

## Where can I learn more about Lilith?

### In Print:

M. Kelley Hunter. *Living Lilith: Four Dimensions of the Cosmic Feminine*. Bournemouth, UK: The Wessex Astrologer Ltd, 2009.

Kless, Anya. *Lilith: Queen of the Desert*. New York: Knickerbocker Circus Press, 2010.

Koltuv, Barbara Black. *The Book of Lilith*. York Beach, ME: Nicolas- Hays, 1986.

Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*. (1967) Third Enlarged Edition. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990.

Schwartz, Howard. *Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

### Online:

The Lilith Shrine: [www.lilitu.com/lilith](http://www.lilitu.com/lilith)

The Lilith Institute: [www.lilithinstitute.com](http://www.lilithinstitute.com)

Lilith Magazine: [www.lilith.org](http://www.lilith.org)

The Lilith Library: [www.lilithgallery.com/library/](http://www.lilithgallery.com/library/)

Lilith's Tribe: [facebook.com/Lilith.Tribe](https://facebook.com/Lilith.Tribe)

### In-person group:

Lilith's Tribe In New York City: [meetup.com/Lilith-NYC](https://meetup.com/Lilith-NYC)  
(Please RSVP on the Meetup site.)

# Who is Lilith?

## An FAQ by Anya Kless

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### Who—or what—is Lilith?

Goddess? Demon? First woman? Feminist icon? For centuries, Lilith has haunted the edges of civilization, appearing in the stories and writings of a variety of civilizations and fields of study. While Babylonian and Sumerian sources depict Her as a succubus or demoness, in Hebraic and Arabian folklore She more often appears as a hairy creature of the night. For modern devotees, she is a powerful teacher, first mother, and an icon of rebellion against oppression.

In Sumerian writings, Lilith or “Lillake” seems descended from a class of demons called “Lillu” or “Lili,” meaning “storm demon” or “wind demon.” In Hebrew etymology, “Lilith” stems from LYL, “layil” or night.

### What is Lilith’s story?

More so than other divine figures, Lilith has more than one story.

The earliest mention of a she-demon whose name is similar to that of Lilith is found in the Sumerian king list, which dates from ca. 2400 B.C.E. In the Gilgamesh story, Lilith appears as the foe of Inanna, taking residence in a tree the young goddess had hoped to use as a throne and marriage bed. In another Sumerian text, however, Inanna sends the beautiful and seductive “Lilitu” into the streets and fields to lead men astray. A nearly identical tale exists in a Babylonian text, which lists Lilith as a sacred prostitute of Ishtar—who corresponds to the Sumerian Inanna.

Somewhere between the eighth and tenth centuries, CE, Lilith appears in a work entitled the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, in which the author attempts to account for the two creation stories in the Book of Genesis. The author of the text claimed that first passage referred to the creation of Adam's first wife, Lilith, and the other referred to the creation of Eve. Adam and Lilith quarreled endlessly because Lilith refused to lie beneath Adam during intercourse. She refuses the traditional submissive role with Her husband, insisting instead on equality. Frustrated, Lilith pronounces the secret name of Yahweh, sprouts wings, and flies out of the Garden of Eden to the shores of the Red Sea. She takes up residence in a desert cave, taking demons as Her lovers and giving birth to many more demons.

According to *The Alphabet*, Lilith proclaims that she had been created to snatch the souls of infants, and she vowed that only if confronted with an amulet bearing the names of three specific angels would she do no harm. In late Roman and early medieval Judaism, Lilith's image frequently appears on magical bowls, countered by the written names of the three angels. Aramaic incantation texts in 600 C.E. Babylonia, those from a Jewish colony at Nippur, and those in Persia have all shared wards against Lilith. In medieval and renaissance art, Lilith's role in Christian folklore can also be seen. While in Jewish lore Lilith escapes the Garden, in Christian lore She returns in the guise of the serpent that tempts Eve. Several depictions of the temptation scenes contain an odd central image: a half-woman, half-serpent hanging in the Tree of Knowledge, beckoning to Eve.

Despite Lilith's official status as a figure of evil, immorality, and destruction, the lingering fascination with Her across cultures seems rooted in more than just fear and revulsion. There is something seductive about Lilith for members of both sexes. She stands as the dark teacher. Lilith as the succubus serves as a scapegoat for men's "nocturnal emissions" and sexual fantasies. In several folktales she tutors rogue rabbis "in the ways of black magic." Even tales that seem to portray Her as a force of destruction offer alternative models of femininity and perhaps a critique of the patriarchal structures of Jewish culture.

## Why is Lilith relevant today?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, She seems to be asserting Herself more adamantly than ever. Lilith's refusal to lie beneath Adam, has made Her a modern feminist icon, evident with the branding of the music festival "Lilith Fair." She has become a symbol of resistance to patriarchal authority, female independence, and freedom from oppression at any cost.

Neo-pagan groups and writers have claimed Lilith as an empowering force. With the rise of Dianic Traditions or Goddess Spirituality, Lilith became an emblem of the sacred feminine that had been rejected and slandered by patriarchal, monotheistic forces. More generally, Lilith has found Her way onto the roster of "dark" goddesses, a list which often includes figures like Hecate, Kali, Ereshkigal, the Morrigan, and Sekhmet. Satanists hail Lilith variously as the Bride of Lucifer, the Queen of Hell, the Mother of All Demons, and the Mother of Cain. Gleaning information from Kabbalist texts, some occultists recognize Her as the bride of Samael, called the Dark Angel or Angel of Death. Some see Her as a rising spirit of rebellion and independence here to guide our modern age.

## What does Lilith have to teach us?

Lilith can be a powerful teacher—wise, patient, and generous with Her attention. She causes us to ask what we truly want rather than what we feel we *should* want—or what society tells us we should want.

One of Lilith's most powerful symbols is the snake. Some things must be discarded for others to be gained. If we are not willing to let go of that which no longer serves us, we will remain paralyzed. We must undergo a process of death and rebirth to come into the full potentiality of our nascent selfhood. Lilith also gives us permission to own our anger—not to bully others but to make ourselves heard.