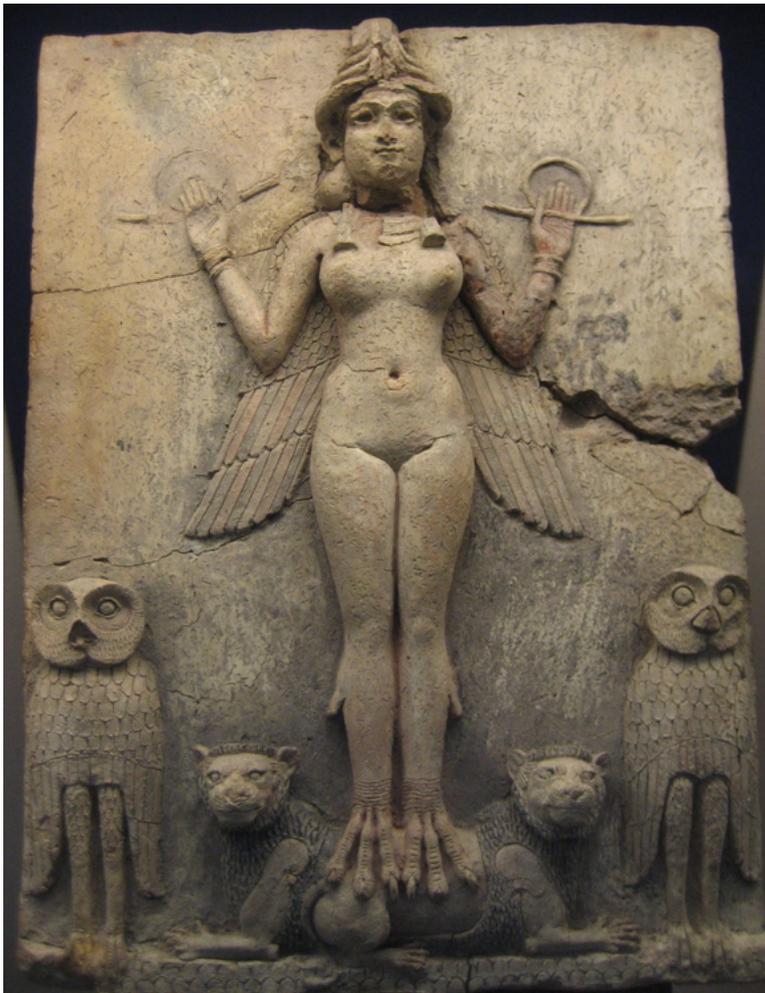




Lilith Meets the Green Man



Talk by Elizabeth Fisher
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Good morning! And thanks for inviting me to celebrate with you this Spring Equinox. This is the time of the year when light and dark are equal so I thought exploring the history of equality of the sexes fits the season. Our time together will be a journey into the distant past, a review of the present and a glimpse of the future.

Two of my passions are: female images of the divine across cultures and throughout time; and international human rights with a special focus on women and children. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to write two multimedia study courses for Unitarian Universalist affiliated organizations on these topics, making it possible for me to delve deeply into both.

Our journey today will bring in both of these themes, female images of the divine and human rights. I am going to ask you to suspend your sense of linear time during my talk and let yourself have access to a time machine; and the freedom and confidence to travel back and forth



through time. That way we can integrate the lessons that have been provided by varied historical periods. This will be helpful to gaining some very important tools for dealing with our present cultural, social and environmental situation.

Let us first go to Babylonia during the centuries before Judaism was established, about 4000 years ago. There we see, displayed in a place of honor, a terra-cotta relief like the facsimile that is hanging on the wall. I will describe it and you can take a moment after the service to get a closer look.

This plague is considered to be the Goddess in the form of Lilith. It is my sense that very few people know who Lilith was yet almost everyone in Western culture knows who Eve was. These two have a strong connection which I will go into in a minute.

Lilith has several conflicting identities.

Scholar Raphael Patai tells about Lilith as an honored goddess. This relief shows in what form Lilith was believed to appear to human eyes. She is slender well-shaped, beautiful and nude, with wings and owl-feet. Her head and shoulders are shown on the cover of the Order of Service. In her hand she holds a ring-and-rod combination. She is considered to be the Creatrix, connected to the cycles of waxing and waning of the moon as well as the cycles of life -- birth, growth, maturing, death and rebirth.

She also has another, perhaps better known identity, if she is known at all. That is as the first wife of Adam. She was the first wife because she left Adam after he sought to force her into a subservient position. She is said to have flown away after violating Jewish law by saying the name of God aloud.

Over the centuries she was given the reputation of a demon by male religious leaders; they said She would destroy women's newborns and so had to be protected against. This did quite a bit of damage to women's self image and made mothers turn away from the powerful female face of divinity. It also added to the woman's reputation as being anti-male when what she was actually demanding was full equality.



Modern Lilith

During the feminist spirituality movement of the last 40 years Lilith was reclaimed. Jewish women have named a magazine after her saying:

“According to myth and legend, Lilith was the first woman, created before Eve. She was Adam’s absolute equal. In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy one created the first human beings – a man named Adam and a woman named Lilith. Lilith said we are equal because we are created from the same earth.”

~From the medieval text Alphabet of Ben Sira.

As we women become more willing to be true to ourselves and feel our self-worth, we are standing up for ourselves. In the 1990’s female rock stars created the Lilith Fair and for several years a group of female lead bands toured the country, with a definite purpose of changing Lilith’s image from the demon to the free woman.

Sarah McLachlan, musician and producer says:



“Like any myth or religion, we take those parts that can guide us in our lives and discard those elements that displease us. The story of Lilith is no different. While she goes on to be vilified and called a demon, I choose to ignore this part of the story as it is surely only the rantings of terrified men who were trying to keep other women from getting any silly ideas. What is important is that Lilith made a difficult and courageous decision and, in doing so, fell out of favor with the men in her life. So it can be said that Lilith was perhaps the world’s first feminist!”

So here we have the Goddess Lilith, empowering independent and self respecting women. Quite a change from fearing she would steal your child.

After leaving Adam, Lilith was away for a long time, carrying on her own life while Western culture has been working overtime giving her a bad name. It's a wonder she ever found her way back into the dialogue.

Now take a moment to move forward to the Twelfth Century. At this stage in human history, Lilith, the animals and plants have been having a hard time for centuries. Men have turned into soldiers, and heads of oppressive governments and families. But wait; now, after all these centuries there is another male image that comes forward on the Cathedrals, the Green Man.

The Green Man has had the same hardship as Lilith over many centuries. Even today rarely anyone has heard of him except those who have been a part of the Pagan revival or studied European medieval history, but almost everyone has heard of the Devil, haven't they?

The origins of the Green Man are ancient as well and are not devilish as in evil, even if he is a bit mischievous. He first showed himself over 5000 years ago in the Neolithic art of central Europe. Green Man images in Celtic art predate Rome's conquest of Gaul. Masks of the Green Man appear in Roman sculpture and architectural detail during the 1st century C.E. In Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance art the Green Man appears again and again. He is definitely related to Pan, the ecstatic god who brought merriment to the crowds in need of cheering.



One of the ways to honor the Green Man was to bring in boughs clad with the new leafage of spring which emphasized the people's desire to experience the joy of life. We welcome the Green Man as an emblem of our unity with nature.

So Lilith meets up with the Green Man during a Flower Power Celebration in San Francisco in 1966. Or she meets him at an Ancient Forest demonstration; or perhaps at the Berkeley Fellowship. A woman who wants to freely fly and identifies with the animal world; and a Man who emerges from foliage and wants to celebrate life.

At first, they are a bit stand offish. It has been a hard 4000 years and lots of misunderstandings have surfaced. It's not easy to trust someone of the opposite sex after what has happened under the system of patriarchy. It doesn't seem to matter how environmentally friendly they both may be. Women often assume men will not treat them fairly; men assume women will be hostile and judge them for the actions of men who are not Green, which seems to be more than a few in all walks of life. In short, neither wants to take the risk of opening up to the other.

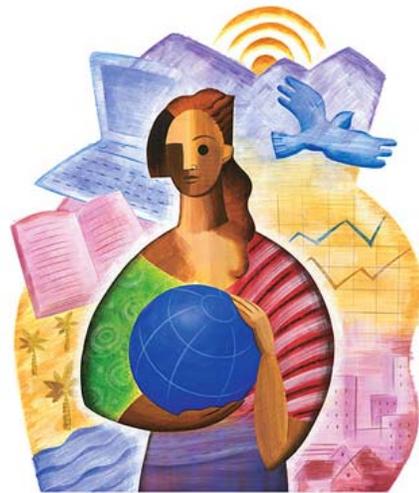


But something a little stronger comes in. It's called natural attraction. It happens to lots of people. It can even happen within yourself when one part of you feels attracted to another and you give yourself permission to have an internal dialogue. It's not gender specific but rather metaphorical, representing the Lilith and the Green Man within each of our psyches.

Note: take a look at the *Hidden Spirituality of Men* by Matthew Fox.

Now take a jump back to 1948 and the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt, a strong Lilith herself, was able to negotiate the inclusion of women in the Declaration because she worked with both the women and the men present from around the world, finding a way to the justice loving, Lilith side, of both.

Next we move through time to Beijing in 1995, when the Fourth World Conference on Women was held. There hangs the official poster from the Conference, featuring a kind of Goddess protectively holding the globe. There were actually two gatherings. One featuring Non-Governmental Organizations or NGO's; and the other, official governmental delegations from nearly every country in the world.



During the official governmental portion of the conference, a comprehensive *Platform for Action* was adopted by the vast majority of countries in the world.

Government officials globally were appreciating that it was time to rethink our stories and cast new ones that allow for partnership and mutual support. This *Platform* dealt with every aspect of life on our planet, highlighting how full political and social equality for women could be achieved and why it was essential.

It is widely acknowledged that when women and children are treated fairly and allowed to develop through education, proper nutrition and a fair share of resources, entire societies benefit.

The NGO conference, which I had the good fortune to attend, was an amazing cultural gathering that featured all kinds of wonderful programs

by Lilith women about what they were doing around the world. And, I saw Green Men in support as well.

Now we jump to 2000. The UN Millennium Goals were established. As a consequence of these international meetings, which included four focused on Women's Rights, as well as others dealing with environmental issues, urbanization, and social development, these goals for the next several years focus considerable attention on the equal rights of women and children.

The movement continues to expand. Our newly elected U.S. Government, unlike the one of the last eight years, will embrace these goals and work to achieve them. We can support these efforts now and stand a much better chance of getting some results that could improve the lives of so many here at home and around the world.

I want to close with some particular areas of focus in current government policy debate that could use our Lilith and Green Man support. As a denomination we have supported these as very important to the social shift we are hoping to accomplish.

- Comprehensive sex education and birth control protection for teens
- Full educational equity for girls around the world
- Green jobs
- Cultural enrichment through the arts as an important social need and right
- Recognition of all the work done that is not paid for both in the home and in organizations

As UU's we also have another contribution we can make. We can provide opportunities for fulfillment and compassion, acknowledging the emotional side of each human as worthy of care. Nurturing each

mind and soul so creative thought processes can flourish rather than wasting the innate intelligence and capacity of joy present in each of us. This is a tremendous opportunity to respond to the world in need of our unique vision.

In closing, I want to encourage you to take with you these two ancient visual images, Lilith and the Green Man, who can be drawn upon for support and inspiration whenever you need it.

And I offer to you a third component in this magical effort --

DRAGONFLY. She is pictured on the cloth hanging between them, signifying she is more than willing to work with Lilith and the Green Man. She is known to make the invisible visible when appropriate through her ability to thread together dispersed aspects of the whole. The dragonfly is the essence of the winds of change and the messages of wisdom and enlightenment.



My image for this New Millennium is that Lilith really does meet the Green Man. They establish a lasting public partnership, and all of us, now in touch with *Dragonfly* wisdom, become expert weavers in this great and astonishing dance in which we move. Blessed Be.

Liz Fisher designed, wrote and edited two multimedia, experiential programs: *Rise Up & Call Her Name: A Woman-honoring Journey into Global Earth-based Spiritualities* and *Gender Justice: Women's Rights are Human Rights*. Visit her website at www.riseupandcallhername.com.