was made ready before it was brought there; so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was being built". This became one of the focuses for discussion in ancient Jewish demonology, since there is a Talmudic legend (*Bavli Gittin* 68), whose source is in the book *The Testament of Solomon* (first to third centuries A.D.), which discusses Solomon's complicated relations with Ashmadai the King of Demons, whom Solomon asked to help with the construction of the Temple. In the Talmudic version Ashmadai is asked to help find the shamir—a special worm which can drill into stones and cut them without any need of metal tools. Indeed, many commentators identify the Queen of Sheba as an embodiment of Lilith.

some type of spiralling movement, like a spiral staircase or a storm.[17] It is hard to imagine a better description of the unique quest of this problematical figure. After a long and difficult journey, Lilith returns to paradise far, far greater than before.

Outside the Bible, the character Lilith already appears as a she-demon in the Saga of Gilgamesh (Sumeria, 1800-1700 B.C.), where the story is told of a mythological tree "by whose trunk the maiden Lilith built her house." Another linguistic root of Semitic-Akkadian origin which might be the source for Lilith is the root "lalu" or "lulu". In the extensive library of King Asurbanipal there are thousands of tablets, many of which are full of conjurations whose purpose is the exorcism of various demons. The Babylonian she-devil, Lilith, usually appears as a member of a demonic triad including "Lilu, Lilitu, and Ardath-Lili." In Sumerian, these names derive from the word "lil," meaning spirit. In Akkadian, they perhaps derive from "Lalu" (plenty, or excess) or "Lulu" (lust, promiscuity). This adds two further character traits which might be ascribed to Lilith: a sense of ever-increasing abundance which can lead to greed, and the desire for this abundance, which may devolve into lust and promiscuity.

Can this be linked to the Hebrew word "holalut," which signifies confusion and mixture? Given what we know about the Bible's penchant for order, it may not be a coincidence that the word for primordial chaos (often represented as a goddess in Near Eastern mythology) is related to the

---

[17] This image recurs much later, in Hasidism, where the development of sexual relations is compared to the climbing of a spiral staircase. One Habad tradition records: "When someone stands by the central column, he looks up...and when he needs to climb up to the second step, which is higher than the first step, he gets closer to the form which is at the top of the column. (But to do so,) he must first go around the central column, so it seems that he is going further away and hiding.... This explains that the secret of the separation of the male from the female is a process of drawing closer and going away, much like a dance... that after being face to face, and very close, there must be concealment, so that there can be an even greater level of face to face. Just as during a dance, when (the dancers) come closer and then further apart." Tzemah Tzedek, *Or Torah*, parshat Ekev, p. 422; R. Shalom Ber, *Hemshech Ta'arav*, vol. 2, pp. 522-3.

name of the arch-demon. Such a link is quite fertile,[18] though impossible to prove.

To summarize, we can list the following traits as being connected to the word Lilith:

- night (leila)
- howling (y'lala)
- demonic spirit (lil)
- storm (lil)
- circular movement (lil, lul)
- spiral ascension (luli)
- abundance and excess (lalu)
- lust, promiscuity, and debauchery (lulu)

LILITH IN THE TALMUD

When a rabbinic storyteller in 9th century Babylonia gave the name Lilith to the first woman on earth, he was building on this web of associations. He (presuming the writer was a male) also drew on Talmudic ideas of "the first Eve." The rabbinic notion of two Eves drew on the much-observed fact that there are two accounts of the creation of human beings in the book of Genesis. First, the Bible says "male and female God created them" (Genesis 1: 27), suggesting that male and female were created simultaneously, both

[18] The verse "The foolish ones (holalim) shall not stand in your sight" (Psalms 5:6) is interpreted by Rashi: "holalim—foolish ones." On Kohelet 7:25 ("and foolishness is madness"), Rashi comments: "'holalut' is foolishness and confusion." 'Holalut' is a kind of inverse of 'hallel' (praise), which is also related to the 'hilat' (halo—probably not a coincidence) of light. It may also be related to hilul, and from hilul to chilul (desecration), and challal (a dead person). Lilith's disruption of pregnancy is also linked to this root, since a pregnant woman is called "challah" (Is. 66:8). The linguistic "gate" ch'l takes us even further, to the mystery of dance (machol), forgiveness (mechila), and challal (space).

receiving the name "Adam." Later, however, the Bible says that Eve was created out of Adam, and subordinate to him.

How to explain this contradiction? One Talmudic interpretation holds that Adam and the "first Eve" were created back-to-back and later separated, paralleling the legend Plato tells in The Symposium of an originally hermaphroditic and thus androgynous creature, but "the first Eve returned to her ground,"[19] because God despairs of her bloody secretions,[20] and replaces her with a less earthly Eve. Thus the rabbis say each should face toward where he or she was created: "the man toward the earth, the woman toward the man."[21] There are other variations, but the notion that the story is not repeating (or clarifying) itself, but rather telling of two separate creations, was commonplace well before the modern era of Biblical criticism.

In addition to the midrashic first Eve, a demonic Lilith is named in the Talmud: "R. Hanina said: It is forbidden to sleep in a house alone. Whoever sleeps in a house alone is liable to be taken hold of by Lilith."[22] Later authorities took this view to be law, as we find in the Mishna Berurah"Our sages of blessed memory have stated that whoever sleeps in a house alone, meaning at night, is taken hold of by Lilith, and house means even a room."[23]

Adam and Eve were also at-risk to these same nocturnal forces. After Cain killed Abel, they are said to have been chaste for 130 years to avoid

---

[19] Bereshit Rabbah 22:7.

[20] See Bereshit Rabbah 17:7: "In the beginning He created her, but saw her full of secretions and blood flowing out of her. So he returned and created her a second time."

[21] B. Niddah 31b.

[22] B. Shabbat 151b. Compare the Will of R. Eliezer HaGadol, paragraph 54: "My son, do not sleep alone at night in any house, for in these circumstances Lilith is liable to cause damage. And if she takes hold of a man or a baby, she takes them out of the world." The Zohar interprets "alone in a house" to mean "a house alone"—i.e. to sleep in a house which itself is alone, i.e. an isolated house in a field. "Whoever is alone in a house, whether it be day or night, in a solitary house—especially at night. What is meant by alone? Isolated from other houses, or someone walking alone at night, might also be hurt." (Zohar III, 45a).

[23] Mishna Berurah, Orakh Hayyim, chap. 239, sub-chapter 9.

producing further offspring who might kill one another, but during this time their sexuality was not completely dormant. They were attacked at night by *lilin* and *lilot*, male and female succubi, who seized hold of them and drew out their sperm and eggs in order to give birth to demon children. These midrashic traditions draw attention to the biblical account of "divine beings cohabiting with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring" (Gen. 6: 2). The idea of a deep spiritual charge in sexuality, which can easily be turned toward the demonic, is later extensively developed in the Zohar and other works of Jewish mysticism.

The distinguishing features of the she-devil Lilith were her wild, long hair and wings. In the Talmud, these features become linked to rabbinic concerns about modesty. Women's hair as a symbol of their sexuality was deeply problematic for the Talmudic rabbis. According to the Talmud, revealing "the hair of a woman is immodest."[24] In the opinion of the sages, long hair recalls the hair of the demon Lilith: "she grows long hair like Lilith, she crouches when urinating (Rashi: like an animal), and becomes a cushion for her husband (Rashi: because he is on top during intercourse)." In the same passage, commenting on the phrase that a woman is cursed in being "dressed as a mourner," Rashi notes that a woman is embarrassed to go outside with wild hair."[25] This entire train of thought views the evil woman as an object, (a "cushion for her husband"), bestial ("she urinates like an animal"), and seemingly malevolent ("she grows long hair like Lilith"). These images evidence a deep revulsion toward women on the

[24] Berachot 25a.

[25] B. Eruvin 100b. The full text of this passage is based on a word-by-word interpretation of Gen. 3: 16: "Eve was cursed with ten curses, as it is written, "And to the woman He said, 'I will make most severe": this is the two drops (sorts) of blood, one being that of menstruation, and the other that of virginity; 'Your pangs'–this is the pain of raising children; 'in childbearing'–this is the pain of pregnancy; 'in pain shall you bear children'—this is self-evident; Yet your urge shall be for your husband'–this teaches us that the woman longs for her husband (Rashi: 'desires intercourse') when he travels; "and he shall rule over you"–this teaches us that the woman asks (for sex) in her heart, while the man demands it verbally... [Eve also] was dressed like a mourner, excommunicated from the society of man, and imprisoned in jail."

physical level, or at the very least, a fear of something untamable and unfathomable about women's sexuality, which was associated with being wild and hairy, like an animal. The Babylonian Lilith was ready at hand as a cultural icon who concretized and gave shape to these rabbinic fears.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in Tractate Kallah, we find the following sentence: "If he is underneath and she is on top, he is seized by shaking. If he is on top and she is underneath, this is the way of human beings. If both of them were as one, this is the way of the stubborn." As we will see, who gets to be "on top" in sexual intercourse becomes a central motif of the Lilith story, which draws upon these many disparate concerns to create a coherent narrative of the evil woman.

THE ALPHABET OF BEN SIRA

We first encounter the "mature" myth of Lilith in a book called *The Alphabet of Ben-Sira*,[26] written during the Gaonic Period, towards the end of the ninth century, in Babylonia. In the Ben-Sira version, these different aspects of the Lilith figure are forged together to tell the fascinating tale of God's two attempts to find a suitable wife for Adam. As in the "first eve" myth, the Ben Sira text assumes that the two creation accounts in Genesis refer to two different women. Yet as we will now see, the Ben Sira myth also incorporates aspects of widely divergent myths of Lilith, creating an entire mythology based upon this problematic figure. We will proceed through the text, offering commentary along the way.

> When God created Adam and saw that he was alone in this universe, God said, "It is not good that man be alone."

[26]Apparently the book is currently extant in over a hundred manuscripts, has been published many times, and translated into Yiddish, Persian, and Arabic, in spite of its rather scandalous nature (perhaps because of it). A critical edition of the book, including extensive debate on its structure and history was published by Ali Yassif by the name of *The Ben Sira Fables from the Middle Ages* (Magnes Press, 5745).

> He immediately created a woman for him, who was taken from the earth, like he had been. He called her name Lilith, and brought her to Adam. They both immediately began to quarrel. This one (Adam) said, "You should lie underneath me," and this one (Lilith) said, "You lie underneath me, as we were both created equally, and we both are of the earth."
>
> Neither of them could convince the other.
>
> When Lilith saw that this was the case, she pronounced God's ineffable name, flew into the air, and ran away. Adam immediately beseeched God in prayer, saying: "Master of the Universe! This woman You gave me has already run away!"

Notice how, in the Ben Sira story, the egalitarian first creation doesn't work out precisely because of the equality of the two partners, which leaves neither with a properly dominant position. They argued and argued until Lilith, on her own initiative, chose to leave the Garden of Eden.[27] It is important to observe that the text does not take a position on whether Lilith or Adam was correct, and that, Lilith is not arguing for egalitarianism but superiority—just as Adam is. In other words, the parity is still maintained between the two characters, perhaps suggesting that egalitarianism was the ideal, but was equally rejected by both sides. Or

---

[27] In *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* there is no mention of the name of Samael, the Great Demon whom Lilith chooses as her new husband. Even in texts prior to the Zohar, Lilith appears as Samael's bride; except that in the *Maamar Ha'atzilut Ha'smalit* (Treatise on the Emanation of the Left Side) which was written by R. Yitzhak Ha'cohen, he refers to two Liliths—Big Lilith and Little Lilith. One is Samael's bride and the other is Ashmadai's bride. On the development of the figure of Samael in the Hebrew sources, and on the difference between him and the "king of the Jewish demons", Ashmadai, see the pioneering work of Idit Pintal on this subject.

perhaps the point of the story is that egalitarianism is fundamentally unworkable, and that one party must always be "on top."

Notice also that, in the Ben Sira story, the transformation of Lilith comes at her own initiative, even though her status now changes from the human into the inhuman. She is also beckoned, but not coerced, to return:

> The Holy One, blessed be He, immediately sent three angels, and He said to them: "Go bring Lilith back home! If she so desires, she will come (back home). If not, do not bring her against her will." These three angels, Sanoi, Sansanoi, and Samnagalaf,[28] went immediately, and found her in the sea, in the place where the Egyptians would drown in the future. They took her and said to her, "If you come with us, then all is well, and if not, we will drown you in the sea".
>
> She said to them, "My friends, I know that the reason God created me was so that I could weaken the newborns when they are eight days old. From the day they are born until they are eight days old, I have power over them. From eight days onward I have no more power over male

[28] Until this day, writing these names on a piece of parchment and placing it next to the bed of a woman in labor is considered a protective charm against Lilith's destructive intentions towards the mother and the newborn. Margaliot (*Malachei Elyon*, p. 236) cites an opinion which maintains that the name Sansanoi may be derived from sansenai, the boughs of the date palm, which is found in the Song of Songs (7:9) "I will climb up the date palm; I will take hold of its branches (*sansenai*)" and which carries a sexual connotation. In the Zohar, vol. 2, in the *Haichalot d'kedusha* 251a, there is a similar name of an angel—Sansanaya—who is appointed over one of the gates of the Fourth Hall and who is responsible for preventing the "askara" disease which attacks babies. The severe throat disease known as askara in often identified in the Zohar with Lilith, the killer of babies. Although Margaliot does not make this point, I believe it is reasonable to assume that this is the same angel, the one who is appointed over for Lilith, known as Sansanaya in the Zohar, and Sansanoi in the Alphabet of ben Sira.

> babies, but if it is a female, I have power over it for twelve days."
>
> They said to her: "If you don't come back with us, we will drown you in the sea!"
>
> She said to them: "I cannot go back, because it is written in the Torah:[29] "Her husband who sent her away cannot take her back again as his wife", if someone else has already laid with her,[30] and I have already slept with the Great Demon."
>
> They said to her: "We will not leave you be until you agree that one hundred of your children die every day." She agreed.[31]

Obviously, there is much to remark upon in this complicated myth. I will focus my remarks here on how the myth makes use of the disparate origins of Lilith to form a single narrative.

First, the "second Eve" is now presented as an alternative solution. When in the Bible God says "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make him a help-mate" (Gen. 2:18), this is now understood as the second, not the first, remedy to the problem of loneliness. The second Eve, with whom we

---

[29] Deut. 24:4.

[30] In the original: "since someone else laid with her". However, according to the halacha, only if the divorced woman married another man is it forbidden for her to go back to her first husband. If she was divorced, and someone else slept with her without marriage, she is permitted to her first husband. See Me'orai Or, (a alphabetically arranged collection of definitions of Kabbalistic terms compiled by R. Meir Paporos, one of the authors of the Lurianic corpus) in which Lilith is presented as an archetype of a divorced woman: "A divorced woman is known as Lilith, who was divorced from holiness and became the wife of another man, an other man" (the letter "Gimmel", entry 25).

[31] *The Alphabet of ben Sira*, the letter "zayin". Yassif, pp. 233-234.

are already familiar, was created (in order that there be no misunderstandings) after Adam was already number one in the world; this second Eve is in second place.

Secondly, Lilith's demonic status—sleeping with the Great Demon—is here subsumed from earlier sources into the dominant patriarchal narrative. Now, the independent Lilith sleeps with the Great Demon, presumably asserting her freedom and independence. Yet Lilith is here re-domesticated, because Lilith still attaches herself to Adam and to other men when they are asleep. She arouses them with erotic dreams, copulates with them and steals their semen in order to impregnate herself. From this human seed, Lilith begets demons, evil spirits, and other malevolent beings, all of whom take great pleasure in causing vexation to man. The existence of chaos demons, taken from earlier sources, is here given an origination myth.

Later Kabbalists, in turn, suggest that it is possible to stop demonic action—a power not found in the earlier sources—if a man sanctifies himself at the time of intercourse:

> Lilith has no power over the children of a man who sanctifies himself at the time of intercourse. The triad of angels known as Sanoi, Sansanoi, and Samnaglof watch over the child so that she cannot harm it.[32]

This unification of the "first eve" Lilith with the "chaos demon" replaces the chthonic, primordial she-demon with one whose source is connected to procreation and patriarchy. In constructing a misogynistic origination myth for (feminine) evil, the Ben Sira text is, itself, an absorption and neutralization of the demon herself. In the earlier sources, the swirling, chaotic demoness was, at least, an alternative power to the Godhead. Now, by the time the Lilith myth is constructed in its classic form, she is reduced to a woman gone wild, a person created by the all-

[32] *Kehillat Ya'akov*, entry on "Death of Children."

powerful God who voluntarily disobeys. God provides her with the freedom to obey, and she rejects it; this, rather than chaotic evil itself, is the source of the demonic.

Indeed, as Lilith says in the Ben Sira text, this is the very purpose for which God made her. She is careful to obey the text of the Torah as well—and even, in later Jewish mysticism, the proper spells of holy men. The terror of Lilith is retained from the earlier sources, but now her power is thoroughly domesticated to the Divine plan. God could have brought her back into Eden, but chose not to do so. God could have made her differently, but didn't. And Lilith assents to have her children murdered, without an explanation provided in the text. Even as Lilith comes to represent the untamed power of unbridled female sexuality, she is tamed by the myth itself, reduced to an obedient player on God's stage.

Can we recover the power of Lilith as it existed before the Ben Sira myth. Yes—but that is a subject for a future discussion.

Joyce Ellen Weinstein: Dinah

Three Poems by Jacob Staub

Golden Calf

From the valley below, the ebullient notes of celebrants,
the beat of tambourines liberated after four hundred years of abuse.

Sing unto the One,
Who smites the tyrant,
Who hears the cries of the oppressed,
Who parts the Sea and plants the seeds for generations yet unborn.

Ana, pool your gold. *Adonai*, give it to God.
Hoshi'a, smelt it down. *Na*, cast the throne.
Ashira, link your arms. *Ladonai*, circle the fire.
Ki, spin into oblivion.
Ga'oh, let go, let go, let go.
Ga'ah, God is One, we are one.
With broken bodies of former slaves, we undulate,
following the Source enthroned into the wilderness of promise.

And up over the ridge, the Levites wait, in formation,
swords on thighs, servants of the Lord, privileged
to follow orders, to do as they are told.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 408-415

A martial clan descended from the heroes of the Battle of Shechem,
they wear their forebears' medals proudly.
They have been instructed in the proper use of herbs and oils,
in the dire consequences of disobedience, of initiative, of openheartedness.
In formation, they await the signal from Moses, down from the mountain,
to charge, to slay three thousand defenseless, spent from a night of celebration.

Moses claims that You love only him,
that we were spared because he intervened,
that You do not like our offering.
Moses, who has never seen Your face—
not in the silent, steamy eyes of Tzipporah,
from whom he stays cloistered,
not in the bloody foreskins of his sons,
whom he ignores in the name of his holy work.
Moses, who doesn't touch.
Moses, who doesn't dance.
Moses, the bridegroom of blood.

Guide him please, Holy One of Compassion.
We don't need another Pharaoh to lead us into freedom.
Love him doubly, forgive him his wrath.
He was taken as an infant from his mother.
Only You know what befell the lad in the palace,
but below, all we see is his sweltering rage.
Otherwise, as You surely can foresee,
generations will mistake
fervent worship for idolatry.

Angel Larry

Larry Herbst whispered it in my ear in 1962.
We were filing out of the Friday morning Musar lesson,
spooked by tales of souls burning longer in *Gehinnom*
because their sons neglected to recite the Mourner's Kaddish.
At least *I* was spooked.

Actually, we exited the room like Romans storming Masada,
jostling, shoving, punching, cursing,
barreling down to the basement cafeteria,
where bare, fluorescent bulbs droned and flickered over scowling women—somebody's mothers—who stretched their number-tattooed wrists to plunk
burnt spaghetti and soggy canned string beans onto our plates.
Only mice were noteworthy; you tried not to notice the roaches.

I alone *filed* out of the classroom,
hanging back until the sweaty crush abated.
I dreamed perpetually about the tangle of limbs,
about random collisions knocking the breath out of me,
about bodies surreptitiously embracing
as we competed for dominance,
but Rabbi Segal, sitting at his desk,
forehead wrinkled as he turned the page of some *sefer*,
had just told us to file out orderly.
Just because he wasn't saying anything,
did they think he wasn't watching?
They were like the *goyim*, the sinners,
who behaved like the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* wasn't watching.

They would burn forever later.

Larry grabbed me from behind,
left arm around my neck,
right arm pinning my torso back against his,
much like the start of a thousand wrestling matches
on Shabbos afternoons, in my bedroom or his,
the move before he'd throw me down on the mattress
and jump on me, bony knees on my shoulders,
the weight of his soft butt sinking into my chest.
But this was different, tender.
I felt his left cheek brush my right ear as he purred:
"You don't believe any of that bullshit, do you?"

I squirmed, blushing. "Leggo," I barked in anger.
The heat in my groin, Rabbi Segal behind us:
What the hell did he think he was doing?
Maybe that's why I didn't catch what he'd said.

Winter Light Promises

Western Snowy Plover the sign reads
as I arrive at the ocean from 44th Avenue.
White feather balls, huddling, fluffed,
sitting motionless like targeted ducks.
Do not feed them, it says.
Do not let your dog chase them.
They are endangered,
presumably because they do not move as I approach,
remaining still as the other gulls squawk and swoop around them.

The mid-morning sun hazes through the mist
as I maneuver through sand-encrusted seaweed,
looking for a shell or stone, a memento of my thanksgiving,
bewildered at blessings unexpected.
Grace startles, by definition.
I unzip my windbreaker and wipe the sweat from my eyes
as I squint at occasional joggers on the promenade above,
but I can't see clearly through the mist.
I get sand in my shoes.

You too did not flinch at my approach last night—
a stranger, knocking on your door.
I wonder if this is how the visitors felt
at the entrance to Abraham's tent.
Did he know they were angels?
You seemed to, greeting me like the messenger I might be.
Did he offer them herbal tea as he seated them on pillows?
Did he lean forward, face radiant, drinking in their every word?

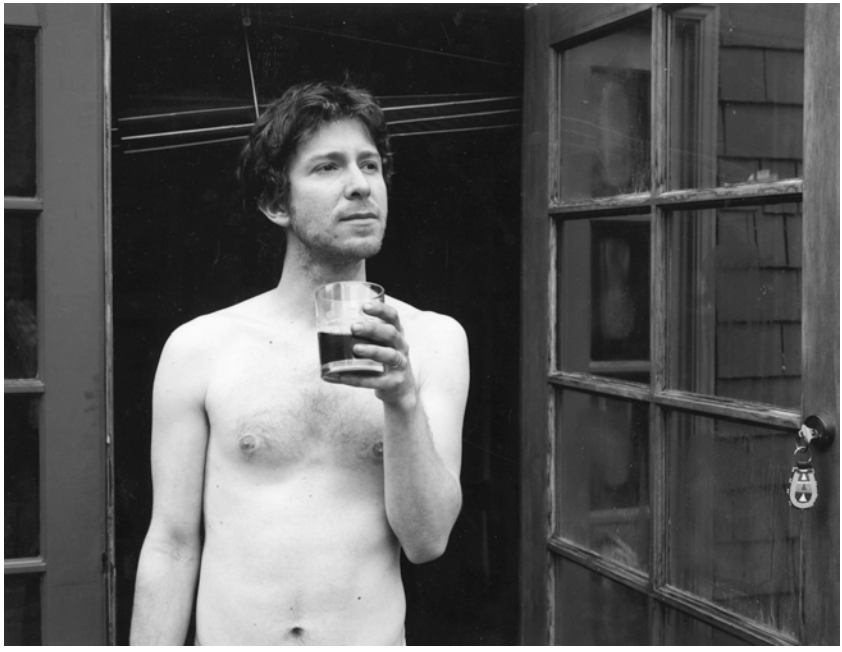
Were they soothed by his presence?
They announced the birth of his son,
but did they notice their own yearning to linger
in the cushion of his presence,
wondering why they had waited so long to respond to his invitation?
Did he gently coax them to show their wings
by undressing his own soul?
Did he light candles with them?
Was it Hanukah in Beersheva?
Did the rays of the desert sun soften the December morning chill?

You too did not flinch when I placed my right hand on your right hip,
brushing the ridges of your spine on the way.
Decades ago, I would play with the pigeons in Riverside Park.
They did not flee at my approach, step by step, slowly, mindfully,
keeping my torso still above my inching feet.
They backed up the Hudson, pigeon step by pigeon step,
for blocks at a time.
God knows, they did not scare easily.
Raccoon wannabes, they would have backed me off of their turf
if they could have.
Unlike western snowy plovers, they are not endangered.

And you,
you rested your left hand on my left shoulder
as the sun set yesterday,
as we stared at the candles.
These candles are sacred, I chanted in the *nusakh* of my Hungarian *zayde*,
the Jacob for whom I am named.
These candles are sacred, and we are not permitted to use their light for any purpose—except to behold them,

to be reminded of miracles past and in our own day.
The wonder of being touched
lightly, tenderly, unconditionally.
The promise that two might dare not to back away
and yet not be endangered.

Rabbi Jacob J. Staub is Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Spirituality at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, where he served as Academic Vice President for 17 years and where he was ordained. He served as editor of the Reconstructionist magazine. He is the founder and director of the first program in Jewish Spiritual Direction at a rabbinical seminary. He teaches medieval Jewish studies, Jewish meditation, and Jewish spirituality. He is the author of *The Creation of the World According to Gersonides* and the co-author of *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*.



Rebecca Jay: Ethan

YHVH Means What Is: Integrating Judaism and Buddhism, and Why I Bother

Jay Michaelson

We're alive. We're here. What do we do about it?

It seems to me, that for as long as we've got, we ought to live like it matters, to show up for life and see it as clearly as we can. As Thoreau said, "to live deliberately—not to find, when I came to die, that I had not lived." Hardly a unique point of view today—it's become something of a cliché, I suppose—but still a starting point. Of course, the details of living in this way are different for different people. This essay is about how I do it.

To me, living deliberately means experiencing life as it is, without bullshit, without delusion, and without authority mediating truth for me; life, in all its richness, beauty, ugliness, pain, and surprise; experiencing and sharing love; and something to do with helping ourselves and others suffer less and be present more. Still nothing new—although quite different from what large constituencies of people believe, especially people who are conventionally understood as religious. I admit its simplicity; I just want to show up for life, express my true nature, and know the truth of what is. Whatever it is.

As the title of this essay implies, somehow this simple imperative becomes translated, for me, into an amalgamation of -isms. Now, I'm not an orthodox Jew or an orthodox Buddhist, and I neither claim nor desire to be a spokesman for any religious tradition. As if that were even possible—there is such wide and angry disagreement on what "Judaism is," that there

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 416-430

really isn't a single ism at all, and the Buddhism I practice really has very little to do with what most Asian Buddhists do, at temples, with offerings, or chants. Nor is it even beneficial to try to stake out territory with recourse to some greater tradition, as in "this thing called Judaism is important, and I'm going to tell you what it means!" But having said all of that, I do nonetheless find my practice of life ("spiritual practice" increasingly becoming too narrow a term) drawing on the systems of Judaism and Buddhism, and I want to explain how it works.

I see Judaism as a way of being in relationship with the sacred, which in Jewish language is usually called "God." (More on that word below.) By "sacred," I mean that which takes me beyond my personal concerns, and the tendency to make everything in the world either a useful or useless implement toward achieving them. "Sacred" is that which gets me beyond the selfish, and Jewish ritual helps me both to gain access to it (through prayer, meditation, study, ritual action) and to respond to it (through ethics, and more ritual). The image I like to use is of Jacob's ladder, in which the angel-messengers are seen ascending and descending the ladder to heaven. Ascending: how do we get to God, how do we have a spiritual experience, how do we live life fully. Descending: how do we respond to this Reality, how do we order our ordinary lives in a way that acknowledges it. And again, how do we live life fully.

Some people think of the "sacred" as something very special. It lives in a special place, and you can only see it at certain times. But I find that the sense of the sacred arises naturally whenever we are fully "present," by which I simply mean: awake, not distracted, focused, not deluded. Indeed, the more I practice, the more I see that the present *is* the sacred. It's really all there is—*ehyeh asher ehyeh*, it is "isness" itself. After all, when did something happen at a time other than now?

Clearly, this use of "God" is very different from the conventional one. I'll get back to the conventional, mythic, personal God later—it's an image that still has great power for me—but it should be fairly obvious that

"isness" is not how many religious people, in the Bible or today, conceive of their deity. I have my reading of the Bible that accommodates my theology: the word "God" doesn't translate the ineffable name YHVH. It translates "Elohim," which is like the ordinary Biblical Hebrew word for gods, Elim. Our El, our God, is the God of Gods, Elohim. Its nature is YHVH, eternal presence. But I recognize that reading as my own, and there are times when I see it as so different from the conventional one that the word "God" seems more confusing than illuminating.

If "God" can be used to denote "What Is," then all we really have to do to experience God is to be "present" in the meaning I've given above. But it's not so easy, because at almost all waking moments, our minds are busy taking us somewhere else—into the future or the past, into evaluations about the thing rather than the thing itself, into a thousand different desires. In other words, we are not usually "present" in the sense of aware and attentive to it. You can have the television on and not even notice what show is on. You can be nervously twitching your leg without realizing it. You may be lost in thought and unaware even of your own emotions. So, what practice is about is becoming *really* present, aware of what's happening now: what feelings are in the body, what emotions are in the mind and heart, what sounds and images are in your environment. Not being distracted by thoughts, which almost always refer either to the past or to the future, or by desires and aversions, which are more about what isn't (i.e., what would be better than now, or what we fear might be worse than now) than what is.

So most of us need technologies to stop seeking, and show up for life instead of being distracted: things like ritual, narrative, life cycle events, visiting holy places, art, meditation, or any number of other methods. And that's where, for me, Buddhism and meditation come in.

Here's a metaphor that I often use to explain why meditation is useful if your goal is, like Thoreau, to wake up and live deliberately. Generally, our minds are like radios that are filled with static. I find that to hear the music

clearly, there are two choices. One is to turn up the volume, and the other to turn down the static. In life, turning up the volume means having intense experiences: peak spiritual moments, or other moments in life when things are suddenly crystal clear because you are really *there*. I hope you've had such experiences. Maybe when you were really "on" in some artistic creation, or, if you have a religious practice, when your practice took you to heights of ecstasy you'd never experienced before. These peak experiences are really nourishing. They show us that there is far, far more to this miracle of life than what we ordinarily experience. They give us a glimpse of possibility, of Light.

For many people, life is all about getting to those peak experiences, but they do have a tendency not to last, and to get a little old. In Jack Kornfield's words, after the ecstasy, there's the laundry. So, with gracious, ecstatic nods to Burning Man, Body Electric, the New York Marathon, psychopharmacology, and the many other modes of 'turned up' living I've experienced, I'm going to focus on tuning in better.

Instead of blasting the volume, can we fine-tune our perceptive apparatus so that the station gets tuned in really clearly and we can be present? Yes. And meditation is a process for doing so. Through various techniques of slowing down the mind and letting go of thoughts and desires and the rest, we enable ourselves to see clearly. That's really all meditation is. Yes, it can lead to profound states of mystical ecstasy, physiological phenomena like rapture, and deep relaxation. But, at least in the Buddhist world, that's not really the point. The point is to see clearly what is going on, at any given moment—to become present. To really know this moment, intimately and clearly.

That's a Western-Buddhist way of saying it. Now let me translate all of that into Jewish language:

V'ahavta et adonai elohecha, b'chol levavcha, b'chol nafshecha, u'v'chol meodecha. You shall love YHVH your god, with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might. How do you do that?

Right now, you are reading, probably sitting down. Great. Look around you at the objects nearby, look inside yourself at your emotional state, your mental state. Are there things you would change, if you could, in your outer or inner geography? Inevitably, there are: there is almost always something about the present that we don't like. Or, alternatively, maybe there's something going on that you really *do* like, and would hate to see go. As it will. These preferences, in my experience, get in the way of fulfilling the exhortation to love God with everything we've got. Everything. Not holding back because of preference. Not remaining attached to ideas which we were taught as kids, or which powerful authority figures intone from raised platforms.

In the language of prayer, I would ask, God, what is holding me back, right now, from full acceptance of this moment, in all of its forms? God, let me surrender it, let me come closer, now, undressing this moment of its outer garments, revealing it to be what I know it to be, what I have felt it to be on many occasions, what every mystic in every tradition in every part of the world has said it is: You. The One. Being itself.

When I get challenged, or called a heretic, or uninvited from teaching events because I'm too "out there" for someone, it's what I try to remember: that I'm not after the weird, I'm only after God. God, when I am truly myself—which is to say, Yourself—all I am trying to do is love you fully. I'm not mixing -isms or undermining ideologies. I'm not provoking, or trying to impress, or indulging, or shaming. Just loving. How can I do that? If I know that God fills every nonexistent subatomic particle of the empty, full universe, how can I turn that intellectual knowledge into real, deep, full-body-contact knowledge, the kind of knowledge that's practically a synonym for love?

The situation is really pretty simple. In Jewish language, which because of the way Jewish theology works raises more objections than it seems to resolve, we are nothing but God, right now, swimming in God. Or, if you prefer: we are not separate selves. We are, at our essence, Being itself, devoid

of any separateness, devoid of any real identity—"we" are nodes of the vast matrix of causes and conditions in the universe. Yet we are going about our lives under the illusion that we are separate selves, with desires and preferences that are often—always—at odds with whatever the universe is presenting. Maybe you don't like the lasagna, or maybe you've had a sense of failure since you were an overachieving Jewish adolescent. Maybe you really want the Mets to win the World Series, or maybe you really want your aunt not to die of cancer. Large or small, these desires, and our attachment to them, blocks the view of What Is.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav said: "The world is full of light and mysteries both wonderful and awesome, but our tiny little hand shades our eyes and prevents them from seeing."

So how do we see? How do we see for ourselves whether these mystical claims are true, and how do we see our true nature clearly? In other words, how do we come to love What Is with everything we've got?

Translation complete.

None of this, I hope, is about putting Jewish garb on Buddhist ideas in order to feel better about them. Rather, my meditation practice, which is basically Buddhist in nature, though it has some Jewish elements to it, has enlivened, transformed, and renewed my Jewish observance and relationship to God. One metaphor I like to use is, it's the answer key to my religion. *Now* I know what all those prayers and books are talking about! Another metaphor: meditation has filled with color what was previously a black-and-white photograph.

Remarkably, when I meditate, the sense of love and sacredness arises naturally; the mysterious quality of knowing itself... it is impossible to describe, and yet, it is accessible without any particular agenda. Try a deep meditation practice—a seven-day silent retreat should do the trick—and see what comes up for you. These sensations do come up for many, many, many other people, and is remarkably like what our religious visionaries and prophets talk about when they talk about God. Coincidence? Mass

delusion? Maybe, but it's a delusion experienced precisely by those working to purify thought, see clearly, and notice intently.

Of course, meditation is not the only way to the sacred. Art is another—creating it or fully participating in it. So is love. One advantage of meditation, though, is that it enables not just another peak experience, but the possibility to be with negative mind-states also (sadness, anger, despair) and gain tremendous insight into how the mind works, and how the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion operate in the world. This doesn't usually happen if you're only getting high.

And meditation is a bit more truthful. ("The seal of God is truth," Jews are taught in the Talmud.) What the Buddha observed, as a result of many years of sustained meditation and other practices, is that suffering is existentially real. We may well be the One, or Being, or God, or whatever—but the existential fact is that we are suffering because of our desires and aversions. The Buddha taught how to get free of it. Of course, we will always experience the arising of desire; enlightened people still get hungry. But that gnawing, thirsty, clinging desire—"If I don't get something to eat right now, I'm gonna go nuts!"—that's what the Buddha taught how to lose.

Of course, there are important differences between Buddhism and Judaism, and I'm not one to efface them. In my own life, there are a number of Jewish elements that aren't very Buddhist, and a number of Buddhist ones which aren't very Jewish. For example, on the Jewish side:

- I cherish a personal relationship to personal God—albeit in a monistic and nondual sense, which tends to erase most of the traditional theist/atheist cleavage lines. My religion has a strong devotional element. I love to read psalms, to speak to God in hitbodedut, to cultivate a *love* for the Divine—not just an awe or presence with it. I want to be with God when I'm ecstatic, davening, walking, on the toilet, bored, irritated, and, of course, having sex. Throughout, though,

I am not just being with what is. I am rapturously, deliriously in love of God. Some times more than others.

- Ritual in general, and Jewish ritual in particular, is my primary response to sacred. I observe much of halacha, particularly the sabbath and kashrut as traditionally understood. Putting on tallis and tefillin sometimes *feels* right, and loving, and beautiful. Asian Buddhists also have devotional ritual and mythic belief, of course—it's only the Western ones who don't. As Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi said, if Buddhism came to America in the form it exists in many Asian countries, no one would be interested. (The corollary is that we may need a similar practice of translation as we bring Judaism into the contemporary world.)
- Myth, stories, archetypes, language, culture, food, frame of reference. It is my cultural context, my tribe. For better or for worse, I have emotional roots in Israel and my 'home base' in the Jewish community.
- Ethics: the belief that the holy path, that of Moses, and the bodhisattva, is both ascending the mountain to God, and then returning down the mountain to communal and social responsibility. Wisdom leads to compassion. Holiness leads to an imperative to act. This is true in Buddhism as well, but I like the way it is systematized and expressed (though often not as it is explicated) in the Jewish tradition.
- I have an aversion to statues and "foreign" chants, which I respect because that aversion is part of my tradition and folkways.
- I feel that life is to be lived and enjoyed, and share Judaism's anti-monastic bent. I even put Buddhism's first noble truth (that there is suffering) in a certain perspective: not that it isn't true, but that it is only part of the story, and that some kinds of pleasures and suffering are going to be part of a well-lived life. The question is how to 'lean back' a little, away from grasping at them so much, into a more balanced place of equanimity.

- I eat meat.

And here are some Buddhist bits I have, that aren't necessarily very Jewish:

- The centrality of meditation and of experiential knowledge, not of text or authority
- The notion of Judaism and Buddhism as forms, not essences. They are paths to the One—fingers pointing at the moon, but not the moon itself. I honor these forms, but do not believe that they are anything more than that.
- A disbelief in the idea of one chosen people. I believe Jews are "chosen" only in the sense of, well, we're the people who developed the Torah and Western monotheism. But not in the sense of being preferred to other people, or better. When I see the word 'Israel' in Jewish prayer, I read it as "godwrestlers" of any persuasion, not people of a certain ethnic lineage.
- Disbelief in the idea of sin and punishment in the classical sense (if you sin, your crops will wither, or you'll be punished later). Actions have consequences, yes, but the wicked often get away with it, and the good often suffer.
- Disbelief in the literal Torah-from-Sinai law. As before, I can redefine "God wrote the Torah" in a nondual way, but I recognize that's not what Orthodox Jews mean when they say it.
- I believe in compassion—not obligation, faith in an origination myth, or fear of punishment—as the best motivator ethical behavior. I also believe that better action is not through external ethics (more the Jewish path: what is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor) but through inner transformation (more the Buddhist path: cultivate natural compassion through meditation and the practice of virtue). Practically, that won't work for everyone, so I still prefer the Jewish system for public ethics. But in private, it drives me bananas.

- While I have enormous humility in the face of the sages of Judaism, and respect and awe for their wisdom, I have no real fealty to rabbinic authority. The rabbis and prophets were wise men, operating within a cultural context. I think we do them a disservice by emphasizing the cultural wrapping rather than the religious impulse inside. For example, poetically, calling God the *gibor milchama* (war hero) had resonance once, but now it goes the wrong way. Legally, exempting women from commandments was once compassionate, but is now the opposite.
- For all my thinking about God, I'm really mostly interested in "Just this." Just this moment. Transcendence, sure, but real transcendence is emptiness.

Finally, God. As I've said, it's a misleading term, and I prefer God's primary 'name': YHVH, an untranslatable and unpronounceable word that seems to gesture to Was-Is-WillBe. What really *is*. The One, as accessed by us—in the Present. Moses asks how he's supposed to describe God, and gets the reply "I Am That I Am," Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh. Take out the pronoun, and you get "It Is What It Is."

This is really the core truth of Buddhism as well. It is what it is. I desire it to be something else, with more fame, friends and money. But without that desire, what is there? Exactly. This is how God is always present, even with prophets in jail and saints in death camps. Because the present is always present. So, as heterodox as it may sound, I really see no difference between the nondual YHVH and the Buddhist Being.

There is a difference is how it is described. In the Buddhist path, Being is perceived 'bottom up,' i.e., starting from our own experience. By closely watching our thoughts, and the awareness that accompanies them, we come to see—directly, not as a matter of doctrine—that there is nothing really here to call "me." Or anything else for that matter. If you like, take the example of a chair that you are sitting in. What is there, really?

Perceptually, there is not "chair." Rather, there is the color of the chair, the different pieces of it, the feel of it, and so on. Where is the "chair" in your perception? It's not really there at all—rather, it's a concept you use to refer to this nest of perceptions. So is "chair" beyond your perception? No, "chair" isn't really there either. The physical phenomenon of "chair" has its properties not because of anything to do with this concept "chair" but because of a thousand other things. For example, its materials (wood, metal, whatever)—which in turn have their properties due to molecular structure, which have their properties due to the four basic forces of the universe and the empty, nonexistent subatomic non-particles within every atom of the chair. So if you look at it, the concept of "chair" is never actually doing anything. It's there only as a description of how things look from a certain perspective. And this is how it is for everything down the line. No concept is ever really there, when you look at it closely. There's only emptiness out there, organized by "laws of nature" which themselves don't really exist but merely describe how Being Is. So, going "bottom up," from an experience of the chair to an idea about reality, Buddhists get to the great Emptiness.

The Jewish path, in contrast, expresses this idea in a "top-down" way. The great Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero wrote: "Realize that the Infinite exists in each thing. Do not say 'This is a stone and not God.' Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity." For Kabbalists, working within a world in which God is the foundation of everything, the top-down approach makes more sense. It's certainly simpler. God is Infinite. Therefore, God fills every atom of Being, including those in your brain right now, having these thoughts. So actually, God is having your thoughts. God is reading these words. And God, however seemingly distorted, is writing them too. *Hineni*—here I am!

Personally, I find the bottom-up, Buddhist path to this realization to be easier to communicate than the Jewish one, because of that term "God." That word, for all my redefinition of it, still seems to require faith, which most people today don't have, myself included. Yes, I try to cultivate deep

faith in the wisdom of others, so that even when I'm stuck at places along my own path, I can trust that the path I'm on is wise. But blind faith? Faith that can never be verified? In facts about the world? Why not blind faith in Odin? UFOs? Fascism? The faculty of blind faith is value-neutral. Often, authority figures use the fact of their authority as a way either to reassure us (trust me) or bludgeon us into having faith in them. But I question authority, always. In fact, precisely because it is authority, I question it more.

But in the realm of the heart, I find the top-down "God" more available than the bottom-up "Being." To paraphrase Martin Buber, if we are talking about God in the sense of loving and knowing God, then I understand. If we are talking about something abstract, then I don't.

Is my nondualistic definition of God a 'Jewish' view? Sure. It's Kabbalistic, very neo-Hasidic, a little Reconstructionist. Are there other Jewish views? Sure. In some ancient Biblical texts, God is a warrior, fighting on our side against our enemies. In others, He's a source for consolation and comfort. Modern thinkers have related to God as source of the categorical imperative, the eternal Other, and, of course, in many modes that don't really work for me. Which texts and approaches we choose will depend, I think, on what we're looking for. Since Judaism is generally a "religion of deed, not creed," there are lots of available Jewish theologies, and mine are certainly as "hechshered" as more anthropomorphic ones.

So, this is my God: YHVH, the Is-ness of Is, the bare facts of Being. The contours of a moment, the silence that contains sound, the stillness that contains movement, the awareness that contains all that is. And I am in love, even though I frequently forget that I am, and get trapped in wanting other lovers instead. Money, success, acceptance—all prostitutes. But they have their attraction. I was raised an American Jew: I still have desires to create something, to 'make something of myself,' and I honor those desires in my writing, my teaching—even in building a software company, which I founded many years ago and which is now a source of

some pride and success. I am the chief editor of a magazine, *Zeek*, which seeks to explore an integral Judaism in interviews, criticism, poetry, and prose. I teach Kabbalah, embodied Judaism, queer theology, Jewish environmentalism, and a lot of other things too. I make music, I write for newspapers, I write poetry and fiction and nonfiction. I am active in political life and the struggle for social and environmental justice. And I am continuing my explorations of the permeable boundaries of human ecstasy.

I, I, I, I. This is my life in the world of *yesh*, of form—achieving, building, making, doing. The challenge I constantly face is making room too for the *ayin*, for emptiness. The Hasidic Jewish path, at least, is "both-and"—it both sees the world as God, and engages with the world as it appears. In the Buddhist mode, especially in the Theravadan world in which I practice, there's more emphasis on the contemplative life, and more recognition of the need to choose—though Western Buddhists claim to be both-and also. But the Jewish path is neither wholly mystical, nor wholly worldly. Neither renouncing nor fully indulging the self. Kabbalah is largely about balance: between expansion and restraint, between discipline and inspiration. The metaphor of *ratzo v'shov*, running and returning, is central.

It's easier in theory than in practice. My real tensions aren't between Buddhism and Judaism so much as between spirituality and self-actualization. I really want success, I really want approval. The consolation, if there is one, is that to "be here now" is always, always available. Because, conveniently, it's always now and always here. And with practice, it's possible to get used to the sensation of settling back into awareness, into the sky instead of the storm passing through it. On the most important journey, each step is the destination. All the causes and conditions in the universe have conspired to bring this very moment into existence, and there is nothing at all that you need to do to change it. In this moment, in this place, through these eyes and in this Mind, God is here. Are you?

Holy Thighs

Ruth Knafo Setton

I know why *you* went to Israel,
land of milk and honey: my sweet lord,
Jesus or Yahweh or Allah. You wanted
to walk His steps, taste His blood,
follow His laws. But listen, my
children, and I'll tell you why I went:

thighs. Only thighs, and nothing more.

Come closer, I'll tell you: He was on TV,
a soldier in olive-green, eyes like cracked
olives. He crouched to light
a cigarette. Camera followed. Rumpled
hair, open shirt. He stood, and camera—
caught by surprise—stayed, lingered:

there, in the inverted V of his groin. Pants

tight, taut against thighs: archway—
open promise to desert, this small kingdom
of passion and pain. Camera and I melted

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 429-433

at the legs on this man: harsh as the land,
rocks of Gibraltar, mountains
to smash my head against.

American thighs were not the same. My boyfriend

had a brilliant mind, crooked smile,
but chunky thighs, padded ass: he semi-
jiggled as he walked. No athlete he:
I'm a talking head, he said proudly
While I, glum, watched him from bed.
He swam two laps and got winded, never

walked when he could drive. I made him

quote Kant, James and Kierkegaard,
but Lord be my witness, I saw only
my soldier, slammed into him—
harder, harder—

I moved to Israel, had no choice.
'68 was still gold and light, a dazzling land:

Hebrew down to our toes, soldier girls

strutting, men's cigarette packs tucked
in short sleeves. I dragged my suitcase out
and breathed in: holy air—dust, flowers
and sweat. Then I saw them, rubbed
my eyes and blinked to be sure: oh my God,
an army of men: tall, dark, blond,

muscle and bone men, Marlboro ad men,

side-curled men, pale scholar men,
soldiers in khaki and unlaced boots,
grizzled and bearded, virgins and lovers,
sun-dappled and corn-thatched, men
as delicious as my mother's lasagne,
a black-eyed man who made me ache,

right there on holy ground,

milk and honey drenching me.
I fell to my knees, pressed
my Jewish thighs to the ground,
and cried: Hallelujah! Thank you Lord!
I've come home! And I'll be
ever so good! Amen.

How I Became the Cannabis Chasid

Yoseph Leib

> Six things were done by King Hezekiah,
> three of which met with approval
> and three with disapproval:
>
> He caused the bones of his father to be transported on a litter of ropes,
> and this was approved of;
>
> He caused the bronze serpent to be broken to pieces,
> and this was approved of;
>
> He hid away
> The Book of Healings,
> and it was also approved.
>
> (Mishna Pesachim, Chapter 5)

So... the mysterious mystery mystifying mister me, back when I was young, was this: Torah, as was revealed to our forefathers, is said to include everything any Jew would ever need to know. In orthodox circles there are apocryphal stories of rabbis curing brain cancer and resurrecting friends they'd accidentally killed... just because they learned Talmud really well,

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 432-441

right? That was one of the promises in yeshiva when we were young: keep learning this stuff, and you'll learn the secrets of everything.

If it's forbidden, you don't need it. If it's important, guidance for how to do it better is in there somewhere, and if the Rosh Yeshiva didn't tell you, it's because you're not on the right level. Or, maybe we forgot one or two things, what with our greatest scholars and teachers being killed in the holocaust.

Even as I would become skeptical, in high school, of the whole Yeshiva system and it's ability to give over whatever it was Torah was really about, I still accepted that the definition of Torah was all that I was promised it was, and that any flaw in it was only a flaw in the transmission. Anything I needed to know, had to be in there somewhere, and if it wasn't part of the culture anymore, that was just because, in the rush to survive, we were bound to put some stuff down so we could run faster.

Around the third year of high school, disappointed with every Yeshiva I had attended, sick of looking in insular situations for the expansive, worldly knowledge that could maybe make me a better and more useful/interesting global citizen, I switched to a secular, alternative high school, where I was immersed in a variety of gentile cultures, for the first time really. I learned, a lot about truth, communication, and love, and was forced to confront many of my old Yeshivish assumptions.

Apparently, I learned, some people really didn't believe in God, and they weren't just pretending. And even more surprisingly, a lot of people did and do. I was a pretty frum agnostic at that point, open to evidence about God's non-existence, but having a hard time believing it on faith. Never quite stopped keeping shabbos, though always happy to end it as soon as the stars came out. I was interested to see what better morality people would have developed free of religion, and although stealing from record stores and big corporate supermarkets seem justified to me (not to mention for the descendants of slaves who built this country), I could never bring myself to toss off the yoke of Jewish heaven. It seemed dishonest.

At some point, I started hearing more about this thing called marijuana. Hip-hop music was all about it, and sure, I'd heard of it before, but I'd never heard any distinction made between it, and say, crack, or LSD, or heroin. It's all drugs right? I'd noticed that my favorite musicians were overdosing from heroin and not cannabis, but I'd never really realized that pot was just a plant.

As I got more into the rock radio music—311, Sublime, old Nirvana, eventually following them into classic Dylan, and into reading old beatnik stuff—the idea of marijuana fit into my personal rebellious cosmology. Ironically, I got my anti-government stance from Yeshiva. Every Yeshiva-trained kid in the world knows that the government of the great Empire Rome doesn't value good or truth, is happy to manipulate and/or kill you if you threaten their power and security, and is run by people who are unwise, arrogant, and stupid. The dissonance of a "Modern Orthodox" institution on the one hand teaching passages of the Talmud and Mishna that are strongly suspect, to say the least, of secular authority, and then on the other trying to reinforce the legends of the good America and the inherent rightness of Whatever is the law, stank very deeply as internally inconsistent.

This dissonance plagued my experience of Yeshiva, and gave me an almost gnostic sense of the conflict between the Good Law that helps me be more helpful, sensitive and righteous vs. the Bad Law that only hides truth and silences testimonies and cries for help. This was a source of religious tension for me for a long time, and to this day, I listen to religious texts and people with a cautious, hopeful, sensitive cynicism, waiting for something horrible to bee expressed as if it was truth, eager to hear Not Lies somehow.

I was fat, generally cynical, depressed and unhappy. One sunny day, I remember, when I was feeling so physically unpleasant, I prayed to God for something that would just let me appreciate the things I appreciate a little more.

One day, some of my thuggish friends were going uptown to go buy a nickel bag. I tossed 'em 5 dollars and asked them to bring me something back. They did, and happily taught me how to roll a blunt and smoke it with them.

And it was nice.

And then I had some left over, so I smoked it later, by myself, in the cheapest bong I could buy on west 4th street. I was taught how to remove seeds and stems, but it took a while before I learned when to break up and when not to break up.

Eventually, I started smoking more ritually, and more exclusively, more with closer friends or alone. And I started having really transcendent experiences.

Once, I sat and saw infinity go around in a circle, infinite circles full of circles, spinning. I had been familiar with the concept, but I'd never experienced the concept before.

Once, I thought—what if thoughts travel on a stream, backwards and forwards through time. I looked at my friend and told him that idea, and he said, wow, I just thought the same thing. And I said, yeah, I know. Years later in Jerusalem, I'd ask Moish Geller which of us thought of it first, and he said, "Neither. You were both just on the same frequency."

Once, I just felt so happy, and suddenly realized that I hadn't felt very happy or free since I was four years old. For the next day, and from then on, I was suddenly nicer to everyone.

Once, I was just so filled with love for everyone, because it was clear: God is One, and everyone is just part of me that's hurting, so how can I be angry at them, etc.

And once, I just stared at the bright orange-yellow color of my brain.

It was so good, and only seemed to make me smarter (in some ways anyway) and more sensitive. I did notice that if I smoked too much, especially during the day, I would get these blinding headache—what I'd later learn was called "burnout." I learned also how to offset it, and avoid

melatonin depletion, by not smoking during the day, or every day, something I was always careful not to do.

And amidst all this, I wondered: How could it be the Jews didn't know about this? How could it be we don't have a tradition of marijuana from the Rabbis, from the Torah? Surely, it must be in there somewhere. Eventually, I went to Israel, and explored. And, to make a long story short, I found one idea that seemed like the answer, for why we didn't have a Jewish herbal tradition that was as much a part of our lives as any of the rest of it

Here it is:

King Hezekiah
hid away the book of Healings.

Why? What was this book of Healings?

Attributed to King Solomon, at the peak of Israelite wisdom culture, it was apparently a book of herbal and other potions and possibly incantations and or rituals designed to cure all known diseases.

Why did King Hezekiah hide it?

He was afraid of it being used for idolatry.

The copper serpent that Moses once used to heal the Israelites in the desert is destroyed for the same reason, as are his fathers old bones hoisted: fear of idolatry

What could that possibly mean?
R' Nachman talks about
The power of every kind of Grass:
each one has its own unique song,
its own unique power
to heal,
And its own star,
its own angel, telling it to grow.

If you do something
and it works, consistently,
you might think it's because of that thing that you did
and take for granted that it's gonna work that way:
that's idolatry.

Let's say you have a job
and because you do the job, you get paid
and because you get paid, you can buy food
you might start to think that if not for the job, you'd have no right to eat:
that's idolatry.

Lets say you have a friend
whom you love because of who you think they are
and your relationship with your friend depends
on their being who they were:
that's idolatry,

carving the poor guy
into wood and stone,
Instead of letting them be alive
and growing all the time.

God hates when we do that to Him.
How do we know?
Because we hate when it's done to us

Medicine:
Is that really what we want our tradition to be about?
The tradition we had about how to cure a runny nose?
Is that all Torah is supposed to be?
Consistent things you can do to provide a desired effect?
Chas v' Shalom.

That was the great hope of science and civilization, of contract and enforcement:

that we could figure out how to get what we wanted from the world.
Try some of this and your problem will be solved.

Someone else in the world
will always be focused
on ways to make money
and ways to be healthy
The path of Israel is for focusing
on what no one else will bother focusing on:
the secret meaning behind everyday things.

Learn wisdom from all the nations
Learn medicine from all the scholars
The job of Israel is not to make new idols,
but to tell you what the old ones *really* mean
and point to the God that's hiding right there behind them

Yes, it's idealized, and other elements played a part too. For example, it's hard to have an herbal tradition of any kind when you're no longer connected to an ancestral land. Maybe it was easier to let go of whatever healing-herb knowledge we once had than to stop lighting candles on Friday night. And maybe it's related to the prohibition of acts once associated with holiness—in the Mishnah they talk about censers of herbs being burned at the end of meals of scholars, leading R' Yishmael to proclaim "Wine and burned spices made me wise." Maybe the same medicine for too long is boring and to be fled from by man and god alike. The things that neither of us get tired of, are things worth sacramentalizing.

Torah is Wisdom
filtered through good eyes

until it becomes guidance.

Pray for guidance
Pray for potency
Pray for healing
Pray for innovation
Pray for life
Amen

Yoseph Leib is the creator of the "Cannabis Chassidis" blog, online at www.cannabischassidis.blogspot.com.

Bara Sapir: Jepthah's Daughter

Hiding Your Sins

Hal Sirowitz

You'd think that since God
watches us from up high in Heaven,
it'd be easy to hide our sins,
Father said. As long as you keep
them small, He'll never see them.
But just like no one really knows
what God looks like, no one is certain
about what He can actually see.
If Superman can see through walls,
then shouldn't God also be able
to do that? I shouldn't even be
comparing the two. One is
a comic book creation. The other
is the Lord of the Universe. But
I couldn't think of another way
of giving you the proper perspective.

Hal Sirowitz is the author of four books of poems, *Mother Said*, *My Therapist Said*, *Before During & After*, and *Father Said*. He is the recipient of a Frederick Delius Award and The Susan Rose Recording Grant for Contemporary Jewish Music.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 441

Somewhere on the Moon

Sven Davisson

Though Jamie and Chad arrived with easily an hour to spare, the small auditorium was already crowded. By the time that Allen Ginsberg entered through a small side door, people overflowed into the hall. A small shuffle and a slow dissipation of the rumbling cacophony announced his entrance. His bright eyes slowly surveyed the room and a small smile raised the corners of his mouth. He shuffled the ten feet to the low stage and its single, metal folding chair. He cleared his throat and introduced himself in his soft cigarette-spun voice.

With the first poem, Ginsberg captured Chad. Though rougher with age, he could detect the voice he had heard so often rising off scratchy vinyl. Its sound had a particular quality that was so familiar. Ginsberg's voice still possessed an urgency. His words tumbled over themselves as if the speaker was overcome by the avalanche of word racing to ground. Many of the poems were familiar: "In Society," "My Guru," "Complaint of the Skeleton of Time," and "Hum Bom!" The first set ended with an unexpected reading of "Howl."

During the intermission, a dozen people queued to get books signed. At Jamie's prompting, Chad reluctantly stood at the end of the line—his copy of *Collected Poems* in hand. As he shifted the book nervously from hand to hand, he noticed dark stains smudging the pads of his fingertips.

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 442-452

His sweat had caused the cover's cloth to bleed a dark navy blue into his skin.

It was his turn and Chad took the seat offered. Ginsberg lifted the book, as if examining, for the first time, something that should be familiar.

"Where did you get this?" Ginsberg asked, surprised at the dissonance between Chad's age and the book's price.

"My father. I was working on a term paper about you last fall." Chad suddenly felt stupid. Before the words were all out, he realized how childish they must sound.

Ginsberg turned the book to the title page. "Really? And what was your theme?" He drew a small circle on the page opposite.

Chad groped for something to respond. It had been a high school paper and, as such, lacked any real depth. "The vision of Blake's rose within your early work."

A series of half-oblongs took shape around the first circle slowly forming the petals of a flower. *Rose of spirit, rose of light, Flower whereof all will tell*, he quoted as he continued to draw his childish flower. Within the center of the petals, he placed the two letters of the primal syllable "AH"—the first mantra, the universal sound of pleasure, the sexual moan. His pen then began to mark out the stem—a thin line curving below the lower petals. Before reaching the bottom edge of the page, the line swung up again crossing itself to approach the center forming a top-heavy figure eight. Ginsberg finished the line forming a serpent with two eyes and protruding forked tongue. The snake swung outwards to the left of the image tilting its head up and back as if appraising the "AH." Within the lower of the eight, Ginsberg added a small Star of David.

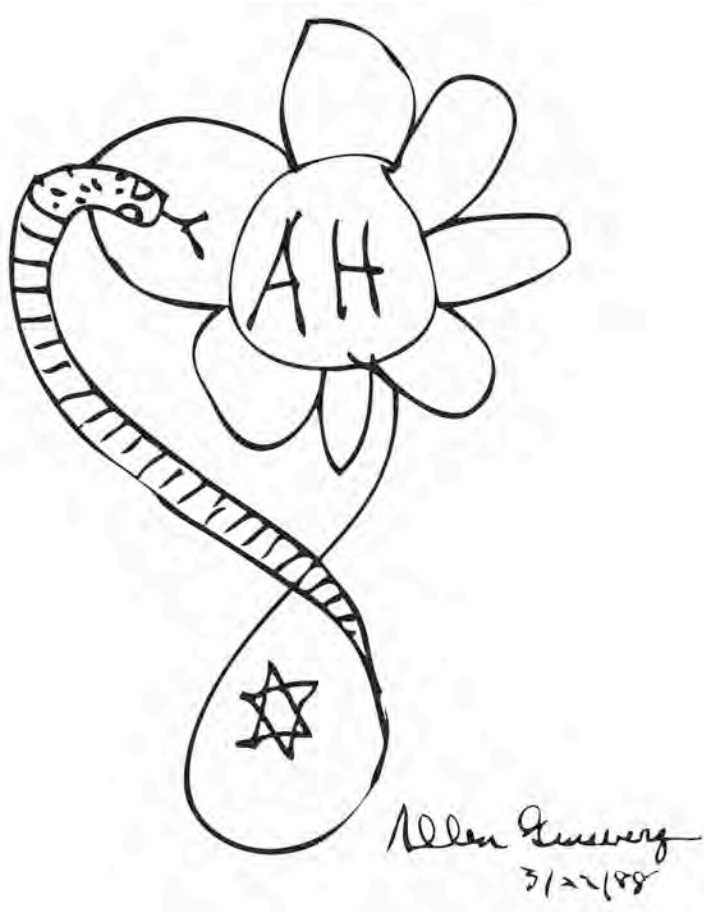
On the opposite page he signed his name below its printed representation. Below this, he placed the actual date between "1947-1980" and the Buddha's footprint, wrote "Orono" beneath the publisher's cities and added a second "AH" beneath the page's epigram. Things are symbols

of themselves. He looked over his work and then handed the book back to Chad.

Chad rose from his chair. "Thank you."

"Thank you," Ginsberg said smiling.

Before Chad could say anything else a person behind him stepped in to engage Ginsberg in conversation. He had been waiting anxiously just to the side for the slightest signal that he could break in and embark upon an obviously rehearsed question. "How would you describe the mystical experience?"



"Trungpa, out at Naropa Institute, described it as stepping on the step that isn't there," Ginsberg replied, lighting a cigarette. Chad watched the smoke curl up past the hall's large NO SMOKING sign. "You know the feeling: the total loss of all reference points; being set suddenly and completely adrift."

The second segment of the reading proceeded much like the first. As before, the poems' beat held Chad. Jamie and he exchanged only the periodic smile of acknowledgment but no words. He was particularly amused by an unfamiliar poem "Ode to My Sphincter."

After the reading ended, Chad and Jamie lingered talking outside the auditorium. As she had just started to show her impatience, Ginsberg and his student handler emerged from the lecture hall. When he saw Chad, the old man's face lit in recognition and he began to make his slightly waddling way toward them. Jamie knowing well her part drifted into the background.

"It looks like my ride hasn't shown up. Do you have any other questions for me?" the poet asked.

"Well," terrified, Chad scanned his mind. "My father and I always wondered which came first Kerouac's *On the Road* or Holmes' *Go!*?"

"*Go!*. It was really the first Beat work. We were all hanging out together and Robert and Jack were being exposed to the same things. Both books center on the same people. Holmes just wrote it as a traditional novel, while Kerouac was working at creating something new and experimental. The anecdotes are all Kerouac's, however. Have you read much Kerouac?"

"Just *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*."

"Good. You should read *Mexico City Blues*. Of all of us, Kerouac was really the genius. What he did transformed writing. He was the greatest writer of the twentieth century and one of the greatest of all time.

"Early on we were both influenced by Blythe's *Encyclopedia of Haiku*. We wanted to expand beyond the language of the American novel as

codified in Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, etc. Like Joyce and Stein, we wanted to expand and rework the ways of crafting language and sound. Kerouac attempted, in his work, to transform the Jazz-African music beat into words, since he recognized it had the rhythm of speech. What he didn't know was that the music had begun in word, originally, and he was just taking it back to its source."

From the far end of the hallway, a forced cough and an audible clearing of the throat announced the arrival of Ginsberg's ride.

Ginsberg glanced over his shoulder down the hall and turned back to Chad. "There's my ride." He paused. "You're coming to my lecture tomorrow on Romanticism, I hope."

Chad was shocked and for a split second he couldn't respond—caught in the realization that Ginsberg may not have been simply killing time. "I'd been thinking about it."

"Well, maybe I will see you there. Good night." Ginsberg moved forward and, despite his diminutive stature, engulfed Chad in an expansive hug. He felt a whiskery kiss on his cheek and then the brush of hot breath against his ear. "Drive safely."

Ginsberg pivoted and shuffled down the hallway waving to the young bearded student who shifted his feet waiting at the hall's end.

Jamie slept the entire ride home closing her eyes before they even made it out of the parking lot. Chad, for his part, was exhilarated. He felt high—the car's tires flying on a black ribbon of excitement. They reached home quickly; it seemed nothing like the normal hour plus. He woke Jamie and dropped her at her house. It was a little after midnight when he pulled into his own driveway.

Once he finally made it home, Chad could not fall asleep. His mind was still frenetic with his second night spent listening to the old poet. He gave up, turned on his reading lamp and pulled out his journal. He began to compose a letter:

Namesté Allen:

From a young unknown poet to a known old poet. After your reading at U Maine Orono, we talked in the foyer of Little 130 of Kerouac (Mexico City Blues) and his relationship to Holmes and Go! how he transformed the African beat (which was once word) to words (again) like Hulsenbeck at #8 Spiegelgasse, Cabaret Voltaire and Blythe's four seasons of Haiku. Tonight after your lecture on romanticism—reading Shelley, Keats, Blake—walking up the stairs to the Faculty Club we talked of Crowley and his resemblance to Shelley's breath machine. Just before I left, as you were getting your coat, you touched my arm and asked me how I was doing. It was all important but I bypassed what I meant to say.

Thank you THANK YOU It was not until meeting you that I realized how much the word image Allen Ginsberg (As Ever, Howl, et. al.) is tied into who I am. At the nadir of my self-worth, when the solution seemed to be Robert Penn Warren's Great Sleep, but eternally (or the myth we perceive to be such), it was your work that saved me. It was not acceptance; I've always known that I go "a little bit sweet for a poor freckled sun faced lad." Your writing was my first introduction to how homo-eroticism permeates art. It gave me a sense of pride and allowed me to carry my head high through adolescence, knowing that I was right.

You (actually the Allen Ginsberg young & beardless from a 1944 snapshot Riverside Dr., NY w/ Hal Chase, Kerouac and Burroughs) were my first lover and in some ways my father.

P.S. You know, I would have... maybe next time.

The next day he carefully typed the letter into his Macintosh and printed it for mailing. He addressed it c/o the University and knew that it was very unlikely that it would reach its intended recipient.

That afternoon as he walked home from school, he dropped the letter into a mailbox. As he turned to walk back toward his house, a single word broke the isolating silence of the side street.

"FAGGOT"

Chad's pulse quickened. At the word, his body tensed instantly. He turned his head quickly to look over his shoulder. At first he did not see anyone, then a shadow shifted beneath one of the large trees about fifteen feet down the road. A tall young man walked slowly into the open. Chad recognized him as a classmate, but did not know his name. He knew the kid's group and knew well their opinion of him. The boy walked toward him—his gate an expression of teenage self-confidence.

Chad knew he had little chance of outrunning him, so he stood where he was calculating potential escape routes. He gauged the distance between himself and the nearest house and compared it to that between himself and the boy. Too far. He decided not to run.

"Hey, faggot. I'm talking to you." Another shout broke the charged silence.

Chad turned fighting to appear calm. "Can I help you?"

The youth held up his wrist and than tilted it limply. "Can I help you," he mimicked in an exaggerated lisp. He stopped a few feet in front of Chad shifting his feet in the gravel as he stood. His eyes remained leveled at Chad unblinking, malicious. "Maybe you *could* help with something." He made an unmistakable motion toward his crotch.

Chad could not arrest the first sarcastic response that came to mind: "I don't do charity work."

The boy's smile tightened, his eyes narrowed. Chad could see the anger beginning to burn into his face. "Fuck you. You little cocksucker." He lunged at Chad with a hard shove to the chest. Chad stumbled backward and struggled to maintain his balance. The boy pushed him again punching him sharply with both fists. This time Chad fell to the ground. A sharp rock jabbed into his right hip.

The boy stood over him—hands set confidently atop each hip. He seemed to study Chad for a split second and then his hands slowly came forward to the front of his belt. He methodically undid the buckle unlooping the thick leather. "Let's see what you can do you, pussy."

Chad looked up at his assailant. "What does this make you?"

"A fag's mouth is the same as a bitch's when it's eating my cock," the young man stated flatly.

Suddenly their attentions were caught by the grinding sound of a car turning onto the gravel lane. The boy looked back at Chad and cleared his throat. The wad of warm spit struck Chad directly in the face. The boy turned and disappeared out of sight into the wooded shadows.

The car slowed as it approached. He heard the sound of a power window lowering as the vehicle drew along side of him. A middle-aged man leaned over from the driver's seat. "Are you okay?" he inquired.

"I'm fine," Chad replied—the cooling spit slowly dripping down the side of his face.

"Are you sure?" the man persisted.

"Yes, I'm sure."

The window rose and the car moved on down the road.

EPILOGUE

Nashville? Who did he know in Nashville, Chad wondered. He flipped the postcard over, probably one of his summer friends stopping in the midst of a cross-country road trip. He noticed a return address rubber-stamped into the upper left corner, obscuring the card's caption: ALLEN GINSBERG, NEW YORK, NY.

Beneath, familiar handwriting:

Thank you for your letter. I wished you had talked to me longer. I spent quite a few bored hours alone in my hotel room. Remind me when we meet again whether it be at Orono, Naropa or somewhere on the moon and we will pick up where we left off. Love, Allen.

Excerpt from *The Starry Dynamo: The Machinery of Night Remixed*, Rebel Satori Press, 2007.

Bara Sapir: Po v' Sham

Bending Spirit

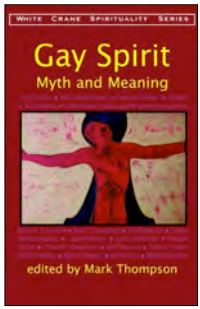
Over the past couple of years, there has been an increase in publications speaking to the spiritual lives of lesbians and gay men. Even a non-exhaustive survey of these titles shows the diversity of the LGBT communities and the breadth of their spiritual exploration.

Leading the pack is a superb collection edited by G.Winston James and Lisa Moore: **Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity** (Reb Bone Press, 2006, 391pp, $16.95). Given its power within African American culture, it is not surprising that the Black church is a strong undercurrent running throughout this collection. Against this backdrop—and often times reacting to or against it—Moore and James have drawn together a rich and varied collection of personal stories of coming to spirituality. In addition to Christianity, authors write of Buddhism, Shamanism, Vodun, heathenism, Wicca and returning to traditional African spirituality. This is an affirming and positive collection—an ideal read for anyone moving toward self-acceptance or looking to deepen their spiritual understanding.

For almost twenty-years now, *White Crane Journal* has been a forum for the discussion gay men's spirituality. Now White Crane Foundation has teamed with Lethe press to bring forth a series of classic and new books

Ashé! Journal of Experimental Spirituality (2007) 5(4) 453-465

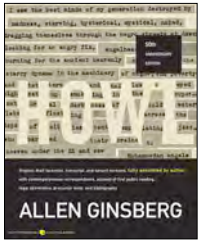
centering on gay spirituality and wisdom. The series debuted in 2005 with the reprint of two classics: **Two Flutes Playing: A Spiritual Journeybook for Gay Men**, Andrew Ramer (White Crane Spirituality Series/Lethe Press, 2005, 157pp, $12.95) and **Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning**, Mark Thompson, Editor (White Crane Spirituality Series/Lethe Press, 2005, 311pp, $19.95). Ramer began *Two Flutes Playing* in 1980 and the work spans the decade through to the early nineties. Part channeled work and part observational musing, the work is an evocative invocation. Ramer weaves stories and heroes into a new mythology for the gay tribes. *Gay Spirit* is a collection that was groundbreaking in 1987 when it originally appeared. Mixing anthropology, history and sexual/identity politics, the collection remains a powerful read. A glance over the names listed in the table of contents might give one the impression that this collection is a dated slice of a different time—William Burroughs, Michel Foucault, Christopher Isherwood, Harry Hay. The very fact that, twenty years on, we recognize so many of these names, as much today as then, is a testament to the timelessness of Mark Thompson editorial selection.



White Crane and Lethe have also teamed to launch a new Wisdom Series. The first release is a new work edited by Toby Johnson (*Gay Perspective*) and Steve Berman (*Vintage*): **Charmed Lives: Gay Spirit in Storytelling** (Lethe Press, 2007, 306pp, $16.95). *Charmed Lives* brings together stories of transformation—running the gamut from the whimsical, the romantic, to the tragic. Contributors include Perry Brass, Don Clark, Andrew Ramer, Mark Thompson, Malcolm Boyd, among others. The book combines personal essays with creative fiction.

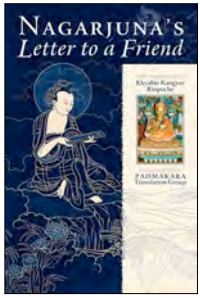
Also from Toby Johnson, this time joined by anthropologist Walter Williams, comes a new work of historical fiction: **Two Spirits: A Story of Life With the Navajo** (Lethe Press, 2006, 331pp, $18.00). Set in the Civil War era of the 1860's, *Two Spirits* tells the story of a feckless Virginian who finds himself captivated by a Two-Spirit male. This is a fascinating book that combines tragedy and oppression with a tale of love, beauty and self-discovery.

Michael Thompson Ford offers a practical guide to pagan spirituality in **The Path of the Green Man: Gay Men, Wicca, and Living a Magical Life** (Citadel Press, 2005, 244pp, $14.95). Ford is the founder of the Green Men, a group dedicated to establishing a new Pagan tradition for gay men. The author takes readers along on his own quest to merge Pagan spirituality into his life. The book is much more than a personal testimonial, however. It is a manual for practicing the Pagan path of Wicca designed specifically for gay men. Ford provides hands-on exercises and rituals for crafting a more meaningful life through developing a deeper connection to the natural world.

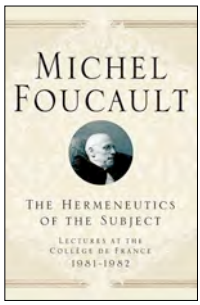


And last, but definitely not least, it was fifty years ago that Allen Ginsberg's prophetic epic poem "Howl" was first published by City Lights. To mark the anniversary Haper Perennial has reissued the original manuscript: **Howl: 50th Anniversary Edition** (HarperCollins, 2006, 194pp, 18.95). This annotated edition is the late poet's own re-creation of the work's composition—providing a unique insight into the creative process. This volume combines the original typed manuscript, including Ginsberg's handwritten editorial marks, with numerous anecdotes that shed light on both the writer's technique and the social, spiritual fabric of the time it was written.

New & Notable

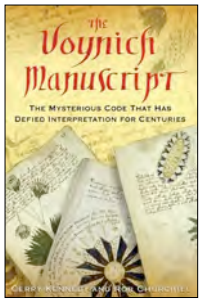


The Padmakara Translation Group has brought another of Tibet's textual treasures into Enligh: **Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend** (Snow Lion, 2005, 208pp, hardcover, $22.95). Appearing 600 years after the Buddha, Nagarjuna is considered one of the greatest scholars of the Great Vehicle, or Mahayana tradition. Here is one of the great works of Indian Buddhist literature. Originally written as a letter to an Indian king, the letter has become a classic work of the shastra tradition. Though short, the letter covers the breadth of the Mahayana path. Due to this the work has proved a great resource for scholars and students of the tradition. The volume includes commentary by Longchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche, the 20th century Tibetan scholar. His straightforward interpretation of Nagarjuna's text is very helpful in making Nagarjuna's, at time compacted, verse accessible.

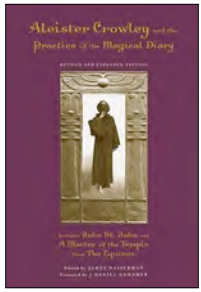


The Hermeneutics of the Subject (Palgrave, 2006, 566pp, hardcover, $35.00) collects lectures Michel Foucault delivered at the Collège de France in 1981 and 1982. In this third volume in this series, the topics of the lectures focus on questions of the "self" and the "care of the self" was viewed and constructed in antiquity. Foucault's talks center on the question of the

ethical formation of the self and the question of subjectivity. These lectures help create a much deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, Foucault's later work. In this case, these talks have particular relevance to Foucault's final work in his *History of Sexuality*. Foucault was one of the great (and unique) minds of the 20th century. His analytical insight, sharp as a surgeon's scalpal, shows itself throughout the course of these lectures.

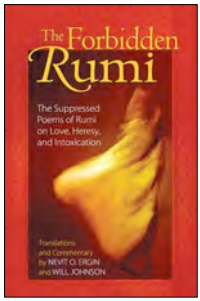


The enigmatic **Voynich Manuscript** was first discovered in an Italian monestary in 1912 and is in the collection of Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book Library. Since then, the strange volume, with its unknown language and strange illustrations, has baffled scholars and fascinated cryptologists. In their work of the same name, Gerry Kennedy and Rob Churchill (Inner Traditions, 2006, 292pp, $18.95) explore the mystery surrounding the medieval manuscript, examining the various theories surrounds boths its authorship and its contents. They trace the speculative history of the manuscript and suggest those who might be connected with it—a veritable who's who of the western mysteries: Roger Bacon, John Dee, Edward Kelley and, the current martyrs du jour, the Cathars.

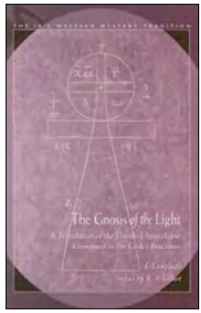


The magical journal is one of the most important, and oft' overlooked, tools in the magician's arsenal. **Aleister Crowley and the Practice of the Magical Diary** edited by James Wasserman (Weiser Books, 2006, 197pp, $19.95) brings together Crowley's important works on the subject of keeping one's magical record. First published in the Equinox in 1909, Crowley's *John St. John* chronicls in great detail his 13-day magical retirement and was described by its author as "a perfect model of what a magical record should be." Wasserman couples this with Frater Achad's *A Master of the Temple*,

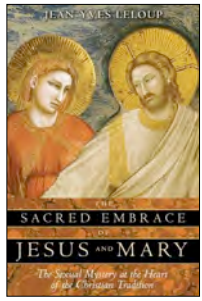
first published in 1919. Achad's example details his experience as an adept. Wasserman provides an insightful introduction. The inclusion of a "culinary glossary" for the various foods and dink mentioned in *John St. John* is a delightful treat.



Rumi is recognized as one of the world's great spiritual poets. The thirteenth-century mystic released himself from many of the precepts of formal religion, espousing, instead, a complete personal dissolving into the rich energies of the godhead. With the support of the Turkish government, Nevit Ergin embarked on translating Rumi's 23 volume Divan—numbering over 44,000 verses—into English. When it came to publishing the openly heretical material contained in the final volume, the Turkish government withdrew their support for the project. Now in **Forbidden Rumi** (Inner Traditions, 2006, 167pp, $14.95), Nevit Ergin and Will Johnson present for the first time in English Rumi's poems from this forbidden volume. Also included are introductions and commentary that provide both 13th-century context and modern interpretation. The collection is nicely grouped into three sections: songs to Sham and God, songs of heresy and songs of advice.



James Bruce first brought *The Codex Brucianus* to England in 1769. The volume contained several sixth century Gnostic works written in Coptic. It is likely that the works were based on earlier original Greek texts. Part of this collection, "The Untitled Apocalypse," is translated here in **The Gnosis of the Light** translated by F. Lamplugh (Ibis Press, 2006, 77pp, $12.95). Dated to the second century, the time of the great Gnostic Valentinus, the text lays out the early Gnostic teachings in esoteric symbolism designed to work upon the believer's inner experience. The work's imagery fosters contemplation intended to prepare a candidate for the Baptism of the Light in which union with the indwelling spark of the divine. To Lamplugh's 1892 translation, this volume adds a preface by R. A. Gilbert examining the historical context and relevance of the work today.



In **The Sacred Embrace of Jesus and Mary** (Inner Traditions, 2006, 150pp, $14.95), orthodox theologian Jean-Yves LeLoup tackles one of the great mysteries of Christianity: why did Saint Paul reject sexuality and the feminine. Drawing on canonical and apocryphal gospels, the Hebrew esoteric tradition and Gnosticism, LeLoup attempts to reveal the actual context of the words attributed to Jesus. Through his analysis, LeLoup argues that Jesus came not to redeem humanity from the flesh, but to honor it as a spiritual path. The author points out that when Paul rejected women, he did not support his contention by citing any words of Jesus. LeLoup suggests that this wholesale elimination of the divine feminine and debasing of sacred sexuality does not reflect, in fact, the true teachings of Jesus. LeLoup supports his own refutation of Paul through an in-depth analysis and exploration of the relationship between Jesus and

Mary Magdalene. A slew of books on the Magdalene have followed on the international success of *The Davinci Code*. Known for his earlier works of esoteric Christianity, including *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and *The Gospel of Thomas*, LeLoup is ideally suited to approach this subject.

Robert Anton Wilson

In Memoriam, 1932-2007

Robert Anton Wilson died on January 11 at his home in Capitola, California. Wilson was a novelist, philosopher, fnord* and conspiracy theorist. He is best known for his science fiction trilogy *Illuminatus!* and his non-fiction autobiographical classic *Cosmic Trigger* (originally published by Pocket Books, 1977). Wilson also penned a punk rock opera *Wilhelm Reich In Hell*.

With the publication of *Cosmic Trigger* and subsequent works such as *Coincidance* and *The New Inquisition*, Wilson drew a strong following among successive generations of anarchist spiritual seekers and independent philosophers. He authored 35 works in all, covering diverse topics running the gamut from extraterrestrials, through sex and drugs, to discordianism. Wilson was particularly adept at creatively applying quantum theories to the domain of personal spirituality and psychology. He strongly advocated the notion that one should not rule out any possibility—dogmatic worldviews being, to his thinking, detrimentally self-limiting.

In his final blog post, written from his sickbed on January 6, Wilson wrote:

> Various medical authorities swarm in and out of here predicting I have between two days and two months to live. I think they are guessing. I remain cheerful and

* Fnord is the typographic representation of disinformation or irrelevant information intending to misdirect, with the implication of a conspiracy.

> unimpressed. I look forward without dogmatic optimism but without dread. I love you all and I deeply implore you to keep the lasagna flying.

"Please pardon my levity," he continued. "I don't see how to take death seriously. It seems absurd."

The announcement of Wilson's passing, posted to his blog on the eleventh, was actually the second time he "died." In 1994, a spurious obituary circulated the internet. Attributed the the *LA Times*, the premature announcement of Wilson's passing quickly spread among his internet-savvy friends and admirers. When contacted about the news, Wilson responded, "The reports of my death have been slightly exaggerated. I can still totter about a bit and even crack a weak joke occasionally."

Over the past few years, Wilson experienced increasingly poor health, from a reoccurrence of polio. Despite this he continued to maintain active contact with the world at large through email and his blog.