



# The Delightful & Surprising Mythology of Judaism

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**



**Our Subject**  
**Our Dates**  
**Our Topics**

**The Delightful and Surprising**  
*Mythology of Judaism*



Hell



Angel of Death



Lilith & Shekinah



Adam & Eve



Messiah

**Tuesdays, February 2, 9, 16, 23 & March 2, 7pm**  
**With Rabbi Michael Lotker**

Sponsored by:  Jewish Federation  
VENTURA COUNTY



Register at: [www.Lotker.com](http://www.Lotker.com)



# A Word From Our Sponsor

**Rabbi Lotker's services as our  
Community Rabbi is made possible by:**



**Jewish Federation**  
OF VENTURA COUNTY  
7620 Foothill Road  
Ventura, CA 93004-1125

THE **STRENGTH** OF A PEOPLE  
THE **POWER** OF COMMUNITY

To make a donation to the Jewish Federation Teaching Tolerance Program  
please contact us at 647-7800 or visit us on the web at [www.jewishventuracounty.org](http://www.jewishventuracounty.org)

# For Copies of the Texts & Recordings of the Sessions Go To [www.lotker.com](http://www.lotker.com)



## ***Wait! – What! The Delightful & Surprising Mythology of Judaism***


*Judaism has a rich mythology that is unknown to most of us. In a series of 5 classes, Rabbi Lotker will introduce the enormous range of classic texts (including Torah, Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalistic, medieval folklore and Hasidic) that contribute to this eye-opening treasure. Subjects will include myths of Angels, the Garden of Eden, the Messiah, Hell, the Angel of Death, Lilith and the Shekinah – the bride of God. Much of the material will be drawn from Howard Schwartz's Tree of Souls: the Mythology of Judaism. The class is brought to us courtesy of the Jewish Federation of Ventura County and there is no charge to attend.*

*The class will take place on 5 consecutive Tuesday evenings, Feb. 2, 9, 16, 23 and March 2 from 7:00 in my Zoom room.*

***>>> TO REGISTER FOR THE CLASS, CLICK HERE<<<***

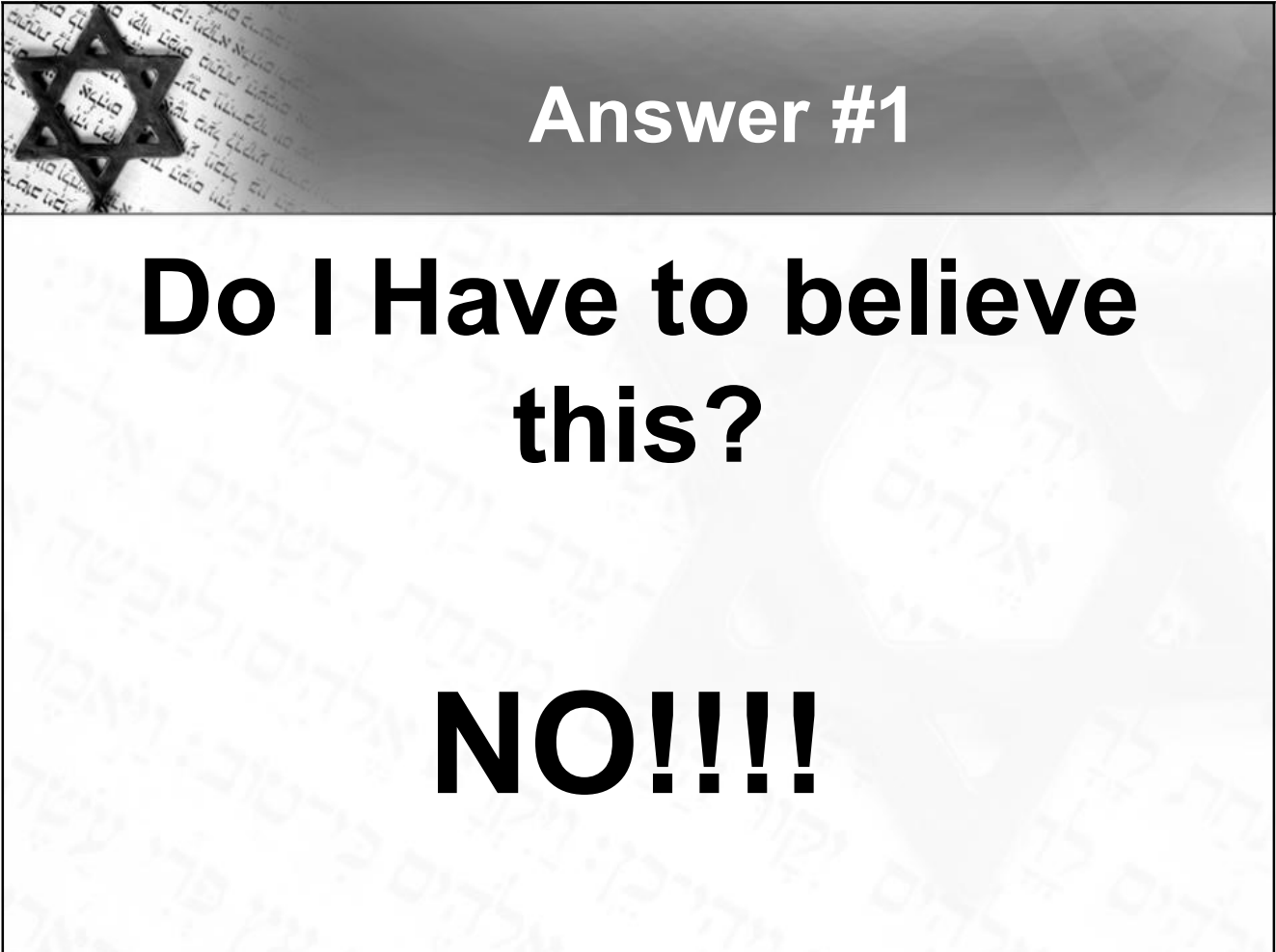
***>>> To view the Texts for the Class, CLICK HERE<<<***

***>> Click here to see recording of session #1<<***



**Question #1**


**Do I Have to believe  
this?**



**Answer #1**

**Do I Have to believe  
this?**

**NO!!!!**

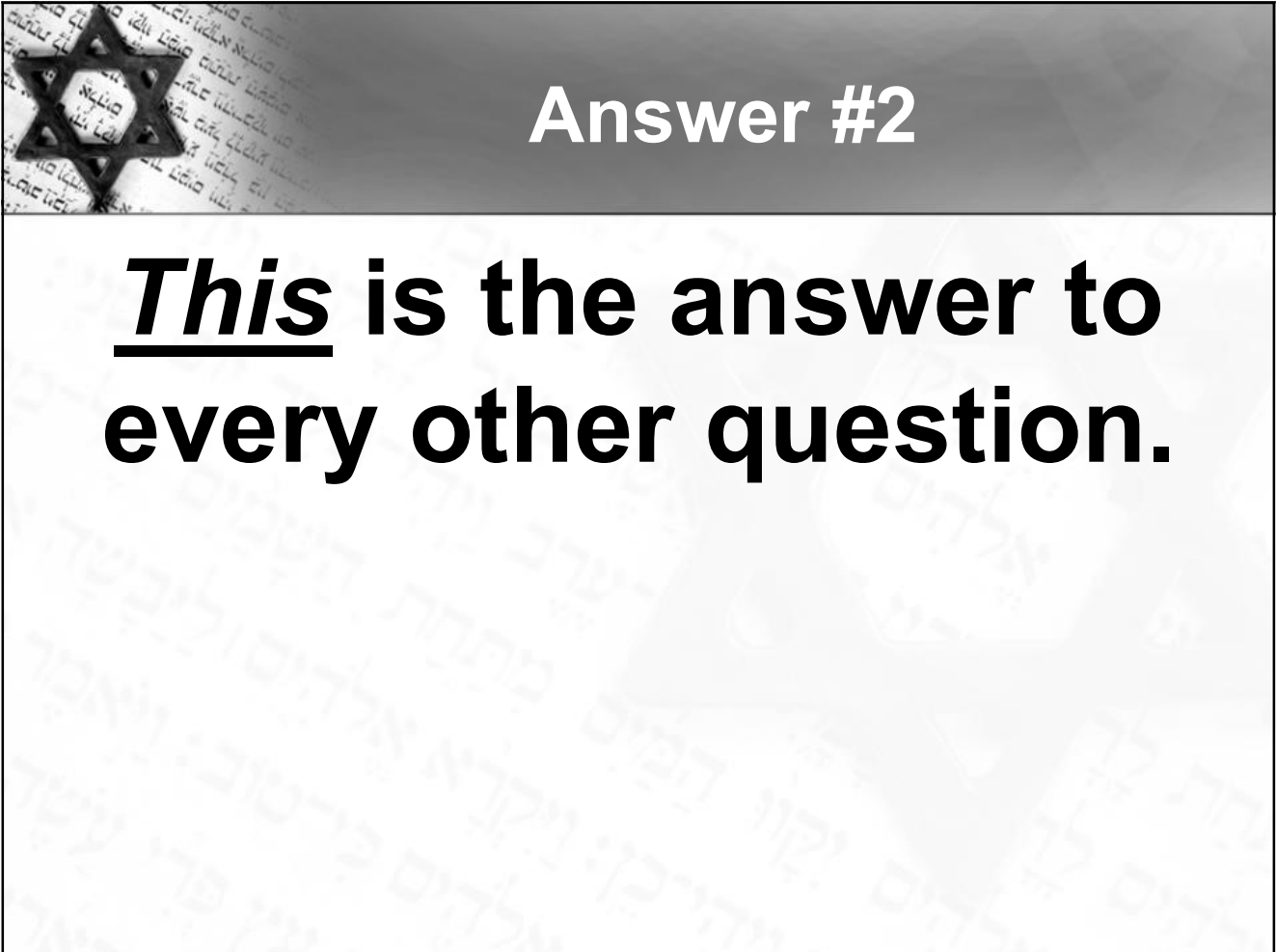


**Answer #1**

**Do I Have to believe  
this?**

**NO!!!!**

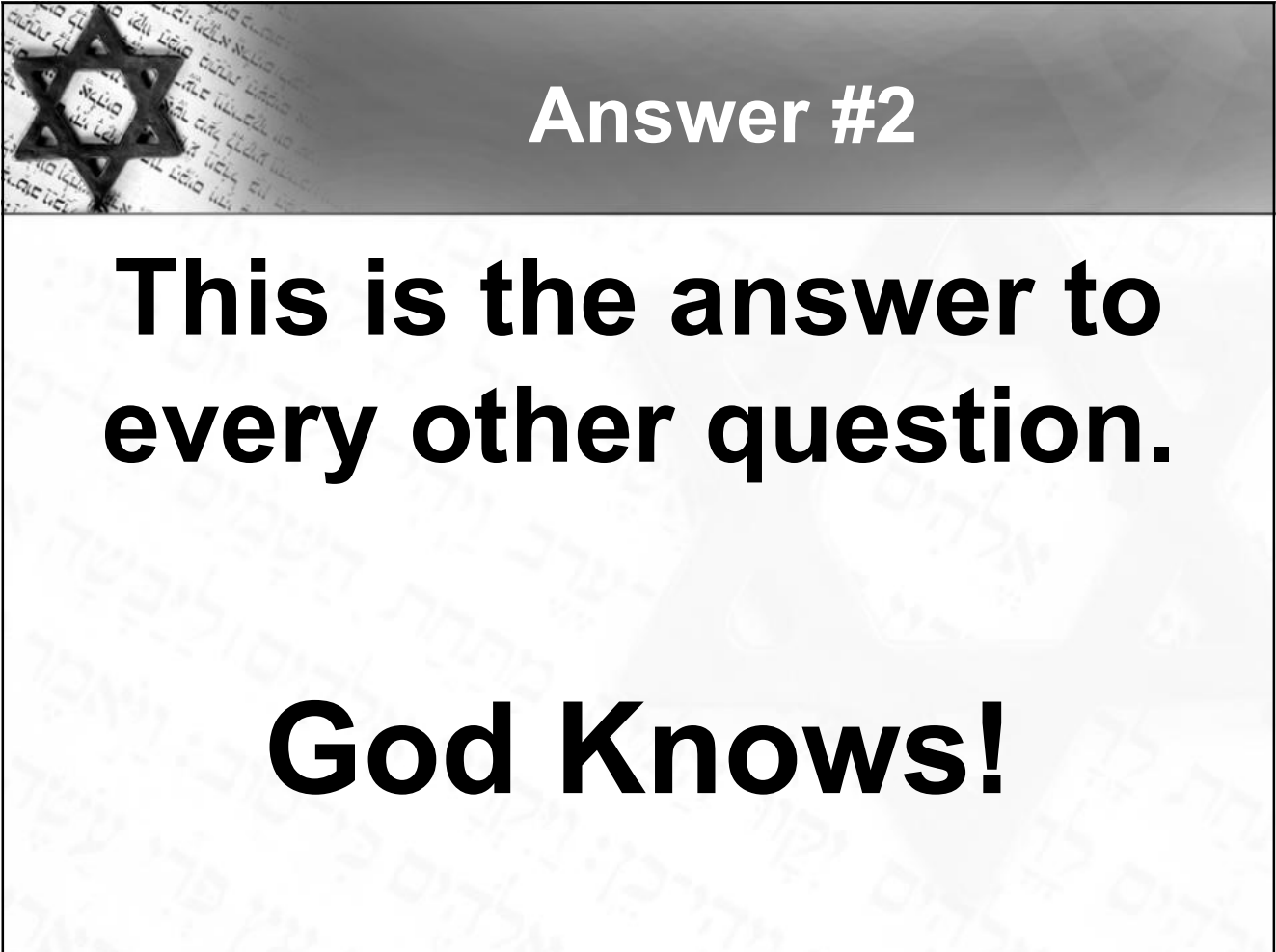
**This answer will be repeated as  
often as necessary.**



**Answer #2**

**This is the answer to every other question.**



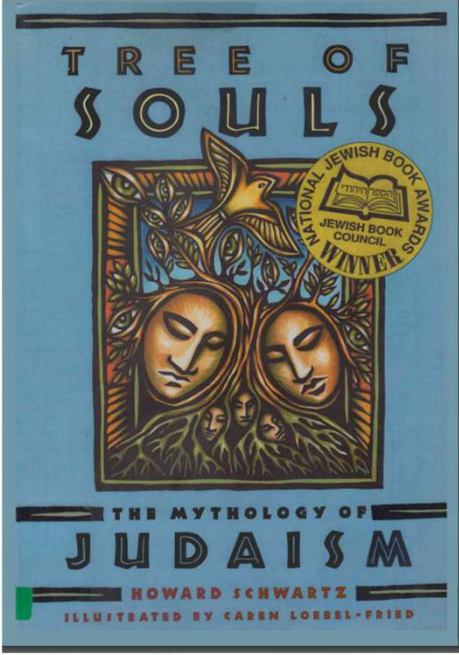


**Answer #2**

**This is the answer to every other question.**

**God Knows!**

# Our Key Text



## Available at a reasonable cost


Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism Paperback – Illustrated, August 24, 2007

by Howard Schwartz (Author), Caren Loebel-Fried (Illustrator), Elliot K. Ginsburg (Foreword)

★★★★☆ 65 ratings

[See all formats and editions](#)

<b>Kindle</b> \$13.19	<b>Hardcover</b> \$89.71 <small>prime</small>	<b>Paperback</b> <b>\$30.99</b> <small>prime</small>
Read with Our <b>Free App</b>	21 Used from \$27.50 12 New from \$86.43 1 Collectible from \$99.00	26 Used from \$24.97 17 New from \$25.00



# Each Myth in This Text

- Has the original quoted
- Has extensive commentary and original sources cited.
- I will post a document with each of the texts and its commentary that we use on my web site.

**6. GOD'S CROWN OF PRAYERS**

Three times each day the prayers of Israel ascend on high. When all of Israel has finished praying, what happens to their prayers? They thread their way to Paradise, to the highest heaven, where they are gathered by the angel Sandalphon, the angel appointed over prayers. Sandalphon collects all the prayers that have been offered in all the synagogues, and weaves them into garlands of prayer that he places upon the head of God, to wear on His Throne of Glory. That is why it is said that God is crowned with the prayers of Israel.

The idea that God wears a crown is a natural development from the concept of God as king. Since kings were the highest, most powerful human figures, God was viewed as the ultimate king. So too does God have a throne, the Throne of Glory, and a crown. The notion of God wearing a crown is also reinforced by the biblical verse: *and a splendid crown upon Your head* (Ezek. 16:12).

Here, though, the crown is formed in a wonderful way. The angel Sandalphon, charged with gathering the prayers of Israel, first collects the prayers and then weaves them into crowns of prayer. In some versions the angel puts the crown directly on God. In others, the angel pronounces an adjuration that causes the crown to rise on its own and settle on God's head.

*Sources:*  
*B. Hagigah 12a, 13b; Exodus Rabbah 21:4; Pesikta Rabbati 19:7; Beit ha-Midrash 1:58-61; Midrash Kohen in Beit ha-Midrash 2:26; Sefer ha-Komah; Seder Tkhines u-Vakoshes 3.*

*Studies:*  
*Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism by Arthur Green.*



# There Are Lots of Myths

## CONTENTS

### Abbreviations

### Transliteration Key

### Preface

Foreword by Elliot K. Ginsburg

### Introduction

- I. The Mythical Strata of Judaism
- II. The Categories of Jewish Mythology
- III. Mythic Parallels
- IV. Myth and Ritual in Judaism
- V. The Light of the First Day
- VI. The Continuing Evolution of Jewish Mythology

## BOOK ONE MYTHS OF GOD

### God's Throne of Glory

- 1. Isaiah's Vision
- 2. Daniel's Night Vision
- 3. God's Throne of Glory
- 4. The Descent of God's Throne
- 5. The Crown of God
- 6. God's Crown of Prayers

### Sefirotic Myths

- 7. The Thirty-two Paths of Wisdom
- 8. The Ten Sefirot
- 9. The Twenty-two Letters
- 10. The Infinite Being
- 11. The Seven Forms of God
- 12. The Ten Crowns of God

vii

### God's Existence

- 13. The First Being
- 14. The Cause of All Causes
- 15. God's Omnipresence
- 16. God Alone
- 17. God's Existence
- 18. God's Gaze
- 19. God's Day

### God's Mystery

- 20. The Hidden God
- 21. The Contraction of God
- 22. Adam Kadmon
- 23. God's Disguises
- 24. Where God Dwells
- 25. The Holy Spirit

### God's Attributes

- 26. The Breath of God
- 27. The Mind of God
- 28. The Eyes of God
- 29. The Face of God
- 30. The Size of God
- 31. The Three Keys
- 32. The Arms of God
- 33. God's Hands
- 34. The Body of God
- 35. God's Back

### The Names of God

- 36. The God of the Fathers
- 37. The Tetragrammaton
- 38. The Lord of Hosts
- 39. God's Robe of Glory

### The Warrior God

- 40. The Warrior God
- 41. God's Sword

### God's Voice and Word

- 42. A Still, Small Voice
- 43. God's Voice
- 44. God's Image
- 45. The Elders of Israel Behold God

### God Studies the Torah

- 46. God Studies the Torah
- 47. God Puts on Tallit and Tefillin
- 48. God's Tabernacle
- 49. God's Prayer
- 50. God Expounds the Torah

### The Suffering God

- 51. The Suffering God
- 52. God's Tears
- 53. God Weeps over the Destruction of the Temple
- 54. God's Lament at the Western Wall
- 55. God's Oath
- 56. God Considers Ending All Existence

### God Walks in the World

- 57. God Walks in the Garden
- 58. God's Lantern
- 59. God Descends to Mount Sinai
- 60. The Tent of Meeting
- 61. The Cottage of Candles

### Early Incarnations of the Shekhinah

- 62. The Creation of Wisdom
- 63. Mother Zion

### Myths of the Bride of God

- 64. The Creation of the Shekhinah
- 65. God's Names for the Shekhinah
- 66. The Two Shekhinahs
- 67. The Earthly Dwelling of the Shekhinah
- 68. The Roaming of the Shekhinah
- 69. The Garments of the Shekhinah
- 70. The Sacred Bedchamber
- 71. The Casting Down of the Shekhinah
- 72. The Wandering of the Shekhinah
- 73. The Lament of the Shekhinah
- 74. The Walling of the Shekhinah
- 75. The Exile of the Shekhinah
- 76. Mourning over the Shekhinah
- 77. The Suffering of the Shekhinah
- 78. Lilith Becomes God's Bride
- 79. Israel and the Shekhinah in Exile
- 80. God's Exile with Israel
- 81. The Face of the Shekhinah
- 82. The Shekhinah Within

### Visions of the Bride of God

- 83. The Shekhinah at the Wall 63
- 84. A Vision at the Walling Wall 63

### God Defers to the Earthly Court

- 85. God Makes Matches 66
- 86. The Rabbinic Overalls God 67
- 87. God Defers to the Earthly Court 68

## BOOK TWO MYTHS OF CREATION

### Before the World Was Created

- 88. The First to Exist 71
- 89. Before the World Was Created 71
- 90. Prior Worlds 71
- 91. The Primordial Elements 73
- 92. God Created Everything with Its Knowledge 73
- 93. The Beginning of Time 74
- 94. Seven Things Created before the Creation of the World 74

### The Creation of the World


- 95. The Seven Days of Creation 75
- 96. Ten Things Created on the Eve of the First Sabbath 77
- 97. Five Heavenly Things Sleeping in the Universe 77
- 98. God the Creator 78
- 99. The Rainbow 79
- 100. The Time of Creation 79
- 101. Everything Was Created at Once 80
- 102. How God Begot Being 80
- 103. What Does the Earth Stand On? 80
- 104. Creation Ex Nihilo 81
- 105. The Order of Creation 81

### The Primordial Light

- 106. God's Garment of Light 82
- 107. The Light of the First Day 83
- 108. The First Cloak 85
- 109. The Tzafar 85
- 110. How Light and Darkness Were Created 88
- 111. Creation by Light 89
- 112. The Light of Prophecy 89

### The Work of Creation

- 113. God's Shout 90
- 114. The Work of Creation 90
- 115. How the Heavens Were Created 91
- 116. The Earth's Foundations 91



# There Are Lots of Myths

**CONTENTS**

<p>Abbreviations</p> <p>Transliteration Key</p> <p>Preface</p> <p>Foreword b</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">I. The</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">II. The</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">III. My</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">IV. My</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">V. The</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">VI. The</p> <p><b>BOOK OF</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">God's</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">1. Isaiah's</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">2. Daniel's</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">3. God's</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">4. The De</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">5. The Cr</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">6. God's</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Self</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">7. The Th</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">8. The Te</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">9. The Tw</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">10. The Int</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">11. The Se</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">12. The Te</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>God's Existence</i></p> <p>13. The First Being</p> <p>14. The Cause of All Causes</p> <p>15. God's Omnipresence</p> <p>16. God Alone</p> <p>17. God's Existence</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>God Studies the Torah</i></p> <p>46. God Studies the Torah</p> <p>47. God Puts on Tallit and Tefillin</p> <p>48. God's Tabernacle</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Visions of the Bride of God</i></p> <p>83. The Shekhinah at the Wall</p>	<p>63</p> <p>63</p> <p>66</p> <p>67</p> <p>68</p> <p><b>69</b></p> <p>71</p> <p>71</p> <p>71</p> <p>72</p> <p>73</p> <p>74</p> <p>74</p> <p>75</p> <p>77</p> <p>77</p> <p>78</p> <p>78</p> <p>79</p> <p>80</p> <p>80</p> <p>81</p> <p>81</p> <p>82</p> <p>83</p> <p>85</p> <p>85</p> <p>88</p> <p>89</p> <p>89</p> <p>90</p> <p>90</p> <p>91</p> <p>91</p>
<p>vii</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>God's Voice</i></p> <p>43. God's Voice</p> <p>44. God's Image</p> <p>45. The Elders of Israel Behold God</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Lilith Becomes God's Bride</i></p> <p>78. Lilith Becomes God's Bride</p> <p>79. Israel and the Shekhinah in Exile</p> <p>80. God's Exile with Israel</p> <p>81. The Face of the Shekhinah</p> <p>82. The Shekhinah Within</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Light of Prophecy</i></p> <p>112. The Light of Prophecy</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Work of Creation</i></p> <p>113. God's Shout</p> <p>114. The Work of Creation</p> <p>115. How the Heavens Were Created</p> <p>116. The Earth's Foundations</p>	

- The Book is 618 pages long.
- The Table of Contents:
  - Is 20 pages long
  - Has 670 individual myths cited!
- The Introduction is 54 pages long and has 172 footnotes.
- The Glossary is 4 ½ pages long
- The Bibliography of Original Sources is 11 ½ pages long and cites more than 500 sources
- The Selected English Bibliography is 42 pages long and cites some 1500 sources.



# Jewish Spirituality & Mythology

## This is why we are here studying

THE PURPOSE OF the marriage of a woman and a man is union.  
 The purpose of union is fertilization.  
 The purpose of fertilization is giving birth.  
 The purpose of birth is learning.  
 The purpose of learning is to grasp the divine.  
 The purpose of apprehending the divine is to maintain the endurance of the one who apprehends with the joy of apprehension.

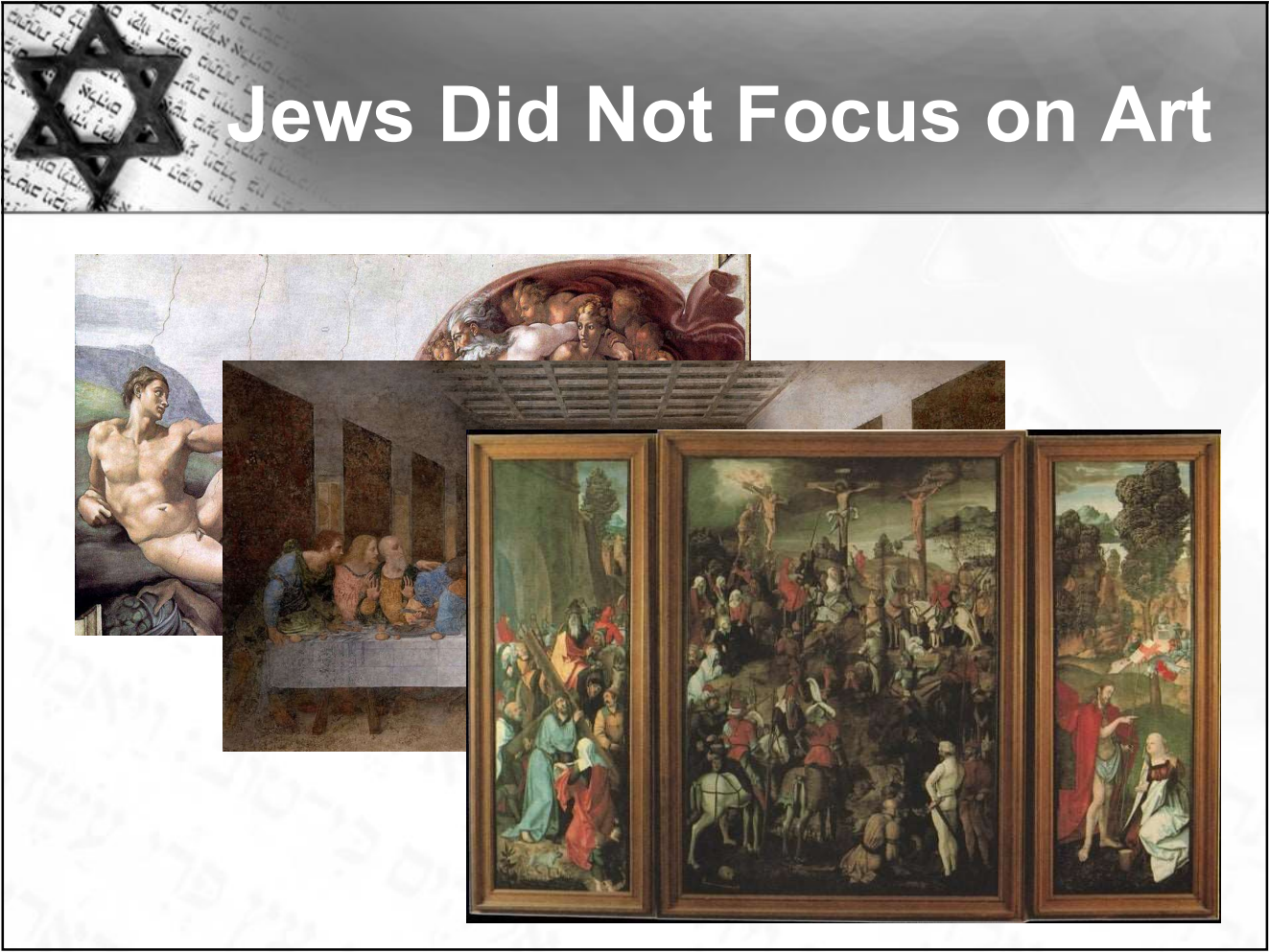
Abraham Abulafia (13<sup>th</sup> century)  
*Mafteah ha-Tokhahot*, cited in D. Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*

“The Greeks learned in order to comprehend. The Hebrews learned in order to revere. The modern man learns in order to use.”  
 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pg. 34.



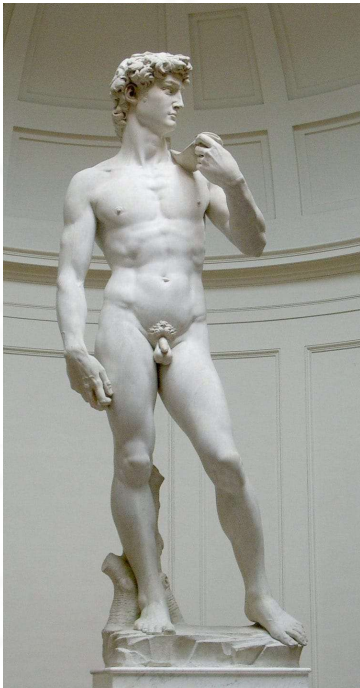
## Jewish Spirituality & Mythology

- **Jewish spirituality begins with study of sacred texts.**
  - The presumption is that our Bible and other sacred texts (Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, etc.) are infinitely rich and deep in meaning.
  - Like a singular love letter from God.
  - So, we read and re-read for messages from the most obvious to the most hidden.
  - In Hebrew, words (*devarim*) are things
- **This is how we will approach this subject**
  - By reading lots of texts.






**Jews Did Not Focus on Sculpture**



# Jews Did Not Focus on Architecture



The image is a collage of architectural photographs. At the top left, there is a Star of David overlaid on a background of Hebrew text. Below this, the main title 'Jews Did Not Focus on Architecture' is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font against a dark grey background. The collage itself consists of several images: a mosque with a large white dome and minarets; a Gothic cathedral with a tall spire and intricate facade; the Colosseum in Rome; and a classical temple with a row of columns. The images are arranged in a somewhat overlapping manner, with the Colosseum being the largest and most central element.

# Jews Did Not Focus on Building Armies



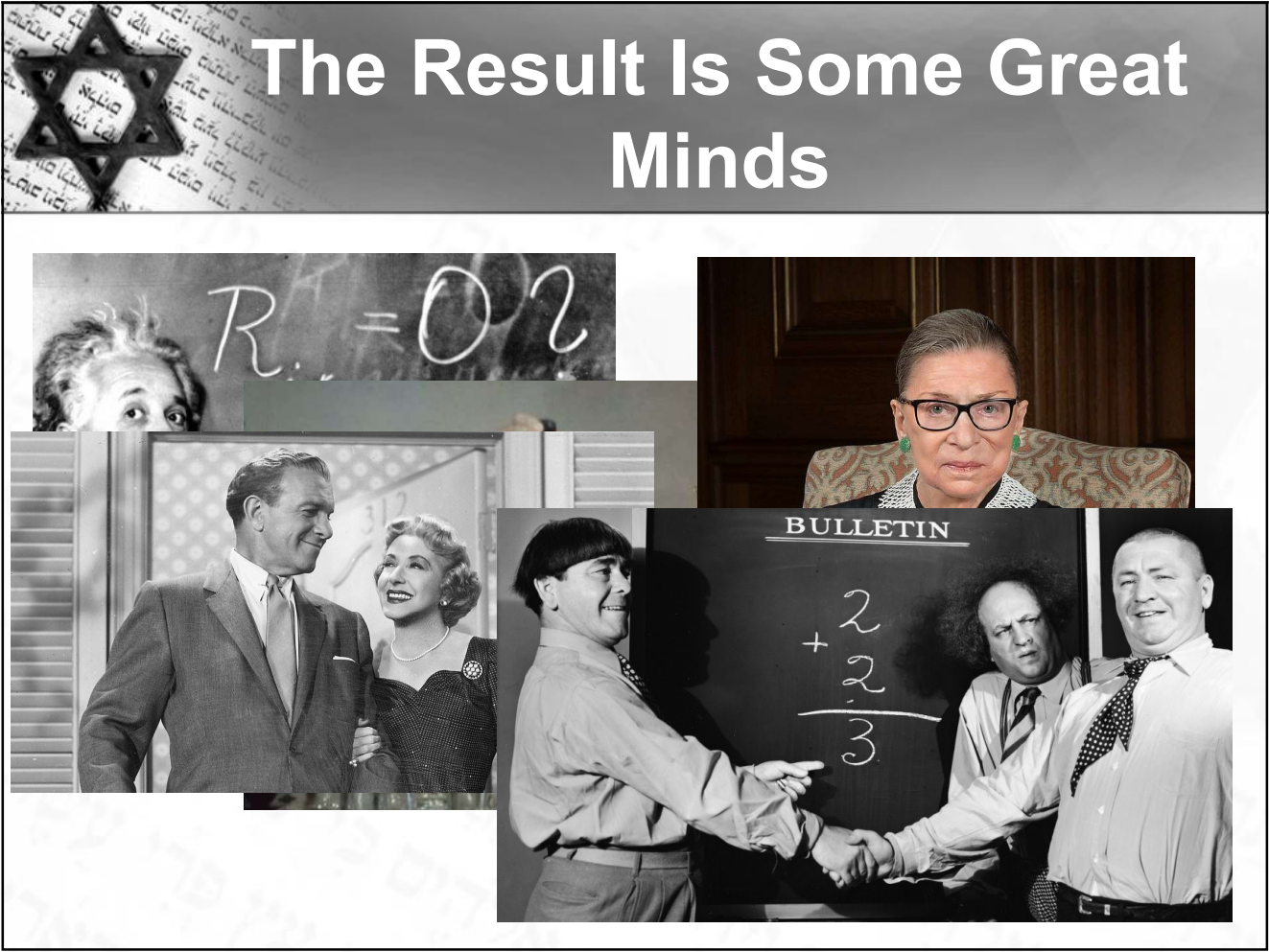
# Jews Focused on Texts and Intensive Study



The Times of Israel

This 400-year-old Jewish library survived Hitler and the Inquisition | The Times of Israel

Creator: cnaan lipshiz



# Our Traditional Approach: Focus on the Texts!




Yesterday



Today




**Jews study  
anytime, anywhere  
(even at a Tel Aviv  
soccer match)**



## Our Approach

- **Is to give you a taste of the depth and breadth of this material**
- **Is scholarly not pious**
  - **I don't insist that you believe the texts are God-given**
  - **But we should understand that our tradition treated these texts as such**
  - **And this is why they have had such an impact**



## Definition of Mythology


- **“Myth refers to a people’s sacred stories about origins, deities, ancestors, and heroes. Within a culture, myths serve as the divine charter, and myth and ritual are inextricably bound.” [Schwartz, pp. xliv]**
- **It’s easy to see how the Torah and Bible provide our stories of origin, God, ancestors and heroes – as well as serving as our divine charter.**






## Myths' Influence on Jewish Practice

- ***Shabbat and Havdalah*** with its unique concept of *Neshamah Yetirah* – an additional shabbat soul. *Havdalah* spices comfort us as this soul departs.
- **The Mourners' Kaddish** assists the departed's soul in the journey from this world to the next and its elevation to higher levels in the afterlife.
- **Passover Seder** – we reenact the story (“we were slaves”), by telling eating (matzah, bitter herbs, salt water, etc.) and actions (opening the door for Elijah, search for chometz, afikomen, reclining, etc.)
- ***Tashlich*** – mythically casting our sins away
- **Sounding Shofar on *Rosh Hashanah*** – myth teaches that this causes God to move from throne of justice to throne of mercy.
- **Three key pilgrimage holidays (*Pesach, Sukkot & Shavuot*)** are expanded from agricultural origins to historical ones.



# Mythology in Judaism

- **The wide array of mythological figures are understood as aspects of the Godhead.**
- **These myths are not to be taken literally – indeed many of them conflict with one another.**
- **Schwartz identifies 10 categories of Jewish myth. Myths of God, Creation, Heaven, Hell, the Holy Word, Holy Time, Holy People, Holy Land, Exile and the Messiah.**
  - His book is organized into these 10 sections.
  - We will not have enough time to even begin to cover each area.
- **Judaism’s foundational myth is that of the covenant between God and the Jews.**
- **There are more than 100 creation myths in Judaism – more than any other kind.**

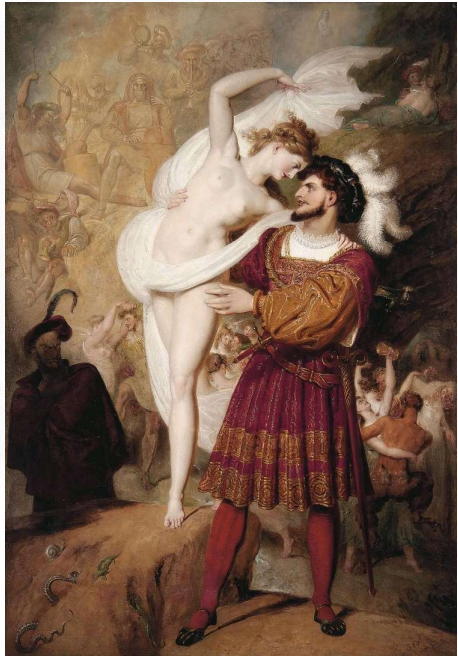
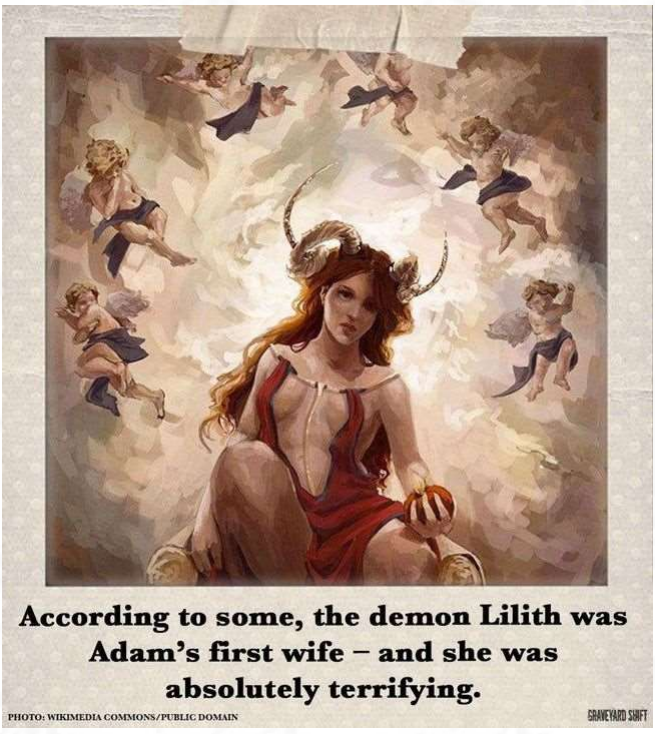


## The Midrashic Method in Myth: Creation of Light

- The midrashic method searches for answers to conflicts or issues in the biblical text. In this process, new myths are created. Example:
- Gen. 1:3 God said (on the first day), “Let there be light and there was light.”
  - But the sun, moon and stars weren’t created until the 4<sup>th</sup> day. So, what was this first light?
  - Isaiah (30:26) has a prophecy about light in the messianic era leading the rabbis to conclude that the light of the first day and the fourth day are different.
    - Light of the first day is a hidden light (*or ha-ganuz*)
    - Or “the light of Paradise” seven times brighter than the sun
  - Where did this primordial light go?
    - Job 37:21 “But now one does not see the light, it shines in the heavens”
    - So, God removed this light (some say after 36 hours) and hid it away for the righteous in *Olam ha-Ba* (the World to Come)
    - Some say the light lasted until Adam and Eve ate the fruit.
    - The Zohar teaches “Whenever the Torah is studied at night, a single ray comes from the hidden light and stretches forth to those who study.”
    - Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav says the light is hidden in the stories of Torah.
    - Another rabbi says the light is not hidden at all but only the righteous can see it.




# Lilith





## The Midrashic Method in Myth: the Lilith Example

- **The problem in the biblical text:** In the first chapter of Genesis, humanity is simultaneously created male and female. In the second chapter, we find Adam alone and Eve is created later from Adam's body.
- **So, what happened to the first wife?**
- **Jewish myth identifies her as Lilith in a mythology that has continued to expand to this day:**
  - Expelled by Adam for disobedience – refusal to be on bottom during sex.
  - Mythology expands to her taking demons as lovers
  - Some myths have her stealing the seed of mortal men during their nocturnal emissions and creating a breed of half human half demonic beings.
  - She becomes a “Queen of Demons” who is a threat to the lives of babies unprotected by an amulet.
  - In modern times, she becomes a role model for Jewish feminism. Today, *Lilith* is a quarterly magazine for Jewish feminism first published in 1976.
- **So, let's start our journey with Lilith**



# Lilith

## 261. ADAM AND LILITH


When God created Adam and saw that he was alone, He created a woman from dust, like him, and named her Lilith. But when God brought her to Adam, they immediately began to fight. Adam wanted her to lie beneath him, but Lilith insisted that he lie below her. When Lilith saw that they would never agree, she uttered God's Name and flew into the air and fled from Adam. Then Adam prayed to his Creator, saying, "Master of the Universe, the woman you gave me has already left me." So God called upon three angels, Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof, to bring her back. God said, "Go and fetch Lilith. If she agrees to go back, fine. If not, bring her back by force."

The angels left at once and caught up with Lilith, who was living in a cave by the Red Sea, in the place where Pharaoh's army would drown. They seized her and said, "Your maker has commanded you to return to your husband at once. If you agree to come with us, fine; if not, we'll drown one hundred of your demonic offspring every day."

Lilith said, "Go ahead. But don't you know that I was created to strangle newborn infants, boys before the eighth day and girls before the twentieth? Let's make a deal. Whenever I see your names on an amulet, I will have no power over that infant." When the angels saw that was the best they would get from her, they agreed, so long as one hundred of her demon children perished every day.

That is why one hundred of Lilith's demon offspring perish daily, and that is why the names of the three angels are written on the amulets hung above the beds of newborn children. And when Lilith sees the names of the angels, she remembers her oath, and she leaves those children alone.

*Sources:  
Alpha Beta de-Ben Sira 5.*



# Lilith

## 265. THE CELLAR


Every impurity engenders demons. Whenever a man's seed is spilled, his demon offspring are conceived. Lilith or one of the daughters of Lilith steals it. A drop is all that is needed.

These demon sons regard the man as their father. They find a place to live in his house, whether in an attic or a cellar, or even in a closet. They make their home there.

Not even married men are safe from the lure of Lilith. No sooner do their wives turn their backs, than Lilith seeks out victims among them. She appears to them in dreams during the night, and as visions during the day. Sometimes Lilith so sways a man that she becomes his secret wife.

That is what happened in the city of Posen, where there once was a goldsmith who was secretly married to Lilith. The demoness lived in the cellar, where the goldsmith had his workshop. He spent time with his demon lover every day, while keeping her existence secret from his family. Little by little the goldsmith yielded everything to her, lust- ing after her day and night.

*Sources:*  
*Kav ha-Yashar; Ohel Elimelech; Sefer Or Yesharim* story no. 199; *Zikaron Tov; Ohalei Shem; Zohar* 1:48a-b; *Ma'asiyot me-Tzaddikei Yesodei Olam; Moraim Gedolim; Hemdat Yamim* 2:98b; *Korban Shabbat* 18; *Sha'ar ha-Kavvanot* 56b-c; *Ta'amei ha-Minhagim* 436; Oxford Hebrew ms. Oppenheim 540 (no. 1567 in Neubauer's *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*), attributed to Judah the Pious; *Ha-Sulam on Zohar, Vayishlah* 1-4; oral version collected by Howard Schwartz from his father, Nathan Schwartz.




# Lilith

Once it happened that the goldsmith even got up in the middle of the Seder, when the words "And they went down into Egypt" were read, and he went down to the cellar. His wife followed after him, afraid that he was ill. She peered through the keyhole of the cellar door, and saw that the cellar had been transformed into a palatial chamber, while her husband lay naked in the arms of a lover. Maintaining control of herself, she returned to the Seder and revealed nothing to the rest of the family. But the next day she went to the rabbi and told him everything.

The rabbi confronted the man with his sin and he confessed. Then the rabbi gave him an amulet to protect himself against Lilith, and he used it to free himself of her. But before she would release him, Lilith demanded that the cellar be bequeathed to her and their demon offspring for all time, and the man took a vow to this effect. He escaped her powers all the rest of his life, but as he lay on his deathbed, his demon children swarmed around him, invisible to his human family, crying out his name.

After his death the house became known as being haunted. Eventually it was sold, and the new owner had a workman break open the door to the cellar, which had been nailed shut. When that workman was found dead on the threshold, Rabbi Yoel Ba'al Shem was sent to investigate. He confirmed that the cellar was infested with demons, and he ordered a rabbinic court, a *Beit Din*, to be convened. The court ruled against the demons' right to live in the cellar there, on the grounds that the demons transgressed the boundaries of the cellar, and they were expelled into the wilderness.





# Lilith

## 271. LILITH AND ELIJAH

Elijah was walking one day when he met Lilith. He said, "Unclean one, where are you going?" Lilith knew that she could not lie to Elijah, so she said, "I am going to the house of a woman who is about to give birth. I will give her a sleeping potion and kill her and take her child and eat it."

Elijah said, "I curse you in the Name of the Lord. Be silent as a stone!"


Lilith said, "O lord, release me from your curse and I swear by God's Name to forsake my evil ways. As long as I hear or see my own names I will retreat and not come near that person. I shall have no power to injure him or do evil. I swear to disclose my true names to you."

Elijah said, "Tell me what your names are."

Lilith said, "These are my names: Lilith, Abiti, Abizu, Amrusu, Hakash, Ode, Ayil, Matruta, Avgu, Katah, Kali, Batub, and Paritasha." Let them be written and hung about the house of women who are bearing a child, or around the child after it has been born. And when I see those names, I shall run away at once. Neither the child nor the mother will ever be injured by me."

And Elijah said, "So be it. Amen."

*Sources:  
Yosef ba-Seder 6.*



# Lilith

## 78. LILITH BECOMES GOD'S BRIDE

After God dismissed His Bride, the *Shekhinah*, from His presence, at the time of the destruction of the Temple, God brought in a maidservant to take Her place. Who is this maidservant? She is none other than Lilith, who once made her home behind the mill, and now the servant is heir to her mistress, as it is said, *A slave girl who supplants her mistress* (Prov. 30:23). She rules over the Holy Land as the *Shekhinah* once ruled over it. Thus the slave-woman has become the ruler of the House, and the true Bride has been imprisoned in the house of the slave-woman, the evil Lilith. There the Bride is held in exile with her offspring, whose hands are tied behind their backs, wearing many chains and shackles. That is a bitter time for the exiled Bride, who sobs because Her husband, God, does not throw His light upon Her. Her joy has fled because She sees Her rival, Lilith, in Her house, deriding Her. And when God sees his true Bride lying in the dust and suffering, He, too, will become embittered and descend to save Her from the strangers who are violating Her.

So it is that in the days to come news will come to God's consort, Lilith, that the time has come for her to go. Then she who plays the harlot will flee from the sanctuary, for if she were to come there when the woman of worth was present, she would perish.

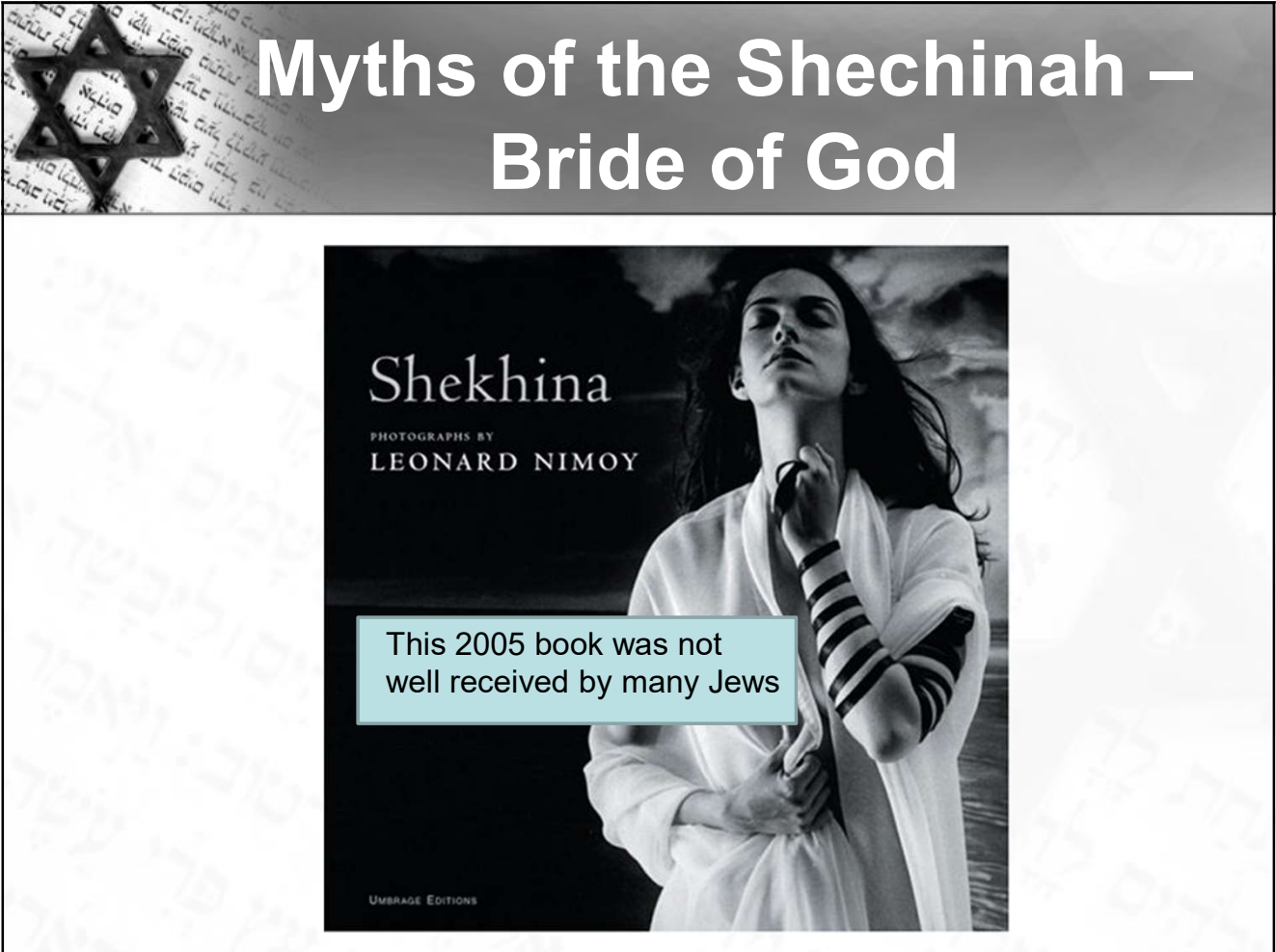
Then God will restore the *Shekhinah* to Her place as in the beginning, and God and His true Bride will again couple with each other in joy. As for the evil slave-woman, God will no longer dwell with her, and she will cease to exist.

*Sources:*  
Zohar 2:118a-118b, 3:69a, 3:97a; B'rit ha-Levi 7; G. Scholem, *Tarbiz*, vol. 5, pp. 50, 194-95.

# Lilith Magazine



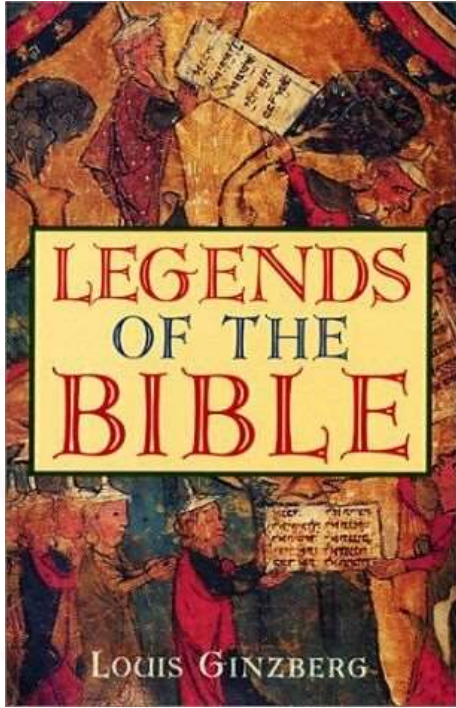
# Myths of the Shechinah – Bride of God



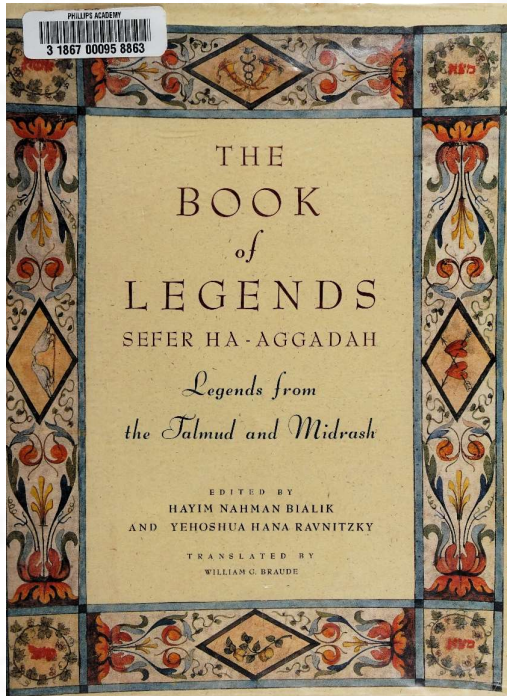


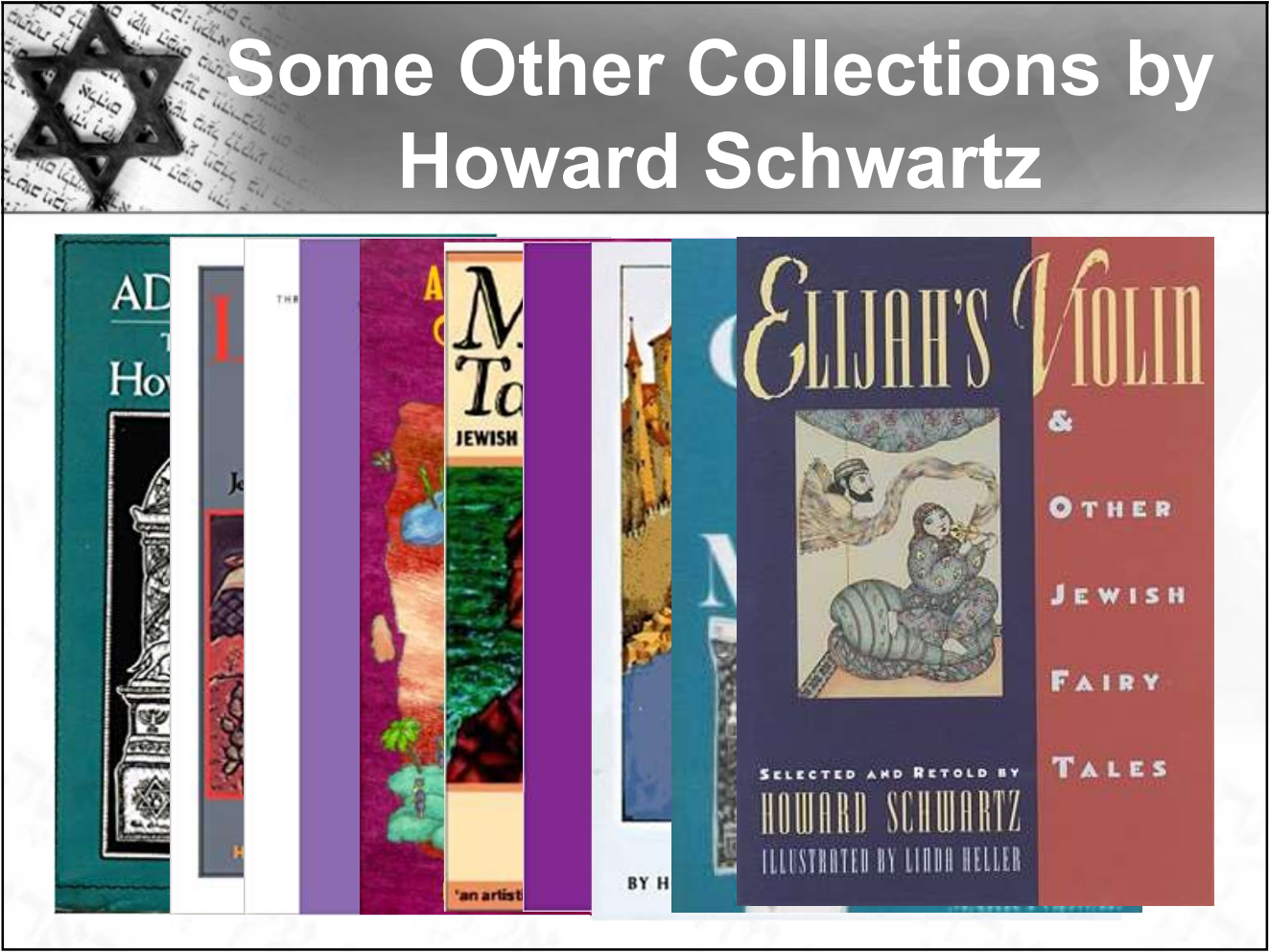
# Some Other Collections of Legends/Midrash

**Some Other Collections of Legends/Midrash**



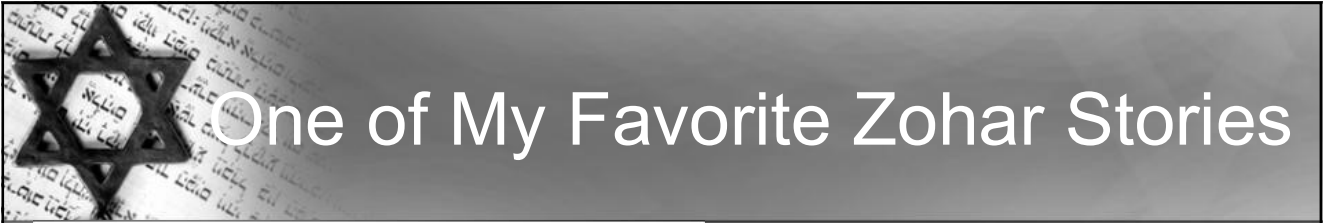
Some Other Collections of Legends/Midrash





# Some Other Collections by Howard Schwartz





# One of My Favorite Zohar Stories

## 12 □ The Old Man and the Ravishing Maiden

(Zohar 2: 94b-95a, 99a-b, 105b, 114a)

Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Yose met one night at the Tower of Tyre. They stayed there as guests, delighting in each other. Rabbi Yose said, "I am so glad to see the face of *Shekhinah*!<sup>1</sup> For just now, the whole way here, I was pestered by an old man, a donkey driver,<sup>2</sup> who kept asking me riddles the whole way:

"Who is a ravishing maiden without eyes,  
her body concealed and revealed?  
She comes out in the morning and is hidden all day.  
She adorns herself with adornments that are not."<sup>3</sup>

"All this he asked on the way, I was annoyed.  
Now I can relax!  
If we had been together, we would have engaged in words of Torah,  
instead of strange words of chaos."


Rabbi Yose said, "Of all the words I heard you say, there was one that really amazed me. Either you said it out of folly, or they are empty words."

The old man said, "And which one is that?"

He said, "The one about the ravishing maiden."

Human beings are so confused in their minds!  
They do not see the way of truth in Torah.  
She calls out to them every day, in love,  
but they do not want to turn their heads.  
She removes a word from her sheath,  
is seen for a moment, then quickly hides away,  
but she does so only for those who know her intimately.

Material taken from D. Matt, *Zohar: Annotated and Explained*, Skylight Paths Pub. 2002, pp. 59-71.



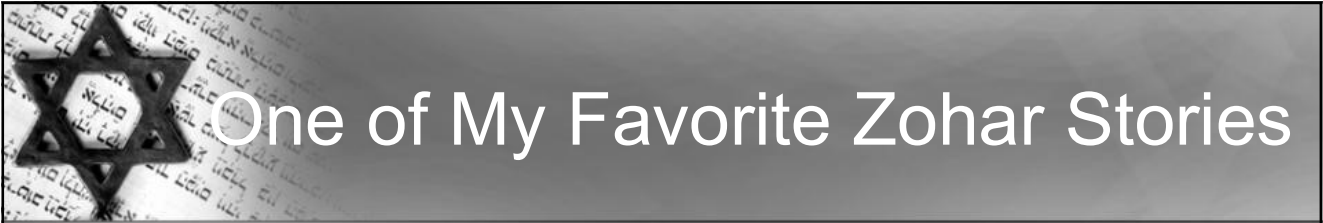
## One of My Favorite Zohar Stories

"A parable:  
 To what can this be compared?  
 To a beloved, ravishing maiden, hidden deep within her palace.  
 She has one lover, unknown to anyone, hidden too.  
 Out of love for her, this lover passes by her gate constantly,  
 lifting his eyes to every side.  
 Knowing that her lover hovers about her gate constantly,  
 what does she do?  
 She opens a little window in her hidden palace,  
 revealing her face to her lover,  
 then swiftly withdraws, concealing herself.  
 No one near him sees or reflects,<sup>8</sup> only the lover,  
 and his heart and his soul and everything within him  
 flow out to her.  
 He knows that out of love for him,  
 she revealed herself for that one moment  
 to awaken love in him.

"So it is with a word of Torah:  
 she reveals herself to no one but her lover.  
 Torah knows that one who is wise of heart  
 hovers about her gate every day.  
 What does she do?  
 She reveals her face to him from the palace  
 beckoning him with a hint,

then swiftly withdraws to her hiding place.  
 No one there knows or reflects—  
 he alone does,  
 and his heart and his soul and everything within him  
 flows out to her.  
 This is why Torah reveals and conceals herself.  
 With love she approaches her lover  
 to arouse love with him.

"Come and see the way of Torah.  
 At first, when she begins to reveal herself to a human,  
 she beckons him with a hint.  
 If he perceives, good;  
 if not, she sends him a message, calling him simple.  
 Torah says to her messenger:  
 'Tell that simple one to come closer, so I can talk with him.'  
 He approaches.  
 She begins to speak with him from behind a curtain she has drawn,  
 words he can follow, until he reflects a little at a time.  
 This is *derasha*.<sup>9</sup>  
 Then she converses with him through a veil,  
 words riddled with allegory.  
 This is *haggadah*.<sup>10</sup>



## One of My Favorite Zohar Stories

"She says to him, 'Do you see that word, that hint with which I beckoned you at first? So many secrets there! This one and that one!'"

"Now he sees that nothing should be added to those words and nothing taken away. Now the *pesbat* of the verse, just like it is.<sup>13</sup> Not even a single word should be added or deleted."

"Human beings must become aware, pursuing Torah to become her lovers!"

The old man was silent for a moment. The Companions were amazed, they did not know if it was day or night, if they were really there or not.

"Enough, Companions! From now on, you know that the evil side has no power over you. I, Yeiva Sava,<sup>14</sup> have stood before you to awaken your awareness of these words."

They rose as if awakened from sleep and threw themselves down in front of him, unable to utter a word. After a while they began to cry.

Rabbi Hiyya opened and said, "*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm* (Song of Songs 8:6). Love and sparks from the flame of our heart will escort you. May it be the Will that our image be engraved in your heart as your image is engraved in ours."

He kissed them and blessed them, and they left. When they rejoined Rabbi Shim'on and told him everything that happened, he was delighted and amazed. He said, "You are so fortunate to have attained all this! Here you were with a heavenly lion, a fierce warrior for whom many warriors are nothing, and you could not recognize him! I am amazed that you escaped being punished by him. The blessed Holy One must have wanted to save you."

He called out these verses for them: "*The path of the righteous is like gleaming light, shining ever brighter until full day* (Proverbs 4:18). *When you walk, your stride will be free, if you run, you will not stumble* (Proverbs 4:12). *Your people, all of them righteous, will inherit the land forever—sprout of My planting, work of My hands, in which I glory* (Isaiah 60:21)."

# The Sefirot

The collage illustrates the Sefirot through four different visual representations:

- Top Left:** A Star of David (Magen David) resting on a scroll of Hebrew text.
- Left Panel:** A colorful circular diagram with the Sefirot arranged in a circle around a central point. From top to bottom, they are: Keter (orange), Binah (red), Din (pink), Hod (orange), Yesod (purple), and Shekhinah (dark blue). The right side includes: Hokhmah (light blue), Hesed (blue), Nezah (light blue), and Tiferet (purple) in the center.
- Middle Panel:** A detailed tree diagram titled "The Ten Sefirot" with English and Hebrew labels and symbolic descriptions:
  - Keter (KETER):** CROWN, Will, Ayin [Nothingness]
  - Binah (BINAH):** UNDERSTANDING, Palace, Womb
  - Hokhmah (HOKHMAH):** WISDOM, Point, Beginning
  - Gevurah (GEVURAH):** POWER, Din (Judgment), Rigor, Red, Left Arm
  - Hesed (HESED):** LOVE, Grace, White, Right Arm
  - Tiferet (TIF'ERET):** BEAUTY, Rahamim (Compassion), Blessed Holy One, Heaven, Sun, Harmony, King, Green
  - Hod (HOD):** SPLENDOR, Prophecy, Left Leg
  - Nezah (NETSAH):** ETERNITY, Prophecy, Right Leg
  - Yesod (YESOD):** FOUNDATION, Tsaddiq [Righteous One], Covenant, Phallus
  - Shekhinah (SHEKHINAH):** PRESENCE, Malkhut (Kingdom), Communion of Israel, Earth, Moon, Queen, Apple Orchard, Rainbow
- Right Panel:** A human figure with the Sefirot placed on its head, shoulders, chest, and feet, showing their physical manifestation.



# Myths of the Shechinah

## From an Artscroll (Orthodox) Prayerbook

5 / SHACHARIS/MORNING SERVICE

DONNING TALLIS AND TEFILLIN

Many recite the following declaration of intent before donning the tallis: **לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד** *For the sake of the unification\* of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and His Presence, in fear and love to unify the Name\* – yud-kei with vav-kei – in perfect unity, in the name of all Israel.*

**לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד\*** קִדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא וּשְׂכִינְתָּהּ, בְּדַחֲלוֹ וּרְחִימוֹ לְיַחַד שְׁמֵי יי"ה בּוֹי"ה בְּיַחְוּדָא שְׁלִימִים, בְּשֵׁם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

... הָרִינִי ... **לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד** – *For the sake of the unification ... I am ready.* This preliminary formulation serves two purposes. It is a statement of intent that the act about to be performed is to fulfill the Torah's commandment. The second purpose, indicated by the mystical references, is a prayer that the Kabbalistic spiritual qualities of the commandment be realized. Some authorities omit the sentence beginning **לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד** and start the supplication from הָרִינִי. Others omit the entire prayer, but all agree that one should have intent to fulfill the *mitzvah*.

... לְיַחַד שְׁמֵי – *To unify the Name ...* The first half of the Divine Name, formed of the letters *yud* and *hei*, symbolizes the Attribute of Judgment, while the second half, formed of the letters *vav* and *hei*, symbolizes the Attribute of Mercy. The blend of both attributes leads to His desired goal for Creation. Since these letters form the sacred Four-Letter Name that is not to be uttered as it is spelled, and since many commentators maintain that this prohibition extends even to uttering the four letters of the Name, the commonly used pronunciation of these letters in the **לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד** prayer is *yud-kei b'vav kei*.



# Myths of the Shechinah

## 64. THE CREATION OF THE SHEKHINAH

God's heavenly treasures were hidden in the innermost of many chambers. They could not be revealed to anyone, for they were too well hidden.

So God decided to bring together His heavenly treasures in his daughter, the *Shekhinah*. That way he would make them available to the world, but only to those who knew where they could be found.

So God saw to it that His daughter, the *Shekhinah*, contained within Herself all the paths of wisdom. Whoever knows those paths has access to God, and to all heavenly wisdom. And whoever would like to fathom those paths must turn to Her for help, for only She knows where God has hidden His heavenly treasures.

This myth is presented in the form of a parable in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, where God is identified as a king, as is standard in rabbinic parables about God. His daughter is the *Shekhinah*. Despite the allegorical format, the myth being conveyed is quite apparent—it is the myth of the divine pair, but here the male and female are both somehow contained within the same mythic figure. Thus God contains both the male and the female elements, even though they may appear to act independently of each other. Here monotheism reclaims the wholeness of God no matter how many aspects of God are portrayed. From this perspective, dualism itself becomes a form of monotheism. This paradox makes it possible to define a divinity capable of changing His mind, who could have masculine and feminine aspects and still be considered a single divine being.

The concept that God has masculine and feminine aspects is explicitly stated in *Zohar* 3:290a: "As the Ancient One, whose name be blessed, took on a form, He shaped everything in male and female form. In another form things could not exist. Therefore the first beginning of development was at once male and female, with *Hokhmah* as father and *Binah* as mother." And the *Zohar* restates the *Bahir's* identification of the

*Shekhinah* as mother, daughter, and sister: "She (*Malkhut*—the *sefirah* representing the *Shekhinah*) is sometimes called daughter and sometimes sister, and here She is called mother. And in fact She is all these" (*Zohar* 2:100b).

What are the heavenly treasures in the parable? They are the secrets of Creation and other heavenly mysteries. God is not going to reveal these to everyone, but only to the initiated. These secrets were all used to create God's daughter, representing God's feminine aspect, known as the *Shekhinah*. Thus all the mysteries of God are focused in this single figure.

The parable in *Sefer ha-Bahir* also states that God hid His treasures not only in the *Shekhinah*, but in Her garments as well. These garments can be identified as the Oral Torah, or even as the Torah itself. This suggests that the Torah is the means by which God reveals His secrets of Creation.

See "God's Daughter," p. 312.

Sources:  
*Sefer ha-Bahir* 63.



## Myths of the Shechinah

### 69. THE GARMENTS OF THE SHEKHINAH

The *Shekhinah* has many garments, consisting of holy angels from above and Israel from below. From these garments God created the Throne of Glory, as well as heaven and earth and all the creatures therein.

The robe of the *Shekhinah* is made of light. The light of the first day is reflected from that robe. The *Shekhinah* wears that robe whenever Israel gives forth light through good deeds. But when Israel does evil, She is garbed in the black garments of Lilith, and She is forced to wear them until Israel repents.

Sources:  
Tikkunei ha-Zohar 22 (65a); Zohar 3:273a.



## Myths of the Shechinah

### 70. THE SACRED BEDCHAMBER

On the very day King Solomon completed the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, God and His Bride were united, and Her face shone with perfect joy. Then there was joy for all, above and below.

As long as the Temple stood, it served as the sacred bedchamber of God the King and His Bride, the *Shekhinah*. Every midnight She would enter through the place of the Holy of Holies, and She and God would celebrate their joyous union. The loving embrace of the King and His Queen assured the well-being not only of Israel, but also of the whole world.

The King would come to the Queen and lie in Her arms, and all that She asked of Him he would fulfill. He placed his left arm under Her head, His right arm embraced Her, and He let Her enjoy His strength. Their pleasure in each other was indescribable. He made His home with Her and took His delight between Her breasts. They lay in a tight embrace, Her image impressed on His body like a seal imprinted upon a page, as it is written, *Set me as a seal upon Your heart* (S. of S. 8:6).

As long as the Temple stood, the King would come down from his heavenly abode every midnight, seek out his Bride, and enjoy her in their sacred bedchamber. But when the Temple was destroyed, the *Shekhinah* went into exile, and Bride and Groom were torn apart.

Sources:

*Zohar* 1:120b, 3:74b, 3:296a; *Zohar Hadash*, *Midrash Eikhah*, 92c-92d.





## Myths of the Shechinah

### 73. THE LAMENT OF THE SHEKHINAH

Since the destruction of the Temple, the *Shekhinah* descends night after night to the place of the Temple, enters the Holy of Holies, and sees that Her dwelling-house and Her couch are ruined and soiled. And She wanders up and down, wails and laments, and weeps bitterly. She looks at the place of the cherubs and lifts up Her voice and says, "My couch, My couch, My dwelling-place, where My husband would come to Me and lie in My arms, and all that I asked of Him, He would give Me. My couch, My couch, do you not remember how I came to you in joy and contentment, and how those youths, the cherubim, came forth to meet Me, beating their wings in welcome? How has the Ark of the Covenant which stood here come to be forgotten? From here went forth nourishment for all the world and light and blessing to all. Now I seek My husband in every place, but he is not here. My husband, My husband, where have You gone? Do You not remember how You held Your left arm beneath my head and Your right arm embraced me, and You vowed that You would never cease loving Me? And now You have forgotten Me."

Sources:  
Zohar Hadash, Midrash Eikhah, 74b.



## Myths of the Shechinah

### 75. THE EXILE OF THE SHEKHINAH

When the Temple was still standing, Israel would perform their rites, and bring offerings and sacrifices. And the *Shekhinah* rested upon them in the Temple, like a mother hovering over her children, and all faces were resplendent with light, so that there was blessing both above and below.

When the Temple was destroyed, the *Shekhinah* came and went up to all those places where She used to dwell, and She would weep for Her home and for Israel, who had gone into exile, and for all the righteous and the pious ones who had perished.

At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, questioned the *Shekhinah*, and said to her, "What ails you?" And She replied, weeping, "My children are in exile, and the Sanctuary has been burnt, so why should I remain here?" Now the Temple is destroyed and the *Shekhinah* is with Israel in exile and there is no joy to be found, above or below.

The myth about the separation of God and His Bride is a primary example of the emergence of the *Shekhinah* as an independent mythical figure. The story also resembles the conflict between an angry couple, where the wife leaves the husband and accompanies the children, here the children of Israel.

From the perspective of the *Zohar*, the fact that the *Shekhinah* accompanied Israel is evidence of God's attachment to Israel: "All the time Israel was in exile, the *Shekhinah* was in exile with them. And since the *Shekhinah* was with them, God remembered them, to do good to them and bring them out of exile" (*Zohar* 1:120b).

*Sources:*


*Sefer ha-Bahir* 76; *Zohar Hadash*, *Midrash Eikhah*, 92c-92d; *Zohar* 1:202b-203a; *No'am Elimelech*; *B. Megillah* 29a; *Tiferet Shlomo* on Deuteronomy 27:2-7.



## Myths of the Shekhinah

### Commentary On “The Exile of the Shekhinah” continued:

The exile of the *Shekhinah* is presented in the form of a parable about a king in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, in which the king had a beautiful wife and children, but when the children turned to evil ways, the king became angry with the children and their mother. The mother then went to the children and upbraided them for their behavior and its consequences until they changed their ways and did the will of their father. Then the king remembered them and loved them as much as he did in the beginning, and also remembered their mother. The king, of course, is God, and the king’s wife the *Shekhinah*, while the children are the children of Israel. According to Rabbi Shlomo Rabinowitz of Radomsk, “The *Shekhinah* protects Jews like a mother taking care of her children” (*Tiferet Shlomo* on Deuteronomy 29:27). The myth of the exile of the *Shekhinah* found in the *Zohar* follows this earlier parable closely, and the earlier parable may well be the inspiration for it. It is interesting to note that in the parable from *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the queen is responsible for the well-being of her children, and the fate of the queen depends on the fate of her children. When the children repent and God loves them once again, He also remembers His love for their mother, the queen.



# Myths of the Shechinah

**77. THE SUFFERING OF THE SHEKHINAH**

Wherever Israel is exiled, the *Shekhinah* is exiled with them and suffers with them. Those who are in this bitter exile should not be concerned with their personal distress, but should only lament the exile of the *Shekhinah*. For through Torah study and prayer, one is able to repair the limbs of the *Shekhinah* that were shattered in exile.

*Sources:*  
No'am Elimelekh; Iggeret ha-Kodesh 31 in Tanya; Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov 66.



# Myths of the Shechinah

## 81. THE FACE OF THE SHEKHINAH

In the days of Moses even the ordinary Israelite had the privilege of being spoken to by the *Shekhinah* face to face. In later times, not even Ezekiel was accorded this privilege.

It is said that whoever leaves a synagogue and enters the House of Study to engage in the study of the Torah will have the merit of seeing the face of the *Shekhinah*. So too when scholars discuss the Torah, they often behold the face of the *Shekhinah* and are surrounded with fire.

Such was the case when Rabbi Hiyya came to visit Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. As he passed the window, he saw a fiery curtain inside the house, with the *Shekhinah* on one side of the curtain and Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai on the other. They were studying Torah that way, and Rabbi Shimon's countenance was aflame with the intoxication of the Torah.

Rabbi Hiyya was so electrified by this sight that he could not even knock on the door. All at once the door opened, and Rabbi Hiyya looked inside. As he did, he glimpsed the face of the *Shekhinah*. And he lowered his eyes and stood frozen in place.

When Shimon bar Yohai saw that Rabbi Hiyya had been struck dumb, he said to his son, Rabbi Eleazar: "Go to Rabbi Hiyya and pass your hand over his mouth." Eleazar did this, and at last Rabbi Hiyya recovered his senses.

Some say that to see the righteous and saintly sages of one's generation is to see the very face of the *Shekhinah*. Why are these called the face of the *Shekhinah*? Because the *Shekhinah* is hidden in them, and they reveal Her.

This much is certain: Before they died and gained entrance to the celestial palace, all the saints who had descended from Adam came face to face with the *Shekhinah*. Of them it is said, "A cord of the Divine will has been grasped here on earth."

Sources:

B. Berakhot 64a; Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:8; Zohar 1:94b; Zohar 2:14a-15a, Midrash ha-Ne'elam; 2:155b.



## Myths of the Shekhinah

### 83. THE SHEKHINAH AT THE WALL

The *Shekhinah* is said to hover over the Wailing Wall, and She doesn't move from there. The northern corner of the Wall is where the *Shekhinah* reveals herself. Whoever desires to see the face of the *Shekhinah* must devote his life to the study of Torah. Very few have been found worthy to see the *Shekhinah* hovering over the Wall.

The presence of the *Shekhinah* is strongly linked to the Western Wall, the retaining wall that is all that is said to remain of the Temple in Jerusalem. There are many accounts in rabbinic texts and Jewish folklore about visions or encounters with the *Shekhinah* at the Wall. But only those who have truly studied the Torah are considered worthy of seeing the *Shekhinah*. See "A Vision at the Wailing Wall," following.

*Sources:*

*Midrash Tehillim* 106; *Kav ha-Yashar*, chap. 93; *Otzar ha-Ma'asiyot*, collected by Reuven Na'ane from Shalom Levi.

# Myths of the Shechinah



The image is a collage of four photographs. The top-left photo shows a black metal Star of David superimposed on a scroll of Hebrew text. The top-middle photo is a close-up of a stone wall. The top-right photo is a close-up of a blue and white flag. The bottom photo is a large panoramic view of the Temple Mount plaza in Jerusalem, showing the Dome of the Rock and many people walking around.



## Myths of the Shechinah

### 387. THE WEDDING OF GOD AND THE SHEKHINAH

When they are first engaged, God sends His betrothed nuptial presents and a meal of celestial bread. So too does He make preparations for the wedding feast. On the eve of Shavuot, before the wedding takes place, the members of the heavenly household remain with the Bride all night, and rejoice in the preparations for the wedding. They study Torah, progressing from the Five Books of Moses to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the Writings, and then to the midrashic and mystical interpretation of the text, for these are the adornments and finery of the Bride.

Throughout the night, the Bride rejoices with Her maidens and is made ready by them. And in the morning She enters the bridal canopy, illumined with the radiance of sapphire, which shines from one end of the world to the other. Shining in all Her finery, she awaits each of those who helped to prepare Her. And at the moment when the sun enters the bridal canopy and illumines Her, all Her companions are identified by name. And God inquires after them, and blesses them, and crowns them with bridal crowns, and blessed is their portion.

Then the Bridegroom enters the bridal canopy, and He offers the seven nuptial blessings and unites with His Bride, joining with the Queen in perfect union, and *the heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19:2).

*Sources:*

*Zohar* 1:8a; *Or Zaru'a* Ms. JTSA ff. 39b/54b.





## Myths of the Shechinah

### 395. THE SABBATH BRIDE

Every seventh day her coronation takes place. Before the start of the ceremony, the dwelling place is prepared like the chamber of a Bridegroom set to receive his Bride. Meanwhile, the Bride herself remains alone, separated from the forces of evil. There she adorns herself with a crown for the Holy King, and prepares herself for their union. Then, as the Sabbath begins, the radiant Bride is escorted by angels on high and Israel below, and she is ushered into Israel's abode, to be in their midst. There she is crowned by the prayers of the holy people, and they, in turn, are adorned with new souls, so that they all are united above and below.


This describes a mythical ceremony that is part coronation and part wedding between God and His Bride, the *Shekhinah*. The union, clearly intended to be understood as a sexual union, between God and His Bride, comes close to portraying them as independent mythic beings. This one passage from the *Zohar* can be subjected to many interpretations. It might be viewed as a union between two of the ten sefirot, those representing the marriage of the King and His Bride. At the same time, it is also an enthronement myth as well as a wedding. This heavenly ceremony is paralleled on earth by the ritual of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, going out to greet the Sabbath Queen at the beginning of the Sabbath. The Ari and his followers wore white, and left the city of Safed to go out into the fields to welcome the Sabbath Queen. Thus heaven turns to earth and earth to heaven, and they meet in a rare union of peace, which is the Sabbath. See the next entry, "Greeting the Sabbath Queen."


Sources:  
*Zohar* 2:131b, 2:135a-b, 3:300b-301a.

**Myths of the Shechinah**


**The Sabbath Bride**

*Abigail Sarah Bagrain*





# Hamantaschen & Shechinah?



## **Yes, There's a Reason Hamantaschen Look Like Vaginas**

*Everything you know about the classic Purim cookie is wrong.*

By [Arielle Kaplan](#)

March 5, 2020

<https://www.heyalma.com/yes-theres-a-reason-hamantaschen-look-like-vaginas/>

# From Lilith Mag – Spring 1968

## From Prehistoric Cave Art to Your Cookie Pan:

TRACING THE HAMANTASCH HERSTORY

by Susan Schur

Huh? What's that hamantasch doing on Aphrodite's vulva?



A hamantasch is *not* a Haman's pocket. That's phony. It's a cosmic womb—a triangle with dots (seeds) inside. It represents something sacred *and* female.

For me, the hamantasch question took on a new urgency a few months ago when I happened upon a travel article describing a pre-spring "Christian" holiday on February 2nd, in Marseilles, France, in which thousands of pilgrims enact a processional with a Black Madonna who is brought out from an underground church crypt dressed in green vestments. (Boy, this one has "pagan" written all over it, including "underground" and "green vestments"—flags for vernal gestation-and-birth rituals.) The event is, of course, a ritual participation in the secret of the earth's abundance. (Hang on — this is, as unlikely as it may seem, connected to hamantaschen.)



grandmas who leaven life's problems for us and reassure us. The myth of Baubo is the seminal (ovarian) one behind many "laughing" pre-spring holidays: Purim (as in "Be Happy; It's Adar!"), Carnevale and Mardi Gras, to name a few. (The word "February" itself, as in "febrile," refers to sexual heat, a revving up for spring's fertility. When Ahasuerus proclaims, in the *Megillah*, that there will be "free" drinking followed by a girlie show, he is in keeping with the seasonal theme.)

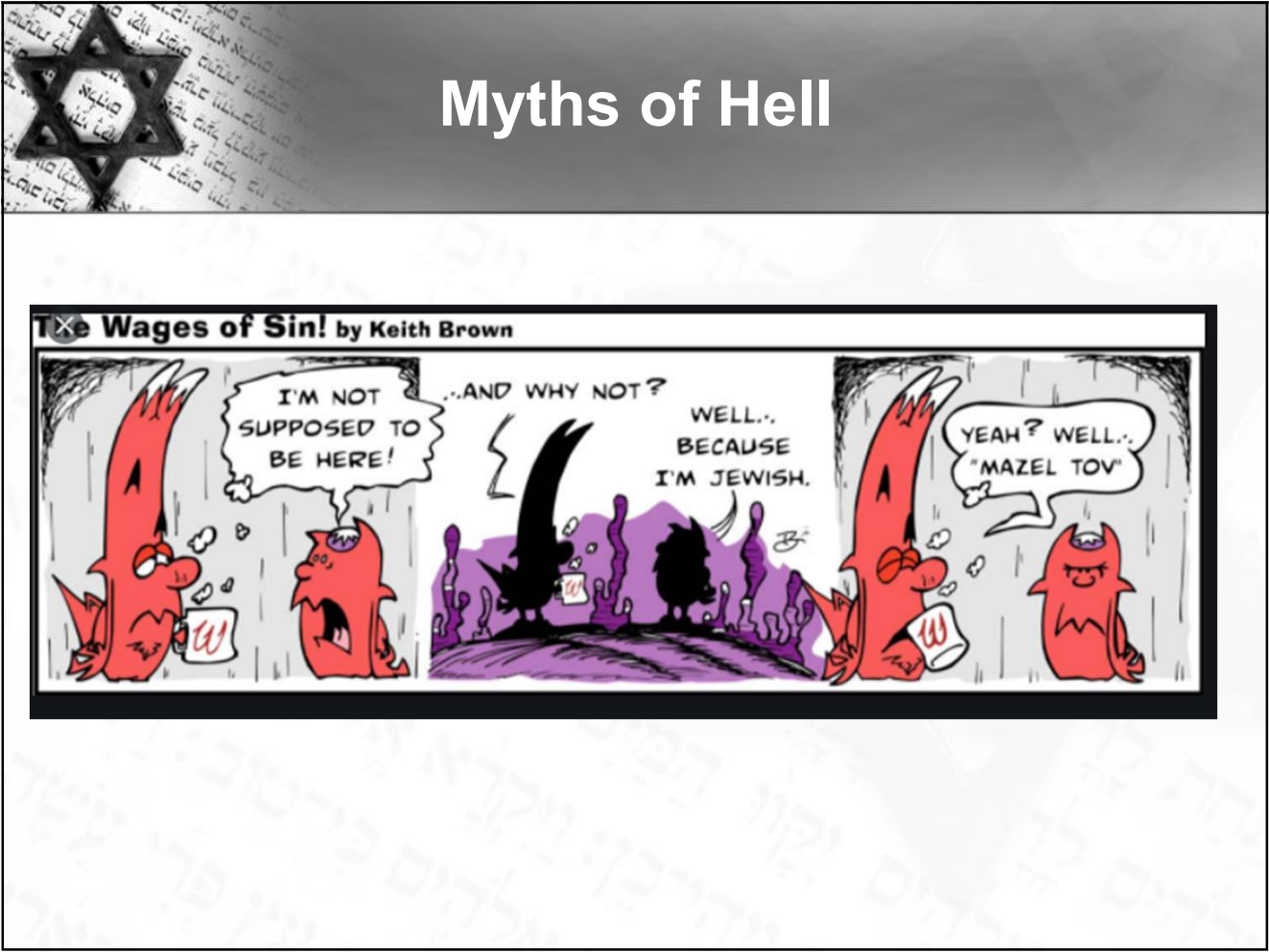
February 2nd—the six-week "hinge" or "cross quarter" day—is an ancient weather divination day which comes down to us, via Pennsylvania Dutch immigrants, in the form of Groundhog




**The Delightful & Surprising Mythology of  
Judaism  
Session 3: Myths of Hell and the Angel of Death**

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**

# Myths of Hell





## Wait... Jews Believe in the Afterlife?

**What do Jews believe about the afterlife?**

- I don't know – go ask them!
- But Judaism has always taught that there is something.
- Since nobody's come back to report, we don't know exactly what that something is.
- So, this opens the door on lots of wonderful myths.
- After a quick intro and views of heaven, we will focus on the Myths of Hell and briefly meet the Angel of Death.

**It's critical to bear in mind that Judaism's focus is on this world.**



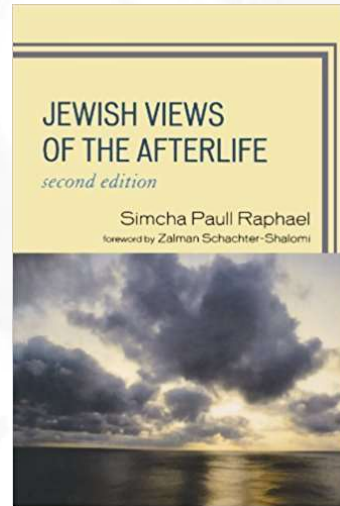
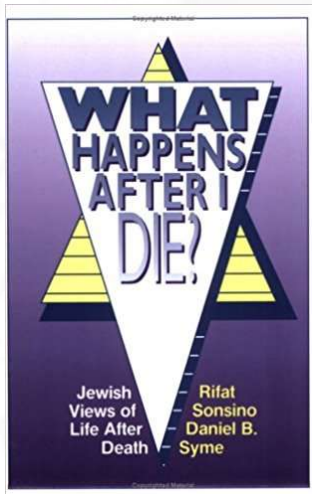
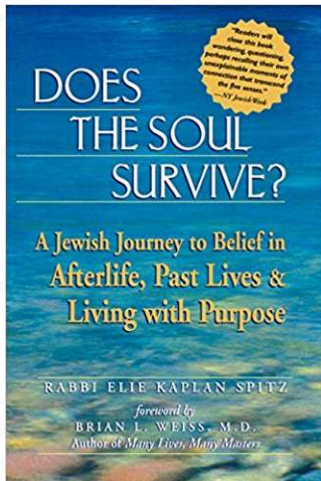
# Survey Results

## **According to a Pew Forum survey**

- **39% of Jews said they believed in an afterlife**
  - **Smallest of any group**
  - **Even smaller than “Unaffiliated” [48%]**
  - **About half the average of 74%**
- **But Jews had the highest response of “don’t know/refused to answer” of 14% [double the average of 7%]**
- **My own theory: “If the afterlife is so central to Christianity, we Jews must not believe it at all.”**



# Some Excellent Resources





## Some Rabbinic Descriptions of Paradise

[before we jump into hell!]

**“One sage maintained that three things – namely, Shabbat, sunshine, and sexual intercourse are central in this world as well as in the world to come (see *Ber. 57b*).**

**He was not alone in viewing paradise as a sensual place. We read that the righteous will sit at golden tables (*Ta’an. 25a*) on stools of gold (*Ket. 25a*) and participate in lavish banquets (*B.B. 75a*). A 3<sup>rd</sup> century Babylonian scholar, *Rav*, disagreed: ‘In the world to come there is neither eating nor drinking; no procreation of children or business transactions, no envy or hatred or rivalry but the righteous sit enthroned, their crowns on their heads, and enjoy the luster of the *Shechinah* (*Ber. 17a*).’”**

**Most of the rabbis saw Paradise as a place of reward agreeing with Rabbi Tarfon who taught: “You know that the bestowal of reward upon the righteous will be in the time to come.” (*Avot 2:16*).”**

**[From Soncino & Syme pp. 28-29.]**



## Myths of Heaven

### 217. THE SEVEN HEAVENS

There are seven heavens. The first serves to renew the work of Creation every day. The second is that in which the sun and moon and stars and constellations are set. In the third millstones grind manna for the righteous. In the fourth is the heavenly Jerusalem, where the Temple and altar are built. There Michael, Israel's guardian angel, makes offerings. In the fifth heaven there are companies of the ministering angels who are silent by day and utter divine songs at night.

In the sixth heaven are stored the treasuries of snow and hail, and the lofts of dews and raindrops, the chambers of whirlwind and storm, the cave of vapor and the doors of fire. The seventh is the highest heaven, *Aravot*, where are found the treasuries of peace and blessing, the souls of the righteous and the souls not yet created, as well as the dew with which God will revive the dead. So too are there many kinds of angels, the *Ofanim* and the *Seraphim* and the holy living creatures and the ministering angels. And the Throne of God, high and exalted, dwells over them all.

Sources:  
B. *Hagigah* 12b-13a; *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 37.



## Myths of Heaven

### 227. WOMEN IN PARADISE

There are six palaces in Paradise where the souls of the righteous women make their home. Each of these righteous women has a palace of her own. In each chamber there are beautiful canopies, with angels set over them, and every day they are crowned with the radiance of the *Shekhinah*.

The first palace is ruled by Bitiah, Pharaoh's daughter, who raised Moses as if he were her own son. She teaches the commandments of the Torah to the many thousands of myriads of pious women who are with her, and she serves as their queen. These women still maintain their human form, and they are clothed in garments of light, and there is great joy among them. Three times a day Bitiah goes to a place where there is a curtain, and bows before the image of Moses, saying, "Fortunate am I for drawing such a light out of the water."


The next palace is that of Serah bat Asher, who rules over thousands of myriads of righteous women. They busy themselves with praises of the Lord, and contemplate the commandments of the Torah. Three times a day Serah goes to a curtain and bows before the image of Joseph, saying, "Happy was the day on which I gave the good news about Joseph to my grandfather, Jacob."

The other palaces are presided over by Yocheved, the mother of Moses, Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses, and Deborah the prophetess. All day long the women are by themselves, as are the men, for there is a curtain spread out in Paradise that separates them. But every night they come together at midnight, for that is the hour of copulation. Then they cleave soul to soul and light to light, and the fruit of this union are the souls of those who become converts to Judaism.

Hidden deep within these six palaces are the four hidden palaces of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel. No one can imagine what joy and purity are found there, for no one has seen these palaces, or is permitted to reveal anything about them.

Sources:

*Zohar* 3:167a-b; *Shloyshe Sheorim*; *Sefer Ma'asei Adonai*; *Derekh Etz Hayim ve-Inyanei Gan Eden*, appended to *Sefer Ma'aneh Lashon* 152; *Derekh ha-Yashar le-Olam ha-Ba* 25; *Seder Gan Eden* (version B) in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:131-140.



## The Journey of the Soul After Death

The following is a synthesis of Kabbalistic understandings following the teaching of Simcha Raphael [pp. 273-327].

- *Nefesh* suffers the experience of the dying process, of the grave and separation from the physical body (takes 7 days of *shivah*). Experiences the River of Light, encounters angelic spirits and deceased relatives, undergoes life review.
- *Ruach* experiences the cleansing of *Gehenna*, a time to experience and resolve unresolved emotions [postmortem psychotherapy?]. This takes up to a year – deceased is helped by children’s *kaddish*, and enters lower *Gan Eden*, a world of emotional bliss where the personality is completed. And it gets a break from *Gehenna* on Shabbat.




## The Journey of the Soul After Death

- ***Neshamah*** takes another dip in the River of Light and enters Upper *Gan Eden*, the heavenly repose for the soul. The quality of your stay here depends on your focus in life. If it was on the physical, Upper *Gan Eden* won't seem like much; if it was on the spiritual you reap the spiritual reward and experience transcendent bliss. Yearly *kaddish* at time of *Yahrzeit* is said to elevate the soul to higher spheres annually. The sources speak of seeing God.
- ***Chayyah*** returns to the storehouse of souls in preparation for rebirth. If, in the previous stage, we see God, in this stage we are being with God in the *tzror ha-hayyim*, the “storehouse of souls” or the “bundle of life.” The associated mourning ritual is the 4 times/yr. *Yizkor*.



## The Journey of the Soul After Death

- ***Yehidah*** is joined with God and then is placed in the womb. The soul in the womb is shown the entire world, ***Gan Eden***, ***Gehenna*** and where it will live and die and some say, the entire Torah. When the moment of birth arrives, an angel touches the baby just beneath the nose and the soul forgets all it has learned.
- The rabbis believed that the dead can communicate with both the human (***Baba Batra 58a***) and heavenly (***Baba Metzia 85b***) realms, where they petition for mercy on behalf of the living (***Taanit 16a***). They speak of the dead being on the other side of a curtain. [Raphael p. 137-8]



## What is Hell (*Gehinnom*) Like

- The term “*Gehenna*” dates from the biblical period referring to a valley in Jerusalem called *Ge Ben Hinnom* (“the valley of the sons of *Hinnom*”). It was the site of a cult whose rituals included the sacrifice by burning of children (II Kings 23:10, Jer. 7:31).
- Talmud (R.H. 17a) “Wrongdoers of Israel who sin with their body, and wrongdoers of the gentiles who sin with their body, go to *Gehinnom* and are punished there for 12 months.” Although some sages argued that after 12 months they would be annihilated forever, Rabbi Akiva taught that “the judgement of the wicked in *Gehenna* shall endure [only] 12 months.” (*Ed. 2:10*). After this year, he taught (and his teaching prevailed), even the wicked would be returned to paradise. This is the source of the custom for mourning parents for 11 months.
- Rabbi Hanina (B.M. 58b) taught that punishment was temporary for all except the following: the adulterer, one who puts his fellow to shame in public, and one who calls his fellow by an obnoxious nickname.”


[Soncino & Syme, pp. 26-27]



# So Where is *Ge Ben Hinnom*?



The image is an aerial photograph of Jerusalem, overlaid with a map. The map features several yellow labels with arrows pointing to specific locations: 'Western Wall' on the left, 'Temple Mount' at the top center, 'David's palace?' in the center, 'Kidron Valley' on the right, 'Central Valley' at the bottom center, and 'Hinnom Valley' at the bottom. A red outline highlights a valley area between the Temple Mount and the Kidron Valley. A red label 'Possible location of Jerusalem in time of David' points to the red-outlined area. The map is credited to '©BiblePlaces.com' and includes a 'Pinterest' logo at the bottom left. The background of the slide is a grey gradient with a Star of David and Hebrew text in the top left corner.



## Myths of Hell

# Why Are There Strange Marriages?

### 277. DEMONIC DOUBLES

The kingdom of Satan is measure for measure like the kingdom of man. Every male child, when born, already has a double in the kingdom of demons. So too does every female, when she is born, have her shadow born there as well, in her precise shape and image, not unlike that seen in a mirror. And at the hour that a heavenly voice goes forth to announce that this one will be married to that one, a partner is also prepared at the same time in the spirit world. She sits and waits for him there from that time forward. And the man who is fortunate marries his partner from the family of man, but less fortunate is he who is found alone on the fourth night of the week or on the night of the Sabbath. For then he is in danger of being kidnapped by the sons of Satan, and led to a place that no man's feet should ever enter, there to marry, not his intended, but his intended's demonic double.

The Talmud explains that "Forty days before a person is born, a heavenly voice goes forth to say that this one will be married to that one" (*B. Sota 2a*). This knowledge is available to the angels, but not only to the angels—the demons, too, overhear this voice and make evil use of the knowledge they obtain. Thus, in effect, the *bashert* tradition, where a person seeks out and marries his or her "destined one," has been corrupted and effectively reversed by demons.

*Sources:*  
*The Testament of Solomon 20; Tzefunot ve-Aggadot.*



## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 288. THE LIGHT OF GEHENNA

Sometimes a light issues forth from Gehenna into the Garden of Eden. This is a sign that God has accepted the grief of one of the souls that is being punished. The soul's contrition warrants its entry into the Garden of Eden, where its suffering is transformed into delight.

This myth is in direct contrast to "The Darkness of Gehenna." It shows that God continues to monitor the grief of the sinners in Gehenna, and that He is prepared at a moment's notice to accept deeply felt repentance to free those sinners from the punishments of Gehenna. In contrasting Gehenna with the Christian concept of hell, it is important to note that the punishments of hell are supposed to last forever, while the time the soul of a sinner spends being punished in Gehenna is limited to a maximum of twelve months. And ultimately, when the Messiah comes, Gehenna will cease to exist.

*Sources:*

*Zohar 2:211b; Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik 153; Toldot Ya'akov Yosef; Sifram Shel Tzaddikim.*



## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 290. THE INHABITANTS OF GEHENNA

The souls of the wicked descend below to Gehenna, as it is said, *The spirit of the beast goes downward to the earth* (Eccles. 3:21). This includes the utterly wicked in Israel and the wicked among the nations of the earth. Both will go down to Gehenna, as it is said, *The wind shall carry them off, and the whirlwind shall scatter them* (Isa. 41:16).

This myth answers the question of whether the punishments of Gehenna are limited to Jews, or whether they apply to the wicked of other nations. Here both are described as being punished in Gehenna.

*Sources:*

*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* on Ecclesiastes 3:21; *Eliyahu Rabbah* 18:108-109; *Eliyahu Zuta* 11:192.



## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 293. THE FATE OF SLANDERERS

What is the fate of slanderers? When slander, spread about the earth, mounts even to the throne of glory, destroying angels descend at God's command and seize the slanderers and throw them into the furnace of Gehenna.

But Gehenna objects, saying, "The tongue of a slanderer reaches from earth up to the heavens. The entire world cannot stand him. First send your arrows at him, and then I will receive him, as it is said, *A warrior's sharp arrows, with hot coals of broom-wood* (Ps. 120:4)." Then those who slander are hung by their tongues and subject to all the tortures that Gehenna has to offer.

The most despicable figures in Gehenna are the slanderers. Not even Gehenna, personified here, can bear their presence. So Gehenna insists that God punish them first, and then Gehenna will receive them, according to the verse *A warrior's sharp arrows, with hot coals of broom-wood* (Ps. 120:4). Here the "coals of broom-wood" refers to the punishments of Gehenna. For another example of the personification of Gehenna, see "Gehenna Seething," p. 238.

Note that the sinners are cast into the furnace of Gehenna, where the hottest flames of Gehenna are burning. This is to demonstrate the seriousness of their sins.

Sources:

*Eliyahu Rabbah* 18:108



## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 294. SABBATH IN GEHENNA

Even the wicked in Gehenna enjoy a respite on the Sabbath. Every Sabbath eve, when the day becomes sanctified, the angel in charge of souls announces, "Let the punishment of the sinners cease, for the Holy King approaches and the Day is about to be sanctified. He protects all!" Instantly all punishment ceases, and the guilty have a respite. The sinners who observed the Sabbath are led to two mountains of snow, where they remain until the end of the Sabbath, when the angel in charge of the spirits shouts, "All evildoers, back to Gehenna—the Sabbath is over!" and they are thrust back to their former place in hell. Some of them, however, take snow with them to cool them during the six days of the week, but God says to them: "Woe to you who steal even in hell!"

But the fires of Gehenna do not come to a halt for those who never observed the Sabbath. Since they did not observe the Sabbath before, they have no respite.

*Sources:*

*Pesikta Rabbati 23:8; Orhot Hayim; Zohar 2:151a; Tola'at Ya'akov 58b; Sha'ar ha-Gemul; Nishmat Hayim 1:12, 1:14; Sefer ha-Zikhronot 15:7.*



## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 300. THE MESSIAH IN HELL

When Rabbi Joshua ben Levi found himself in the Garden of Eden, he decided to explore it as completely as he could. One by one he explored the nine palaces of the Garden of Eden, until he came to the palace of the Messiah. He recognized the Messiah by the splendor of his aura. There he saw how the patriarchs and kings came to the Messiah every Sabbath and holy day and wept, because it was not yet time for him to go forth into the world.

When Rabbi Joshua came before the Messiah, the Messiah said, "How are my children faring?" And Rabbi Joshua said: "Every day they await you." Then the Messiah gave a great sigh and wept.

After that the Messiah showed Rabbi Joshua all of the earthly garden and the heavenly one as well, and revealed the greatest mysteries to him. But when Rabbi Joshua asked to be shown hell, at first the Messiah refused, for the righteous are not permitted to behold hell. But when Rabbi Joshua told him that it was his intention to measure hell from beginning to end, the Messiah agreed to take him there.

So it was that Rabbi Joshua followed the Messiah until they reached the fiery gates of hell. When the angels guarding the gate saw that the Messiah was with him, they admitted him at once. Everywhere they went, Rabbi Joshua saw the punishments of hell, where avenging angels smite the wicked with flaming rods, and throw them into fiery pits, and after that hang them by their tongues, or by the organs with which they committed adultery. And although Rabbi Joshua tried to measure the compartments of hell, he found that they were boundless, as was the suffering of the wicked. But whenever the wicked in hell saw the light of the Messiah, they rejoiced and cried out, "There is the one who will bring us out of here."

*Sources:*

*Sefer ha-Zikhronot 21:1-11; Orhot Hayim; Aggadat Bereshit 51a-b.*



## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 303. PURIFIED SOULS

When the process of purification has been completed, the chief angels take a soul out of Gehenna and lead it to the Gate of Paradise. There they say to the angels standing guard: "This soul was broken after its ordeal in the infernal fire, and now it has come to you pure and white."

Then God causes the sun to penetrate the firmament and shed its rays on that soul and heal it.

The purpose of Gehenna is to purify the souls of sinners so that they can be permitted to enter paradise. This myth demonstrates how a soul is taken out of Gehenna. Note that this purification process is clearly described as a painful one, where the soul is purified in the fires of Gehenna.

*Sources:*  
*Zohar 2:211a.*





## Myths of Hell: Gehenna

### 304. HOW THE DEAD SEE THE DEAD

The day a person dies is the day of his judgment, when the soul parts from the body. A person does not leave this world until he sees the *Shekhinah*, accompanied by three ministering angels, who receive the soul of a righteous person. These angels examine a person's deeds, and insist that a person confess to all that the body has done with the soul in this world. After this confession, the soul of a righteous person rejoices in its parting from this world and looks forward with delight to the world to come. For when God takes the souls of the righteous, He takes it with gentleness. But when He takes the souls of the wicked, He does so through cruel angels, as it is said, *Therefore a cruel angel shall be sent against him* (Prov. 17:11).

After a man dies he can be seen by all the others who are dead. To each of them he appears as they last saw him alive: some see him as a youth, others as an old man. For the angel who guards the dead makes his soul assume these various forms so that all should recognize him by seeing him just as they saw him in life.

However, if a man is condemned to punishment in Gehenna, he is enveloped in smoke and brimstone, so that none of those being punished can see the punishment of any other. Thus none are put to shame, except for those who have put others to shame.

Sources:

*Sifre on Deuteronomy 357; Midrash ha-Ne'elam in Zohar 1:98a; Sefer ha-Zikhronot 11:6.*

Myths of the Angel of Death





## Myths of the Angel of Death

### 250. THE CREATION OF THE ANGEL OF DEATH

Some say that the only thing created on the first day of creation was the Angel of Death. How do we know this? By the word "darkness" in the verse *Darkness was over the face of the deep* (Gen. 1:2). But others say that when God created the world, there was no Angel of Death.

So when was the Angel of Death created? Some say it was at the time of the sin of Adam and Eve, for the serpent was the Angel of Death, and it caused death for the entire world. But others say that the Angel of Death did not come into being until Cain slew Abel, for until then no one had died, and there was no need for such an angel. Then God transformed Cain into the Angel of Death, as punishment for having slain his brother, and that is how the Angel of Death came into being.

Cain served as the Angel of Death for one hundred and thirty years, wandering and roaming about, accursed. After the death of Cain, Lamech took his place as the Angel of Death.

*Sources:*

*B. Avodah Zarah 22b; Genesis Rabbah 21:5; Exodus Rabbah 30:3, 38:2; Numbers Rabbah 23:13; Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, Bereshit 11; Zohar 1:35b; Me'am Lo'ez Bereshit 1:5.*



## Myths of the Angel of Death

### 252. RABBI LOEW AND THE ANGEL OF DEATH

One night, not long before the Holy Days were to begin, Rabbi Loew glimpsed a light in the synagogue across the way, and he wondered who might be there at that hour. He left his house, and as he approached the synagogue he saw through the window a strange figure standing at the pulpit. The closer Rabbi Loew came, the more sinister did the figure seem, and suddenly Rabbi Loew realized who it was—the Angel of Death—and at the same time he came close enough to see the angel sharpening a knife over a long scroll on which many names were written. Rabbi Loew was pierced with terror and resisted a powerful impulse to run away. But a moment later he became calm and self-possessed, and he knew what he had to do. As silently as possible he opened the door of the synagogue and came up behind the dreaded angel. All at once he snatched the long list out of the angel's hands, tearing it away from him, and ran from the synagogue to his home, where he threw the list into the flames and watched until every scrap of it had burned to ashes.



## Myths of the Angel of Death

Now the plague had begun to spread in the city, and that was the list of victims the Angel of Death had come to take in one fell swoop. Now only those on the piece of the list left in his hands fell victim to him; all the rest were spared. But among those on the list was Rabbi Loew, and it was he, above all, whom the deadly angel was determined to capture.

Rabbi Loew, who could read the lines of the future, knew that the angel would try to snatch him to seek revenge. But Rabbi Loew used his powers to avoid the angel, much as King David had done, studying Torah day and night. For the Angel of Death is forbidden to take a man while he is engaged in the study of Torah. Yet even so, the angel found a ruse by which to capture him. He hid in a rose of great beauty that grew in the garden of Rabbi Loew's grandson. One day the boy picked the rose as a gift for his grandfather, and as he held it in his hands to present to Rabbi Loew, the rabbi perceived the presence of the dark angel, hidden in the rose. Then he did not hesitate, but accepted the gift from his grandson, for he knew that if he did not, the boy's life would be endangered. But no sooner did Rabbi Loew take it in his hand than the Angel of Death struck him like a serpent and snatched his soul.

A major study of the legends of the Angel of Death was undertaken by Haim Schwarzbaum in the last years of his life. Professor Dov Noy tells the story that he once asked Schwarzbaum why it was taking him so long to finish his book on the Angel of Death. Schwarzbaum replied that he believed the Angel of Death would prefer to take him after he had finished the book, and that is why he was taking his time. Unfortunately, he died before the book was completed.

*Sources:  
Die Legenden der Juden; Die Wundermanner im Juedischen Volk.*



# The Angel of Conception & the Angel of Death

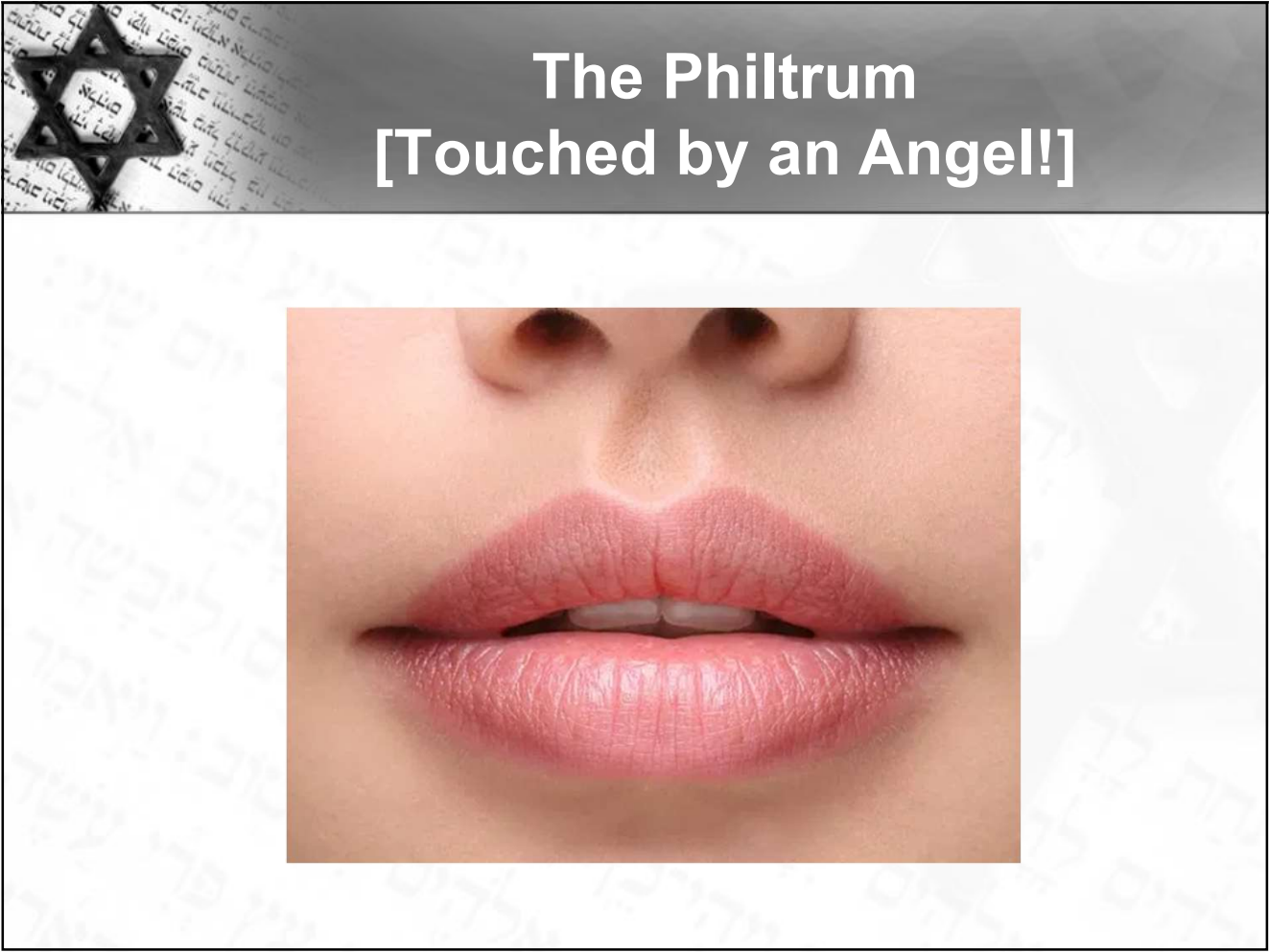
## 240. THE ANGEL OF CONCEPTION

Among the angels there is one who serves as the midwife of souls. This is Lailah, the Angel of Conception. When the time has come for a man and his wife to conceive a child, God directs Lailah to seek out a certain soul hidden in the Garden of Eden, and command it to enter a drop of semen. At first the soul refuses, for it still remembers the pain of being born, and it prefers to remain pure. But Lailah compels the soul to obey, and that is when God decrees what the fate of that sperm will be, whether male or female, strong or weak, rich or poor, and so on. Then the angel turns around and places the soul in the womb of the mother.


While the infant grows in the womb, Lailah places a lighted candle at the head of the unborn infant, so he can see from one end of the world to the other, as it is said, *His lamp shone above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness* (Job 29:3). For nine months Lailah watches over the unborn infant, teaching him the entire Torah as well as the history of his soul. During this time, the evil inclination has no power over him. And before he is born, he is given an oath to keep his soul pure, lest God take it back from him. Then Lailah leads the child into the Garden of Eden, and shows him the righteous ones with crowns on their heads. So too does Lailah lead the child to the netherworld and show him the punishments of Gehenna. But when the time has come to be born, the angel extinguishes the lamp, and brings forth the child into the world. The instant the child emerges, Lailah lightly strikes the newborn above the lip, causing it to cry out. And at that instant the infant forgets all it has learned. That is the origin of the mark on the upper lip, which everyone bears.

Indeed, Lailah is a guardian angel, who watches over that child all of his days. And when the time has come to take leave of this world, it is Lailah who comes to him and says, "Do you not recognize me? The time of your departure has come. I have come to take you from this world." Thereupon Lailah leads him to the World to Come, where he renders an accounting before God, and he is judged according to his merits.

B. Niddah 16b, 30b; B. Sanhedrin 96a; Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, Pekudei 3; Zohar Hadash 68:3; Sefer ha-Zikhronot 10:19-23; Be'er ha-Hasidut 1:216; Aseret ha-Dibrot 79; Avodat ha-Kodeah, Introduction; Nishmat Hayim 2:18; Anaf Yosef on B. Niddah 30b; Amud ha-Avodah 103b; Avkat Rahel in Beit ha-Midrash 1:153-155; Likutei ha-Pardes 4d-5c; IFA 4722, 18976.



# The Philtrum [Touched by an Angel!]




## Not Naming a Child After a Living Relative

One of these superstitions was that, due to the carelessness of the Angel of Death, harm may come to a child named like an older living person. For when the time comes for that older person to die, the Angel of Death, receiving instructions to take the life of the older person by that name, might instead take the life of the younger person of the same name. This belief in a possible mistake on the part of the Angel of Death, which we have found expressed in the story of the Talmud (Chagiga 3b-4a) cited above, was especially current and strongly believed in among the Ashkenazic Jews. This is evident from the following story told in *Sefer Chasidim* (*ibid.*, no. 375, p. 114): An older teacher and a young student happened to get married in the same week. The young student died during the very week of the wedding. In a dream he appeared to his mother and told her that he actually had many years yet to live but his untimely death was brought about by a mistake on the part of the Angel of Death. The latter received the order to take the life of the bridegroom who got married during that week. Of course, the order referred to the older teacher who also had been married during the same week. But the Angel of Death did not understand the order correctly. And when he met the young student bridegroom alone on the street,<sup>49</sup> he thought the order for the bridegroom of the week referred to him, and so he killed him. The story goes on to tell that all the years which had been allotted to the young student and which he had not lived out were then—by another mistake of the heavenly clerks—assigned to the old teacher, thus prolonging his life. Finding on their records that the bridegroom who got married that week—referring to the young student—had yet so many years to live, and finding only one living bridegroom who got married that week (the old teacher), they accordingly credited his account with that number of years.

There is no doubt that out of consideration for the safety of the child, and as a precaution against possible danger resulting from mistakes on the part of the Angel of Death, they avoided naming the child after a living father or grandfather, or—as the custom was in some places—after any living person. And it was not only fear of the death of the child, but also fear of sickness or any other punishment that might be decreed against the older person and which the angel charged with the execution of that decree might by mistake inflict upon the child having the same name.<sup>50</sup> For the Angel of Death is not the only one among the angels that is stupid and careless. The other heavenly officers are not much smarter and no more careful than he.

**CCAR RESPONSA**  
**American Reform Responsa**  
**59. Naming of Children**  
**(Vol. XLII, 1932, pp. 316-360)**





## Changing Your Name to Fool the Angel of Death

The belief that a change in the name effects a change in the status was strongly developed and almost generally accepted in Talmudic times, because of its connection with, or the support it derived from, the other notion so generally accepted in Talmudic times, namely, the fallibility of the spirits. It was believed that if a person is called by another name, the spirits, angels, or demons, who look for him under his old name, cannot find him. For under the new name they imagine him to be another person, a person about whom they have no order or against whom they have no charge or grudge. Thus, to escape danger from demons, it was considered an effective protection for husband and wife to exchange their names: he called himself by her name and she by his. The demons who might seek to harm the gentleman would find a person who, judging by his name, was a lady, whom they would refrain from harming. Likewise, the demons who might pursue the lady would give up their evil designs if they should find instead of the lady a person who, as the new name indicated, was a gentleman. The Talmud (Shabbat 67b) describes this practice of exchanging names as heathen superstition (Darchei HaEmori),<sup>23</sup> and is inclined to object to it. Yet the Talmud considers it perfectly good Jewish belief, that by a change of name one might escape the punishment decreed against him by the heavenly court. There are four procedures by which a person may cause the evil decree issued against him to be torn and destroyed, says the baraita R.H. 16b, and one of them is changing the person's name. Some people say that a change of place or residence may have the same effect.<sup>24</sup>


**CCAR RESPONSA**  
**American Reform Responsa**  
**59. Naming of Children**  
**(Vol. XLII, 1932, pp. 316-360)**



**The Delightful & Surprising Mythology of  
Judaism  
Session 4: Adam, Eve & the Garden of Eden**

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**

**Let's Return to Eden**



**Dress (beyond fig leaf)  
Optional!**



# Before the Beginning: Creation in Lurianic Kabbalah

## 155. THE SHATTERING OF THE VESSELS AND THE GATHERING OF THE SPARKS

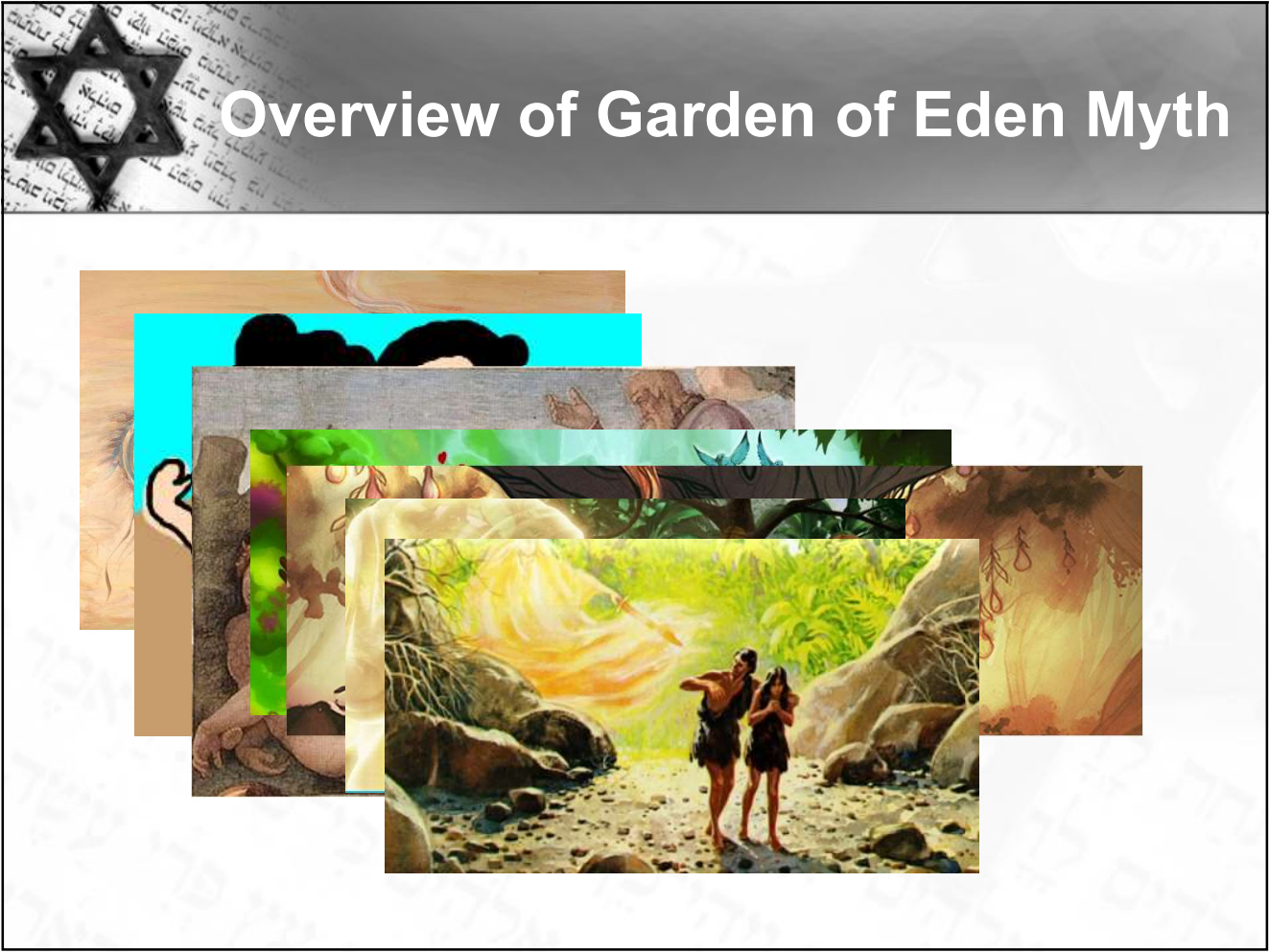
At the beginning of time, God’s presence filled the universe. Then God decided to bring this world into being. To make room for creation, God first drew in His breath, contracting Himself. From that contraction a dark mass was produced. And when God said, *Let there be light* (Gen. 1:3), the light that came into being entered the dark mass, and ten vessels came forth, each filled with primordial light.

In this way God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But somehow the frail vessels broke open, split asunder, and all the holy sparks were scattered, like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else.

That is why we were created—to gather the sparks, no matter where they are hidden. Some even say that God created the world so that Israel could raise up the holy sparks. And that is why there have been so many exiles—to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity. For in this way the people of Israel will sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth.

And when enough holy sparks have been gathered, the vessels will be restored, and the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally take place. Therefore it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their soul. And when the task of gathering the sparks nears completion, God will hasten the arrival of the final redemption by Himself collecting what remains of the holy sparks that went astray.

*Sources:*  
Zohar 3:135a-135b, *Idra Rabbah*; *Etz Hayim, Hekhal Nekuḏim, Sha’ar ha-Melakhim* 5; *Etz Hayim, Hekhal Adam Kadmon, Derush Igulim ve-Yosher* 2:24b:3-9; *Derush she-Masar* 18-20; *Mavo She’arim, Sha’ar* 2, pt. 1, 5:18-19; *Kanfei Yonah*; *Derush Heftzi Bah; Keter Shem Tov* 194; *Likutei Moharan* 49; *Makhon Sifte Tzaddikim* on Exodus 34:6; *B’nei Yisakhar, Nisan Ma’amar* 4; *Yigdal ha-Pardes* 8:60d; *Sefer Ba’al Schem Tov, va-Yetze* 8, 9; *Tanya* 25; *Be’er Mayim Hayim, Bereshit* 32; *Esh Kadosh; Wisdom of Solomon* 3:7, 7:25-27.





## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 173. ADAM THE HERMAPHRODITE

Some say that Adam was originally created with two faces, one male and one female, one facing forward and one behind, as it is said, *Male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:27). Others say that Adam and Eve were created as a single being, with Adam in front and Eve in back, so that Adam's back was in the shape of Eve.

How did this happen? God had originally intended to create two people, but ultimately only one was brought into being.

But facing in two directions made walking difficult, and conversation awkward. So God changed His mind and split Adam into two, making two backs, one for Adam and one for Eve, and dividing them into two separate beings.

Then there are those who say that Adam lost his second face in a different way, through his sin. For when Adam sinned, God took away one of his faces.

This myth is a very clear parallel to a Greek myth found in pre-Socratic sources, and most famously in Plato's *Symposium* 189a-190a, that every person seeks to find his or her other half. That myth is intended to explain the nature of Eros as a craving for completeness, since each person is only a part of what he or she once was. This meaning does not really carry over in the Jewish version of this myth, except by implication. The closest concept in Judaism is that of *bashert*, in which every person is said to have a destined one. This grows out of the talmudic dictum that "Forty days before a child is formed, a voice goes forth from heaven to declare that this one will marry that one" (B. Sota 2a).

*Sources:*

B. Eruvin 18a; B. Berakhot 61a; B. Ketubot 8a; *Genesis Rabbah*. 8:1, 8:10; *Leviticus Rabbah* 14:1; *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* 1:8; *Midrash Tehillim* 139:5; *Shoher Tov* 139:5; Maharsha on Genesis 1:27; *Zohar* 3:44b; *Zohar Hadash* 55c-d; *Likutei Moharan* 1:108.



## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 180. THE FIRST WEDDING

God had already created the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. All of the animals were in the Garden of Eden. The time had come for Adam, the first man, to be created.

God called upon the angel Gabriel to bring clay from each of the four corners of the earth, the north, the south, the east, and the west. This the angel did, and then God formed a clay man and breathed the breath of life into him and the man opened his eyes and began to breathe.

Adam gave names to all the animals and explored the Garden of Eden. But God saw that Adam was lonely, and He decided to create a mate for him.

So one day, when Adam was strolling about in the Garden of Eden, God put Adam to sleep, and while he was deeply dreaming, God took out one of his ribs, and with that rib God created Eve, the first woman.

When Adam awoke and saw Eve standing in front of him, their faces illuminating each other, he understood at once that he had found his true mate. God introduced Adam to Eve and explained how she had been created. Then Adam embraced her and kissed her and said, "*This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken*" (Gen. 2:23).

Then God knew that the time had come for the world's first wedding. God Himself prepared tables of precious pearls and filled them with delicacies.

God also created ten wedding canopies for them, all made of precious gems, pearls, and gold. So too did He attire Eve, the first bride, in a beautiful wedding dress, and braid her hair and adorn her with twenty-four different ornaments.

As the ceremony began, the ministering angels walked before Adam, leading him beneath the wedding canopies. Michael and Gabriel were Adam's groomsmen. Then God Himself brought the bride to Adam and stood before them like a cantor, and took the cup of blessing and blessed them, as it is said, *God blessed them* (Gen. 1:28).

As soon as Adam and Eve were wed, still other angels descended to the Garden of Eden, playing music for the newlyweds, beating tambourines and dancing to pipes. So too did the sun, the moon and the stars dance for them, and all of creation joined in the celebration of the world's first wedding.

**Sources:**

B. Eruvin 18a; B. Berakhot 61a; B. Niddah 45a; B. Shabbat 95a; Genesis Rabbah 8:13, 18:1; Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 4:4, 26:3; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 12; Avot de-Rabbi Natan 4; Sefer ha-Zikhronot 7:1-2; Pesikta Rabbati 14:10; Zohar 3:19a, 3:44b.



## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 131. THE ORIGIN OF FIRE

For the first week of Creation, the sun shone day and night. But when the sun sank at the end of the Sabbath, and darkness came closer, Adam grew terrified. He cried out to God that the serpent was coming to harm him. Then God told Adam to take two flints and to strike them against each other. And when he did, fire came forth, much to Adam's amazement, and he uttered a spontaneous blessing over it. That is why a blessing is recited over a candle at the end of the Sabbath, for fire was then created for the first time.

Myths of origin are common in all mythic systems, including Judaism. Myths of the creation of the world, of the origin of man, and here, of the origin of fire, are all found in Jewish sources. Here God tells Adam how to make a fire, rubbing flints together. This first fire is tied to the darkness that descends after the sun sets at the end of the Sabbath. Thus a series of origins are all linked together: the first Sabbath, the first sunset, the first darkness, the origin of fire—and the origin of the first blessing for the first *Havdalah* service, which takes place at the end of the Sabbath. See "Adam Brings Down Fire from Heaven," p. 137.

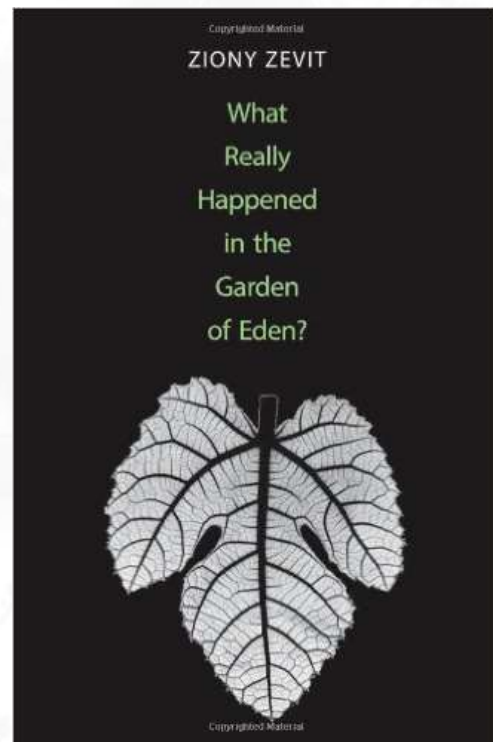
*Sources:*

*B. Sanhedrin 38b, 100a; B. Hagigah 12a; B. Pesahim 54a; B. Avodah Zarah 8a; Genesis Rabbah 8:1, 11:2, 21:3; Exodus Rabbah 32:1; Leviticus Rabbah 14:1, 16:2; B. Pesahim 54a; Pesikta Rabbati 23:6.*



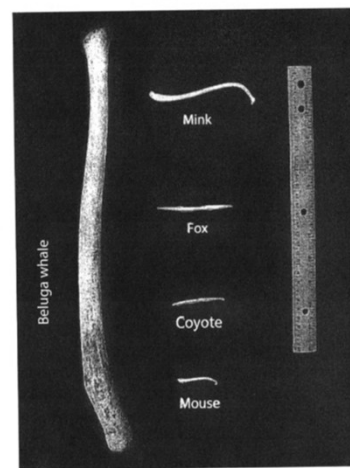
# A Scholar's Insight Into the Myth of the Surgery

- From Ziony Zevit's book (Yale University Press, 2013)
- The Israelites knew human and animal skeletal structure.
  - Human from ossuaries
  - Animal from eating
- They knew that human males and females had the same number of ribs (and other bones)
- So, is there a bone which male animals have that females don't and which the human male doesn't have?

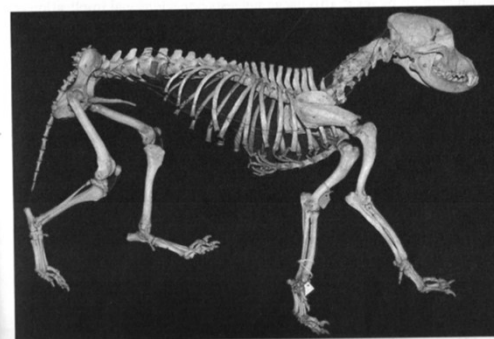


# The Baculum or Os Penis

- **Most male mammals have a penis bone, called the baculum or os penis.**
- **This bone is absent in humans and spider monkeys.**
- **The phrase “...closed up the flesh at that spot” (lit. “beneath it...” (Gen. 2:21 - ויסגר בֶּשֶׁר תַּחְתָּנָה) may refer to the perineal raphe or seam/scar under the male scrotum.**



Bacula from Selected Mammals  
(Courtesy of Scott E. Gilbert, Department of Biology, Martin Biological Laboratories, Swarthmore College.)





## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 556. EVE TASTES THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

God told Adam, *"Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die"* (Gen. 2:16-17). But Adam told Eve, *"God has said, 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die'"* (Gen. 3:3).

At that time the serpent said to himself, *"Perhaps I cannot convince Adam, who heard the words of God for himself. So I will seek out Eve."*

The serpent found Eve in the garden and said, *"Is it true that God has commanded you not to eat of any fruit in the garden?"* Eve replied, *"No, there is only one tree in the midst of the garden forbidden to us. We are not allowed to eat of its fruit or even to touch it, for on that day we shall die."*

The serpent laughed when he heard this, and said, *"God has only said this out of jealousy, for He knows that if you eat of the fruit of that tree, your eyes will be opened, and you will know how to create a world just as He did."* Then the serpent went to the tree in the midst of the garden and shook it, so that some of the fruit fell to the ground. *"See, I have touched the tree and I have not died. You, too, can touch it without dying."*

When Eve saw the serpent touch the tree and not die, she picked up one of the fruits that had fallen and, seeing that it was beautiful and desirable, she tasted it. But no sooner had she taken a single bite, than her teeth were set on edge, and she saw the Angel of Death standing before her, with his sword drawn. Then Eve said to herself, *"Now that I have eaten of this fruit, I will die, and Adam, who has not touched it, will live forever, and God will couple him with another woman. It is better that we die together."*



## Myths of Adam & Eve

So when Adam came she gave him some of the fruit to taste. And as soon as he did, he too saw the Angel of Death standing before him, with sword drawn. Then Adam knew that the fruit she had given him must have been the forbidden fruit, and he was filled with grief.

Others say that the serpent did not wait for Eve to touch the tree, but pushed her against it and said, "See, you have not died. And just as you didn't die from touching the tree, so you will not die from eating its fruit." So Eve plucked the fruit and held it up and tasted its skin. When nothing happened, she bit into the fruit, and that is when she saw the Angel of Death.

*Sources:*

*Targum Pseudo-Yonathan on Gen. 3:6 ; Bereshit Rabbah 19:3-4; Avot de-Rabbi Natan 1, 4-5, 151; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 13; Zohar 1:263b; Sefer ha-Zikhronot 12 .*



## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 564. WHAT THE SERPENT SAID TO EVE

In order to convince Eve to taste the forbidden fruit, the serpent said: *“But God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God”* (Gen. 3:5-6). Know that God ate of this tree and then created the world. That is why He has commanded you not to eat of it, lest you create other worlds. The truth is that you were brought into being to rule over everything. Make haste and eat before God creates other worlds that will dominate you.” And Eve saw how plausible were the words of the serpent, and she tasted the fruit.

This midrash adds significantly to the biblical version in having the serpent suggest to Eve that God Himself gained His powers after eating from the Tree of Knowledge. While the serpent’s original comments promised Eve knowledge, they did not imply that God obtained His knowledge in this way. But the rabbis, reading between the lines, saw a hint of such a meaning in the serpent’s comments and made this hint explicit. To do so is to belittle God’s unique powers, and it turns the serpent into a heretic. Thus this midrash may be viewed as aimed not only at the serpent, but at those with Gnostic views who failed to acknowledge God’s unique powers as Creator of the world.

Sources:  
*Genesis Rabbah* 19:4.

# Myths of Adam & Eve



The serpent came to Eve when she was alone and possessed her and infused her with lust. That is how the serpent fathered Cain.

*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*



## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 572. HOW CAIN WAS CONCEIVED

Samael was the great prince in heaven. After God created the world, Samael took his band of followers and descended and saw the creatures that God had created. Among them he found none so skilled to do evil as the serpent, as it is said, *Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts* (Gen. 3:1). Its appearance was something like that of a camel, and Samael mounted and rode upon it. Riding on the serpent, the angel Samael came to Eve in the night and seduced her, and she conceived Cain. Later, while Eve was pregnant by the angel, Adam came to her, and she conceived Abel.

Others say it was the serpent himself who seduced Eve, for after he saw Adam and Eve coupling, the serpent conceived a passion for her. He even imagined killing Adam and marrying Eve. So he came to Eve when she was alone and possessed her and infused her with lust. That is how the serpent fathered Cain, who was later to slay his own brother. And that is how Eve was infected with his impurity. As a result, all of Israel was impure from that time until the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. Only then did Israel's impurity cease.

When Cain was born, Adam knew at once that he was not of his seed, for he was not after his likeness, nor after his image. Instead, Cain's appearance was that of a heavenly being. And when Eve saw that his appearance was not of this world, she said, *I have gained a male child with the help of Yahweh* (Gen. 4:1).

It was not until the birth of Seth that Adam had a son who was in his own likeness and image. From Seth arose all of the generations of the righteous, while all the generations that descended from the seed of Cain are wicked, until this very day.



## Myths of Adam & Eve

*Zohar* 1:36b explains that two came upon Eve, the serpent and Adam, and that she became pregnant from both of them, and bore two sons. The son of the serpent is, of course, Cain. In order to explain why Cain was evil and Abel was good, *Zohar* 1:54a explains that Cain was conceived from the side of unholiness and Abel from the side of holiness. As a result, Abel was in the likeness of God's image, as stated in the verse *And God created man in His image* (Gen. 1:27). But Cain was of the likeness of the nether image. Just what this is isn't clear, although one commentary, *Ziv ha-Zohar*, identifies the nether image as that of an ape. Because Cain was from the side of the Angel of Death (another possible explanation of the "nether image"), he killed his brother.

*Sources:*

*Targum Pseudo-Yonathan* on Genesis 4:1; *B. Shabbat* 145b-146a; *B. Sota* 9b; *B. Yevamot* 103b; *B. Avodah Zarah* 22b; *Genesis Rabbah* 18:6; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 13, 21, and 22; *Zohar* 1:28b, 1:36b-137a, 1:54a, 1:55a; 1:243b, 2:52a; *Magen Avot* 53.





## Myths of Adam & Eve

### 575. THE WIVES OF CAIN AND ABEL

Where did the wives of Cain and Abel come from? On the day that Adam and Eve were created, on that very day they coupled, and on that very day they produced offspring. It is said that two entered the bed and seven left it, for Cain was born with a twin sister, and Abel was born with two sisters.

Cain married Abel's twin, and Abel married Cain's. But they could not agree on the fate of Abel's second twin. Indeed, it is said that she was the subject of the dispute between the two brothers, out of which Cain slew his brother Abel, and the voices of the blood of the families who were destined to issue forth from Abel cried out before God.

*Sources:*

*Genesis Rabbah 22:2-3, 22:7; Targum Onkelos on Genesis 4:9; Sefer ha-Zikronot 23:26.*



**The Delightful & Surprising Mythology of  
Judaism**  
**Session #5: Myths of the Messiah**

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**

# For Copies of the Texts & Recordings of the Sessions Go To [www.lotker.com](http://www.lotker.com)

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**

Welcome to Rabbi Michael Lotker's website. Here, you will find information about Rabbi Lotker, his services and his book, *A Christian's Guide to Judaism*.

On this website, you will learn a bit about Rabbi Lotker, be able to contact him, learn about the services he offers, learn about his classes and talks, access class materials, hear some of his sermons, and learn about his book, *A Christian's Guide to Judaism*.

Rabbi Lotker opens a session at the US House of Representatives.

**Navigation Menu:** Home, Rabbi Lotker, Weddings, Life Cycles & Funerals, A Christian's Guide, Classes, Sermons, Contact Rabbi Lotker.

**Class Announcement:**

**Wait! – What! The Delightful & Surprising Mythology of Judaism**  
*Judaism has a rich mythology that is unknown to most of us. In a series of 5 classes, Rabbi Lotker will introduce the enormous range of classic texts (including Torah, Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalistic, medieval folklore and Hasidic) that contribute to this eye-opening treasure. Subjects will include myths of Angels, the Garden of Eden, the Messiah, Hell, the Angel of Death, Lilith and the Shekinah – the bride of God. Much of the material will be drawn from Howard Schwartz's Tree of Souls: the Mythology of Judaism. The class is brought to us courtesy of the Jewish Federation of Ventura County and there is no charge to attend.*

*The class will take place on 5 consecutive Tuesday evenings, Feb. 2, 9, 16, 23 and March 2 from 7-8pm in my Zoom room.*

**Session Texts and Recordings:**

- >>> [Texts for Sessions 1 & 2 - Intro - Lilith - & Shekinah<<<](#)
- >>> [Texts for Session 3 - Heaven - Gehennah/Hell & the Angel of Death<<<](#)
- >>> [Texts for Session 4 - Adam & Eve and the Garden of Eden<<<](#)
- >>> [Texts for Session 5 - The Messiah<<<](#)
- >> [Click for recording of session #1- Introduction and Lilith<<](#)
- >> [Click for recording of session #2- The Shekinah - Bride of God<<](#)
- >> [Click for recording of session #3- Heaven, Hell & the Angel of Death<<](#)
- >> [Click for recording of session #4- Adam & Eve and the Garden of Eden<<](#)



# A Word From Our Sponsor


**Rabbi Lotker's services as our  
Community Rabbi is made possible by:**



**Jewish Federation**  
OF VENTURA COUNTY  
7620 Foothill Road  
Ventura, CA 93004-1125

THE **STRENGTH** OF A PEOPLE  
THE **POWER** OF COMMUNITY

To make a donation to the Jewish Federation Teaching Tolerance Program  
please contact us at 647-7800 or visit us on the web at [www.jewishventuracounty.org](http://www.jewishventuracounty.org)



## Key Point to Remember

**Because Judaism's focus is on this world and what we are to do in this world and not so much on what we are to believe...**

**...we are more than free to speculate, wonder, dream, explore, imagine and enjoy a wide array of myths without imposing theological problems or accusations of heresy.**

# Myths of the Messiah



Messiah

יחי אדונו מורנו ורבינו מלך המשיח לעולם ועד



## Jewish Understanding of Messiah

English “Messiah” is a translation of the Hebrew “*Mashiach*” [משיח]

- *Mashiach* means “anointed.”
  - Kings of Israel were anointed by pouring holy oil on their heads.
  - 39 references to “messiah” in Heb. Bible
    - Not one refers to future redeemer
- When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (about 200 BCE), the Hebrew *Mashiach* became the Greek “*Christos*” [Χριστός].
- The Greek *Christos* gives rise to the English “Christ.”



## Jewish Understanding of Messiah

- Fully Human and Only Human
- A Political and/or Military Ruler like King David
- Not God in any sense
- Not the son of God in any sense beyond the idea that we are all children of God
- Not connected with redemption of sin
  - Only we can atone for our sins
  - For sins against God, God forgives
  - For sins against others, God cannot forgive unless the person offended forgives
- Messiah not at the heart of Judaism





## Jewish Prophecies Concerning Messiah

- A time of peace on earth
  - Peace among people
  - Peace among animals
- All the world will come to know the one God
- Details unresolved
  - Mystics see the time as supernatural
  - Rationalists believe that we will do the work to make the world perfect
  - Many believe in a Messianic Age rather than an individual Messiah.

# My “Has the Messiah Come?” Test

- Read the LA Times cover to cover every day for a month.
- If there’s no story of war, or hatred or hunger or disease, the Messianic Age may be here!



## Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus As Messiah?

- No world peace, no Messiah
- The Second Coming not a Jewish idea
- But the larger issue is whether Jesus is God
  - The idea of God taking human form, suffering with us and dying for our sins is
    - Beautiful and inspiring
    - But not Jewish!
- This is why I can have great respect for Christianity but less sympathy for “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jews”



## Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus As Messiah?

- No world peace, no Messiah
- The Second Coming not a Jewish idea
- But the larger issue is whether Jesus is God
  - The idea of God taking human form, suffering with us and dying for our sins is
    - Beautiful and inspiring
    - But not Jewish!
- This is why I can have great respect for Christianity but less sympathy for “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jews”
- **This issue is not “Who was Jesus” but “Who is God.”**

A graphic with a Star of David on the left and Hebrew text in the background. The text reads: "Moving on From the Rationalist Approach... ... Let's Explore Some Wonderful Myths of the Messiah!"

**Moving on From the Rationalist Approach...**

**... Let's Explore Some Wonderful Myths of the Messiah!**



## Myths of the Messiah

[Note: Schwartz's book contains 63 separate myths of the Messiah. I have had to be extremely selective.]

### 610. THE SCALES OF THE MESSIAH

The Messiah was created when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. At that time God commanded Elijah the Prophet to bring scales to him. On one side of the scales Elijah would place the captive Messiah, along with the souls of the dead, and Elijah would fill the other scales with tears, torture, and the souls of the *Tzaddikim*. And when this had been done, God announced that the face of the Messiah would be seen when the scales were balanced.

This orally collected myth portrays the conditions that would enable the coming of the Messiah—a balancing of heavenly scales with the Messiah on one side with the souls of the dead, and the suffering of Israel with the souls of the *Tzaddikim* on the other. The idea is that God is well aware of the suffering of Israel, and when the time is right, He will send the Messiah to ease that suffering. This suggests a kind of heavenly mechanism to trigger the messianic era and the End of Days.

Sources:  
IFA 6929.



## Myths of the Messiah

### 611. THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MESSIAH

King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former glory. He will rebuild the Temple and gather all the exiles of Israel. All ancient laws will be reinstated in his days; sacrifices will again be offered; the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will again be observed according to the commandments set forth in the Law.

This statement by Maimonides is quite definitive, except that it does not include the resurrection of the dead, the last of Maimonides' own Thirteen Principles. Indeed, in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Melakhim* 11:3, Maimonides denies that the Messiah will bring the dead to life: "Do not think that King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, revive the dead, or do similar things."

The two other major requirements of the Messiah are listed here by Maimonides: the rebuilding of the Temple and the Ingathering of the Exiles. Thus Maimonides downplays the supernatural elements in the messianic tradition, viewing the messianic era in practical terms that could be accomplished without overthrowing the laws of nature. Indeed, in 12:1, he states this explicitly: "Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course."

*Sources:*

*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Melakhim* 11:1.



# Myths of the Messiah

## 613. THE DESCENT OF THE MESSIAH'S SOUL

The soul of the Messiah lives in a palace in heaven. There is a potential Messiah born on earth in every generation. That person, known as the *Tzaddik ha-Dor*, the most righteous of his generation, has both an earthly soul and a heavenly soul. If the time is right for the Messiah to come, then the heavenly soul will descend and fuse with the earthly soul, and the days of the Messiah will have arrived.


In recent times some members of the Lubavitch Hasidim came to believe strongly that their Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, was the Messiah. In addition to a public campaign for "Messiah Now," Lubavitch theologians searched the existing messianic traditions for evidence that the Rebbe, as he was universally known, was the Messiah. Here they encountered two apparently contradictory traditions. One holds that the Messiah is a divine figure, who makes his home in a heavenly palace. The other tradition holds that the Messiah will be the *Tzaddik ha-Dor*, the greatest sage of his generation—a human being. These were originally two separate messianic traditions in Judaism, but they were eventually linked. The earthly, human Messiah was

identified as Messiah ben Joseph, who was said to pave the way for the heavenly Messiah, known as Messiah ben David. However, this myth held that Messiah ben Joseph would lose his life in the process. Before the death of the Rebbe, Jacob Immanuel Schochet, a prominent Lubavitch scholar, often lectured on the subject of the Messiah. There was no doubt that his descriptions of the qualities of the Messiah were intended to refer to the Rebbe. In these lectures, Schochet presented a new messianic theory, combining the myths of Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David into a single myth. Here, rather than having one Messiah prepare the way for the other, the figure of the Messiah was simultaneously human and divine. This was made possible by the descent of the soul of the heavenly Messiah into the body of the human one. Thus, in the Lubavitch view, the heavenly Messiah himself will not descend, but merely his soul, which will fuse with the soul of the human Messiah. This made it possible to explain how a human, such as the Rebbe, could fulfill the role of Messiah ben David, the heavenly Messiah.

*Sources:*

4 Ezra 12:32, 13:25-26, 51-52; Lubavitch, oral tradition related by Jacob Immanuel Schochet.





## Myths of the Messiah

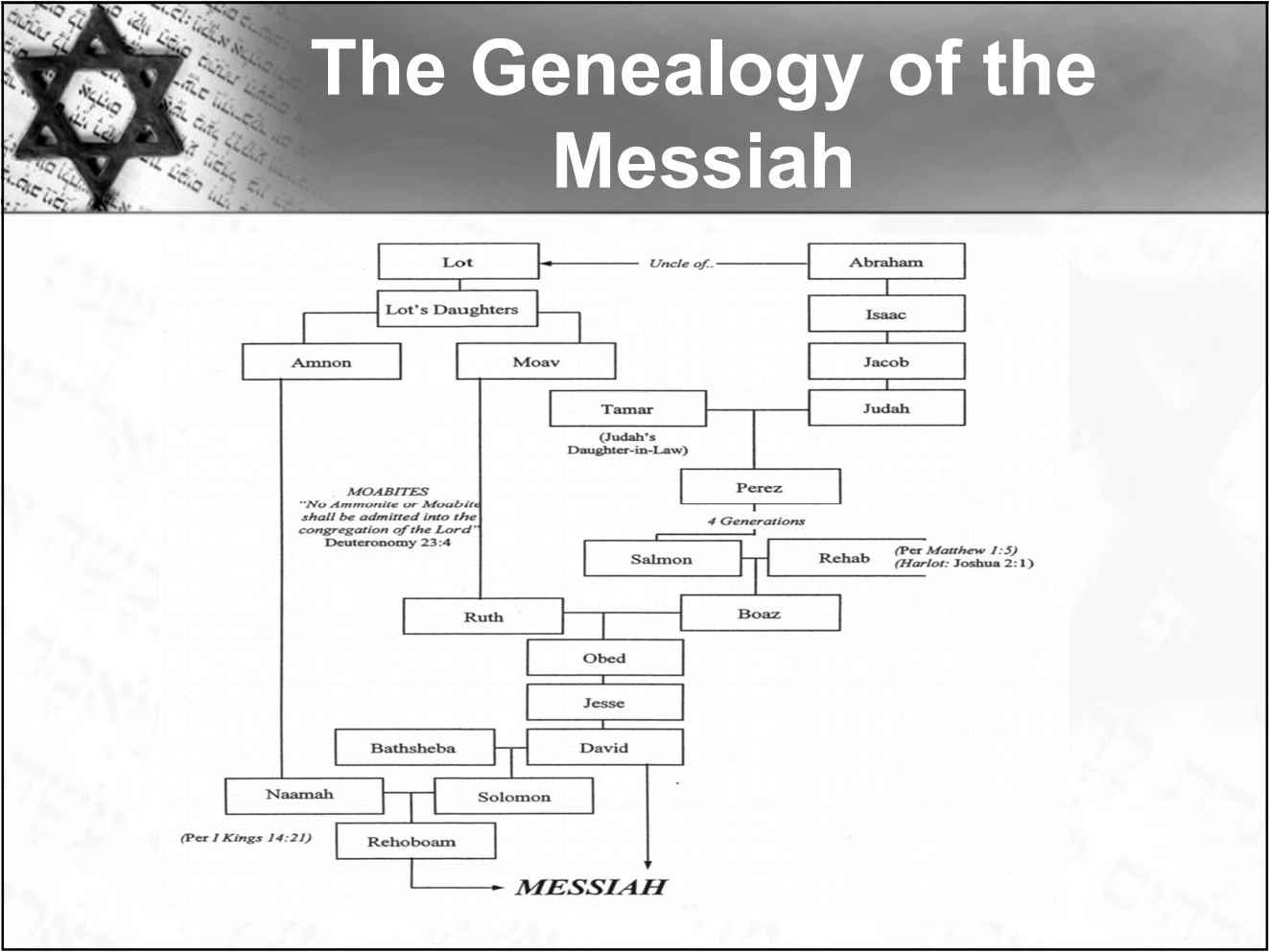
**615. THE MESSIAH WILL DESCEND FROM THE SIDE OF EVIL**

For reasons known only to Him, God caused events to occur whereby the Messiah will be born from the realm of evil, for the Messiah will descend from the House of David. And King David was descended from Ruth the Moabite, and Moab was the son of one of the two daughters of Lot. After the destruction of Sodom, Lot, who was intoxicated, committed incest with his daughters. Thus when God said, “*I have found David*” (Ps. 89:21), where did He find him? In Sodom. Thus the soul of the Messiah is descended from such a place.

If the Messiah were to descend from a righteous person rather than the incestuous Lot, no enemy would have been able to prevail against Israel, or cause them to be forced into exile. God ordained things to happen this way, although no one knows why. David wanted to banish the evil side from which he had been born, eliminating it from the world, but he was unable to do so, for he had no power over the side of evil, since he had been born from it.

In the *Zohar* and later kabbalistic and Hasidic commentaries, the incestuous union of Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38) is identified as the source of the power of the *Yetzer ha-Ra*, the Evil Impulse. This leads to the mysterious conclusion that the Messiah will descend from the side of evil. The key concept here is that the Messiah’s soul is closest to evil, possessing great intensity. But in the messianic era the evil soul will be transformed, by a process of *tikkun*—repair or restoration—into the good.

*Sources:*  
*Genesis Rabbah* 41:5; *Zohar* 1:109a-112a; *No’am Elimelekh, Likutei Shoshanah*, p. 101a;  
*Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, no. 111.



**If you would like to study the details of this odd origin of the Messiah:  
Go to [www.lotker.com](http://www.lotker.com)**

The screenshot shows the website for Rabbi Michael Lotker. On the left is a vertical navigation menu with items: Home, Rabbi Lotker, Weddings, Life Cycles & Funerals, A Christian's Guide to Judaism, Classes, Sermons, and Contact Rabbi Lotker. On the right is a horizontal navigation menu with items: Home, Rabbi Lotker, Weddings, Life Cycles & Funerals, A Christian's Guide to Judaism, Classes, Sermons, and Contact Rabbi Lotker. The 'Classes' item in both menus is circled in black. A large black arrow points from the 'Classes' item in the horizontal menu to a yellow highlighted article box at the bottom. The article box contains the following text:

***Illicit Sexual Encounters in the Bible.***  
*We will be carefully reading some of the most interesting and unusual stories in the Hebrew Bible - ones that you never, ever studied in Hebrew School. A careful review of the lineage of King David and the Messiah and what it teaches us about your family and mine and the ultimate task of redemption.*  
*>> Since this class is complete, here are videos of the sessions - click and enjoy <<*  
*> Session #1*  
*Session #2*



## Myths of the Messiah

### 620. THE LADDER OF PRAYERS

The Ba'al Shem Tov was once praying with his Hasidim. That day he prayed with great concentration, not only word by word, but letter by letter, so that the others finished long before he did. At first they waited for him, but before long they lost patience, and one by one they left.

Later the Ba'al Shem Tov came to them and said: "While I was praying, I ascended the ladder of your prayers all the way into Paradise. As I ascended, I heard a song of indescribable beauty. At last I reached the palace of the Messiah, in the highest heavens, known as the Bird's Nest. The Messiah was standing by his window, peering out at a tree of great beauty. I followed his gaze and saw that his eyes were fixed on a golden dove, whose nest was in the top branches of that tree. That is when I realized that the song pervading all of Paradise was coming from that golden dove. And I understood that the Messiah could not bear to be without that dove and its song for as much as a moment. Then it occurred to me that if I could capture the dove, and bring it back to this world, the Messiah would be sure to follow.

"So I ascended higher, until I was within arm's reach of the golden dove. But just as I reached for it, the ladder of prayers collapsed."

*Sources:*

*Midrash Ribesh Tov; Or ha-Hokhmah, Parashat Beha'alotekha.*



## Myths of the Messiah

### 628. THE CAPTIVE MESSIAH

For many generations the Messiah has sat captive, chained with golden chains before the Throne of Glory. Elijah has tried to release him many times, but he has never succeeded. So Elijah descends to earth and explains that in order to break the chains of the Messiah, he needs a magic saw whose teeth are the deeds of Israel. Every deed adds a tooth to this saw, but every sin takes one away. When there are twice as many good deeds as there are sins, then the saw can be used. That is why it is said that the Messiah will not come until we bring him.

A number of texts describe the Messiah as bound in chains. According to *Pirkei Hekhalot Rabbati*, for example, God will tie up the Messiah hand and foot for eight years, and during the years that the Messiah is fettered, God will hide His face from him. This is a reminder that the decision of bringing the End of Days, which the Messiah will herald, does not belong to the Messiah, but to God, or to the people Israel, whose good deeds will make it possible. Adding to the complexity, there are even myths in which God Himself is in chains. See "Mourning over the *Shekhinah*," p. 58.

Sources:  
IFA 6928.



## Myths of the Messiah

### 636. THE VISION OF THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

The hand of the Lord came upon me. He took me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the valley. It was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many of them spread over the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "O mortal, can these bones live again?" I replied, "O Lord God, only You know." And He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus said the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again. And you shall know that I am the Lord!"

I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone to matching bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, O mortal! Say to the breath: Thus said the Lord God: Come, O breath, from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live again." I prophesied as He commanded me. The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude.

Sources:  
Ezekiel 37:1-14.



## Myths of the Messiah

And He said to me, "O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.' Prophecy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the Land of Israel. You shall know, O My people, that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and lifted you out of your graves. I will put My breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil. Then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken and have acted"—declares the Lord.

The belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead can be traced to this powerful biblical myth of Ezekiel, in which God compels him to resurrect, with his prophesying, the bones in the valley of the dry bones. Here God's intention to bring the people of Israel back to life is presented as an explicit promise, with a powerful demonstration of God's ability to fulfill it. In messianic myth, the resurrection of the dead becomes one of the three primary requirements that must be fulfilled to initiate the messianic era. The others are the Ingathering of the Exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

*Sources:*  
Ezekiel 37:1-14.



## Myths of the Messiah

### 639. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD


God keeps the souls of the dead alive, and the dead wait, their eyes fixed upon the resurrection.

The patriarchs sought to be buried in the Land of Israel, because the dead in the Land of Israel will be the first to come to life. Not only Abraham and Sarah are buried there, but also Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Leah. So too are Adam and Eve said to be buried nearby.

In the days preceding the coming of the Messiah, great events will befall the world. Ten territories will be swallowed up, ten territories will be overturned, and ten territories will have their inhabitants put to death.

When the Messiah comes, all mankind, the quick and those who were dead, will be one in the worship of God. In those days the dead of the Land of Israel will be the first to come back to life. The angel Michael will blow a great blast on the shofar, and the tombs of the dead will burst open in Jerusalem, and God will revive them. When the resurrection comes, those who arise from the dead will see the Eternal Spirit returning to Zion through the Gate of Mercy. This gate has been blocked for many generations. Therefore it is said of this gate that it will not be opened until the eyes of Israel are opened at the End of Days.





## Myths of the Messiah

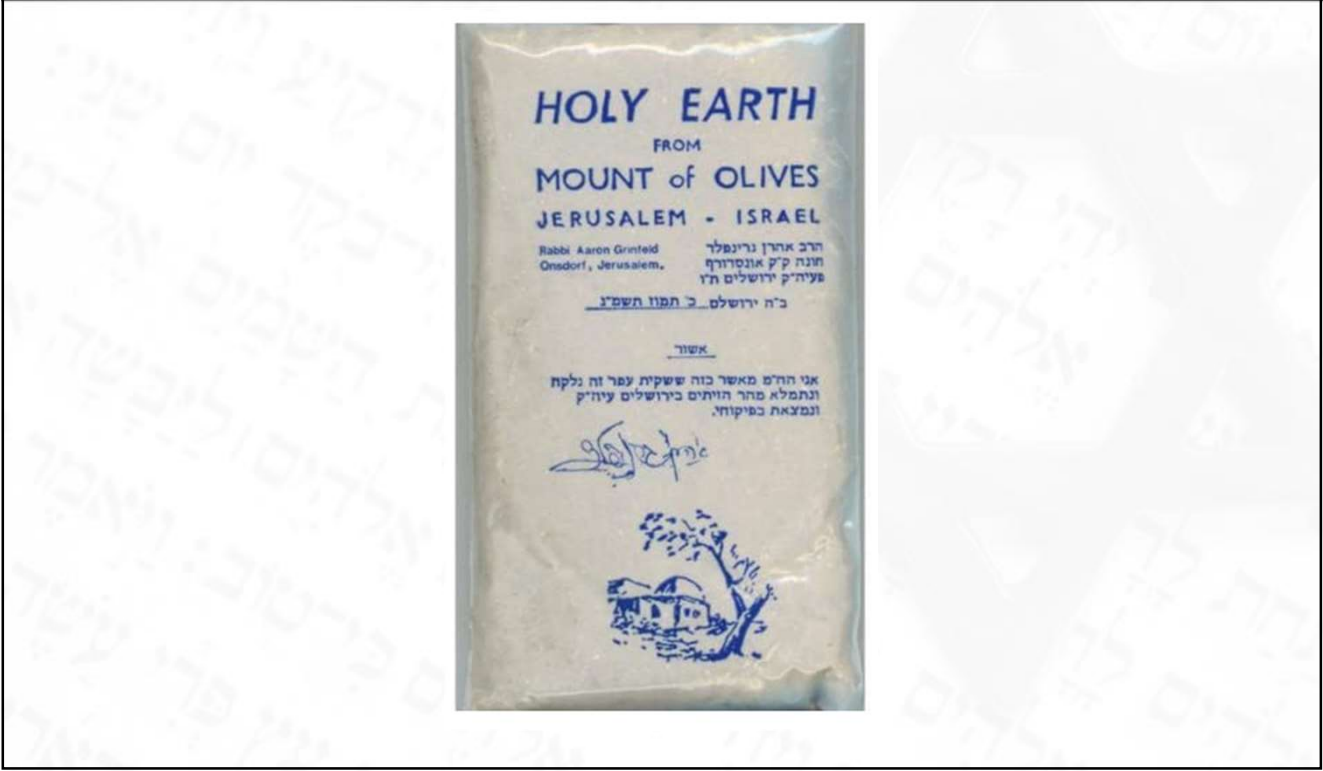
In the days of the Messiah, God will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and Israel will go up in pilgrimage not three times a year, but on every New Moon and Sabbath. How will it be possible for all flesh to come to Jerusalem? In those days Jerusalem is destined to be as large as the Land of Israel, and the Land of Israel as large as the whole world. And how can they come from the ends of the earth? Clouds will carry the children of Israel to Jerusalem, where they will say their prayers, and then the clouds will carry them back to their homes, as it is said, *Who are these that float like a cloud?* (Isa. 60:8).

Then the walls of Jerusalem will disappear, and the Messiah will rebuild them with precious stones and pearls. The resurrected dead will inhabit this new Jerusalem, and they will be like Adam before he sinned.

After that, the bones of the righteous outside the Land will roll through underground caves until they reach the Mount of Olives in the city of Jerusalem. There God will restore their souls to them, and they will arise and enjoy the days of the Messiah along with those who have already come alive in the Land. And those who are resurrected will not die again and return to dust. But just as God endures forever, so they will live forever. God will give them wings and they will float in the air and fly like angels to the Garden of Eden, where they will learn Torah from God.

*Sources:*  
*Genesis Rabbah 96:5; Pesikta Rabbati 1:1, 1:4, 1:6, 1:7, 48:2; Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1; B. Sanhedrin 92a-b; Midrash Tehillim 104:23; Zohar 1:12b; Otot ha-Mashiah in Beit ha-Midrash 2:58-63; Otzar ha-Ma'asiyot; Hilkhot Melakhim 11:1; Hilkhot Teshuvah 8:1; Ma'amar Tehiyat ha-Metim; Hesed le-Avraham 33b; Sefer ha-Hezyonot 2:5; Sefer Eliyahu in Beit ha-Midrash 3:68-78.*

It is common that earth from the Mount of Olives is place in a grave at a Jewish funeral





## Myths of the Messiah

### 641. THE WORLD TO COME

There are no bodies in the World to Come, only the souls of the righteous, who are bodiless, like the ministering angels. Since there are no bodies, there is no eating or drinking, nor anything that human bodies require in this world. So too there is no sleep or death, sadness or mirth. That is why the sages said, "The World to Come has neither eating, nor drinking, nor sex in it, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the *Shekhinah*." Thus the souls of the righteous exist there without toil, but the knowledge they acquired in their lifetimes remains with them. Indeed, because of it they merited the life of the World to Come. Thus the crowns that they wear are the crowns of knowledge. And there, in the World to Come, they enjoy the splendor of the *Shekhinah*, for now they can grasp the truth of God that they did not know when they were burdened with a body.

Whoever believes in the two worlds—this world and the World to Come—will be considered a descendant of Abraham. But whoever does not, will not be considered his seed.

*Sources:*

*B. Berakhot 17a; Midrash Rabbah 53:16; Hilkhot Teshuvah 8.*



## Myths of the Messiah

### 662. THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

The Messiah will not come until he is no longer needed. He will not come until a day after his arrival. He will not come on the last day, but on the last of all.

Kafka's paradoxical explanation of when the Messiah will come is so intriguing that it deserves a place in this collection of Jewish myths. It also reflects traditional Jewish teachings about the Messiah. The coming of the Messiah represents the initiation of the End of Days, the messianic era in which all of existence will be transformed, a return to a prelapsarian condition or a kind of heaven on earth. For this reason, the arrival of the Messiah is not important in itself; rather, it is the transformation that accompanies the arrival that matters. This is one way of understanding Kafka's comment that "The Messiah will not come until he is no longer needed."

*Sources:*

*Parables and Paradoxes* by Franz Kafka.




## Next Class: Deep Jewish Insights From Fiddler on the Roof

Although it may not be apparent on the surface, there is quite a bit of Jewish tradition, insight and depth in the music and story of “Fiddler On The Roof.” In this class, we will enjoy many of the scenes and songs from the movie and discuss such issues as our relationship with God, perspectives on the afterlife, Jewish superstitions, a reason for Jewish intelligence (and all those Nobel Prizes), Talmudic logic, the true meaning of “*Mazel Tov*,” Jewish understanding of miracles, Jewish marriage customs and a lot more. It’s even OK to sing along with the wonderful music!



## Next Class: Deep Jewish Insights From Fiddler on the Roof

- The class will take place on Wednesday evenings beginning at 7PM (Pacific):
- March 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.
- All classes in this same Zoom Room
- No charge for the classes but please register on my website or just reply to the email that I will send you all.



The poster for the class features a central illustration of a man with a blue face and a white hat playing a yellow violin on a rooftop. The background shows a snowy town with a red-roofed building and a church steeple. Text on the poster includes: 'Insights from the music of Fiddler on the Roof', 'Explore Jewish traditions & perspective with Rabbi Michael Lotker', 'March 10, 17 & 24 7pm PST', 'Sponsored By: Jewish Federation VENTURA COUNTY', and 'RSVP: Lotker.com/rsvp-intro.html'.



## Coming in the Spring: More Delightful & Surprising Jewish Myths

**I haven't decided on the details but there are many more wonderful myths to be studied. Here are some candidates:**

- **Myths of God**
- **Myths of Creation**
- **Myths of Heaven**
- **Myths of the Holy Word**
- **Myths of Holy Time**
- **Myths of the Holy People**
- **Myths of the Holy Land**
- **Myths of Exile**

**This may turn into more than one class  
Stay tuned for email notices!**