"JEW-SION 101"

Noah, Gilgamesh ...and Halloween:

Syncretism through the ages*

*Syncretism: *"the fusion of two or more different forms of belief or practice"*

Sources:

JPS Torah Commentary – Genesis

Anchor Bible Dictionary

Yenne Velt: The Great Works of Jewish Fantasy and Occult, edited by Joachim Neugroschel

A Big Jewish Book: Poems and Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present, ed. By Jerome Rothenberg

GENESIS 6-9 AND THE GILGAMESH FLOOD STORY

Similarities	Differences
human population multiplying	the world bellowed like a bull
divine investigating mankind	a great god and many other gods
unhappiness at man's condition	anger --man's noise keeps gods awake
decision to bring a flood	intent to wipe out mankind entirely
one man warned	warning given against great god's will
the man told to build a boat	words whispered to his reed house
boat measurements given	a square measure -- as wide as long
seed of land animals to be on board	seed of all living creatures
the man obeying the warning	told to say it would rain a rich harvest
boat built and pitched	built in seven days, with feasting
many cubits long	120 cubits square
several decks	6 decks below, divided into 9 sections
living things came aboard	also gold and other supplies
his family came aboard	also other kin and all the craftsmen
he came aboard	he boarded after the rain started
the storm was terrible	the gods of the storm rode on
the land was affected	the land was smashed like a cup
the people were overcome	they could not be seen from heaven
the flood overwhelmed the world	the gods were terrified, and cowered
	Ishtar lamented over the dead people
	the great gods of heaven and hell wept
the storm raged for many days	the flood was stilled the seventh day

the sea streched flat on every side	a mountain appeared 14 leagues away
the boat grounded and held fast	on the mountain of Nissir
he opened a hatch	the same day
he released a few birds	he waited only 7 days
a raven and a dove	also a swallow
at intervals	all in one day
the raven did not return	it was the last bird sent out
dove found no resting place, returned	he sent her out first, and not again
the bird saw the waters had retreated	the raven (not the dove)
he opened all the boat coverings	that same day
he made a sacrificed on the mountain	he set up 14 cauldrons on stands
Divinity smelled the sweet aroma	the gods came like flies and swarmed over the sacrifice but Ishtar kept the great god away
Divinity promised to remember	Ishtar said she'd remember this day
by a colorful crescent	by the blue jewels around her neck
	the gods rebuked the great god
the man survived the flood	the great god gave him immortality

What kinds of things were left out in the Babylonian story?

The human population was multiplying.	Gen. 6:1-4
A divine investigation of mankind	:5-8
brought unhappiness at man's condition	:6
and a decision to bring a flood.	:7-17
One man was warned.	:8-21

The man was told to build a boat,	:14-16
and boat measurements were given.	:15
Seed of animals was to be taken on board.	:19-20
The man obeyed the warning.	:22
The boat was built and pitched.	:22
It was many cubits long,	:15
with several decks.	:16
Living things came aboard,	7:1-5, 6-9, 13-15
and he and his family came aboard.	:7, 13
The storm was terrible.	:11-12
The land was destroyed by the flood.	:17-19
All life on earth was overcome.	:20-23
:	
The flood overwhelmed the world.	:24
The storm raged for a certain number of days.	:24, 8:1-3
The water surface extended out on every side. 8:5-9	
The boat grounded and held fast.	:4
He opened a hatch,	:6
and he released a raven and a dove,	:7-10
at intervals.	:6,8,10,12
The raven stayed out.	:7
The dove, finding no resting place, returned.	:9

By them he knew when the waters had retreated.	:10-12
He opened all the boat coverings.	:13
He made a sacrificed on the mountain.	:20
Divinity smelled the aroma, and responded.	:21-22
and promised to remember,	9:8-16
by a colorful crescent...	:12-17
The man, and the others with him,	:18; 8:16,18
and the animals, survived the flood.	8:17,19

JPS TORAH COMMENTARY

The Flood is a cosmic catastrophe that is actually the undoing of creation. But God's chastisement and grace operate simultaneously, so that out of the disaster comes renewal. One righteous man, Noah, together with his family and representative animals and birds are to be saved in order to regenerate the world.

The action progresses in four stages. Noah receives detailed instructions from God as to how to ensure his survival and carries these out to the letter (6:9–22). Then the Flood is unloosed with all its intended devastation (chap. 7). Third, the Flood comes to its appointed end (8:1–14). Finally, the harmony between God and humanity is restored and the reordering of the world is decreed (8:15–9:17).

The Mesopotamian Background. The very notion of a deluge of cataclysmic proportions raises the question as to the origin and historic setting of the narrative.

It is unlikely that the topography of the Land of Israel, a hilly country with a dry climate, could have served as the source of inspiration. No accumulation of clay deposits, the telltale evidence of extensive flooding, has been uncovered in excavations there. None, for instance, is present in Jericho, a town that dates back 9,000 years. Indeed, rabbinic lore has it that the Land of Israel was exempt from the Flood.

Mesopotamia, on the other hand, supplies a natural locale for a flood tradition. Both cuneiform documents and archaeological research provide abundant testimony to periodic inundation of the flat alluvial valley between the Tigris and Euphrates. Torrential rains coupled with seasonal cyclones, and the early melting of the snows in the mountains of Anatolia, have from time to time combined to cause the rivers to burst their banks and turn the land into hundreds of miles of lake. It is not surprising that it is Mesopotamian civilization that produced the popular flood stories of the ancient Near East, stories that have come down to us in several versions and recensions.

The fullest extant narrative is that found in the eleventh tablet of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. However, the flood episode in that version is a late addition to the story. Its parent version was the Atraḫasis Epic, a history of the human race from creation to the flood and its aftermath. There also exists a Sumerian counterpart to the flood narrative. The Mesopotamian story even survived into Hellenistic times. The Babylonian priest Berossus (ca. 75 B.C.E.) included it in his history of Babylon.

The name of the hero differs from version to version. In Gilgamesh it is Utnapishtim, which means "He found [everlasting] life"; Atraḫasis means "exceedingly wise"; Ziusudra of the Sumerian epic, Grecized by Berossus as Xisuthros, denotes "life of long days." The different accounts also vary in other details. Nevertheless, the literary structure and wealth of descriptive material common to them all warrant the conclusion that they are interdependent.

There is also good reason to believe that a single historic event inspired the original composition. It is precisely from present-day Fara, the site of ancient Shuruppak, where Utnapishtim lived, that we have archaeological evidence of a devastating deluge. Similar fluvial deposits from the same date, about 2900 B.C.E., have turned up in the excavations at Kish. Moreover, it can now be independently established that the mythical hero Gilgamesh was actually a historical figure, a king of Uruk, as was Ubartutu, a king of Shuruppak and father of Utnapishtim. Similarly, Ziusudra was a king of the same town.

Genesis and the Mesopotamian Accounts. It is safe to conclude that the parallels between the biblical account of the Flood and the Mesopotamian stories, being so numerous and detailed, are much more than the result of mere coincidence. Yet it cannot be claimed that any version presently known is the direct source of the biblical narrative, for the latter has points of contact with each version while it also contains items independent of them all. The many parallels and contrasts are given at their appropriate place within the commentary. A few significant items of broader interest are mentioned here as introductory material.

In the Bible, the Flood is a climactic turning point in a larger history of humankind that begins with the history of the world. The identical situation is present in the Sumerian, Atraḫasis, and Berossus stories, and it is reflected in the Sumerian King List. A crucial point of departure by the Bible from all these versions is the deliberate divine decision to save the hero, which is communicated to him directly. In the Mesopotamian tales, humanity was supposed to have been completely wiped out;

the rescue of the hero occurred inadvertently, by dint of the perfidy and subterfuge of one of the gods acting against the intent of the others. The motivation of the deities in causing a flood is not recorded in Gilgamesh or Berossus, while in the Atraḫasis story the flood is the gods' solution to the tumult of mankind, which increasingly disturbs them. This is apparently another way of describing the problem of overpopulation. In Genesis, the Flood is God's response to the pollution of the earth by the moral corruption of the human race, and there is not the slightest doubt that it is Noah's integrity that determines his fate. In Atraḫasis and Berossus, the hero also appears to be famed for his piety and integrity, but there is no explanation for the favor shown to Utnapishtim. Both Noah and Xisuthros belong to the tenth generation of antediluvians; in the Sumerian King List there are eight such, and the other versions are silent on the place of the hero in the chronological scheme. While the biblical Noah is an ordinary person, the heroes of the parallel versions are of royal blood.

The duration of the deluge is not uniform in the various accounts. Atraḫasis and the Sumerian version have seven days and seven nights followed by the shining sun. In Gilgamesh there seem to be six days of inundation. Berossus gives no information on the subject, nor do the Mesopotamian accounts report on the time it took for the earth to dry up. By contrast, Genesis has a precise chronology for the various stages of the Flood.

Perhaps the most significant of all the distinctive features of the Torah account is that only Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives enter the ark, whereas in the other accounts the builders of the vessel, the boatman, relatives, and friends are passengers with the hero and his family. This means that only in Genesis is the concept of a single family of man possible; indeed, it is a major theme.

From all the foregoing, coupled with the detailed observations made in the commentary, it is clear that our biblical account constitutes an independent Israelite version that is nevertheless closely related to the Mesopotamian traditions. It is likely that underlying the present prose narrative was an earlier poetic composition, the substratum of which may still be discernible. This would account for the occurrence of so many unique or rare words, such as *gofer, kinnim, tsohar, mabbul, yekum,* and *keshet.* It would also explain poetic sentences such as 7:11 and 8:22, as well as the sevenfold repetition of so many key words. When Isaiah 54:9 refers to "the waters of Noah" rather than to "the Flood," for instance, there may be a citation from some ancient popular source not otherwise preserved. There is every reason to believe that in ancient Israel, as in Mesopotamia, more than one version of the great flood story once circulated, each distinguished by characteristic vocabulary and emphasis on certain details. As a matter of fact, many modern scholars claim that it is still possible to isolate the various pre-Pentateuchal strands of Israelite tradition utilized by the Narrator in producing the present, definitive Torah edition of the Flood story. The evidence for this is taken to be the existence of doublets, the differences in the divine names—sometimes YHVH, sometimes *'elohim*—and stylistic variants for the same thing. Examples of the latter are "male and female" in 6:19 and 7:16 but "males and their mates" (lit. "man and his wife") in 7:2; the use of *m-ḥ-h,* "to blot out," in 6:7 and 7:4,23, as opposed to *sh-ḥ-t,* "destroy," in 6:13–17; *m-v-t,* "to die," in 7:22 but *g-v-ʿ,* "to perish," in 6:17 and 7:21; *kol ha-yekum*, "all existence," in 7:4,23 but *kol basar*, "all flesh," in 6:13,17, and 7:21. There are also said to be internal differences in matters of chronology and in the number of animals to be brought into the ark, though these items can be otherwise explained. See Excursus 2.

Whatever be its literary history, the Flood story of the Torah stands out as an authentic, original expression of the religious genius of Israel. Conceptually, spiritually, and morally, it stands in striking contrast to all the other versions.

The Flood and Creation. The uncompromisingly moral tenor and didactic purpose of the Genesis Flood story have influenced its literary artistry. Because humanly wrought evil is perceived to be the undoing of God's creativity, numerous elements in the story are artful echoes of the Creation narrative. Thus the divine decision to wipe out the human race employs the same two verbs that are used in the original Creation, but transposed in order to symbolize the reversal of the process (6:7; cf. 1:26–27). The Deluge itself is brought about by the release and virtual reuniting of the two halves of the primordial waters that had been separated in the beginning (7:11; cf. 1:1,6–7). The classification of animal life in 6:20 and 7:14 corresponds to that in 1:11–12,21,24–25. The provisioning of food in 6:21 depends upon 1:29–30. Noah is the first man to be born after the death of Adam, according to the chronology of 5:28–29, and he becomes a second Adam, the second father of humanity. Both personages beget three sons, one of whom turns out to be degenerate. Noah's ark is the matrix of a new creation, and, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, he lives in harmony with the animals. The role of the wind in sweeping back the flood waters recalls the wind from God in 1:2. The rhythm of nature established in 1:14 is suspended during the Flood and resumed thereafter, in 8:22. Finally, the wording of the divine blessing in 9:7 repeats that in 1:28, just as the genealogical lists of the Table of Nations in chapter 10 parallel those of 4:17–26 and 5:1–32 that follow the Creation story. In both cases the lineage of the human race is traced back to a common ancestry.

GILGAMESH EPIC. A masterpiece of ANE literature, the Gilgamesh Epic (GE) is composed in Akkadian. It features the adventures of Gilgamesh, a king said to rule the S Mesopotamian city of Uruk around 2600 B.C.E. Since Gilgamesh has left us no contemporaneous monuments, scholars debate whether he really existed. Gilgamesh's exploits in the GE, however, are mostly beyond historical evaluation. In other traditions and in omen literature, Gilgamesh is invoked as a mighty builder, but also as an infernal deity.

A. Sources

The GE is a long narrative with multiple episodes, allocated to at least 10, but no more than 12 tablets, each averaging about 300 lines (an afternoon's listening). One native tradition simply refers to the series by its opening line, "He who saw all." Sources for the epic's various episodes may have circulated in Sumerian as early as the Ur III Dynasty (2100–2000 B.C.E.). Written or copied as much as half a millennium after the fall of Ur, these narratives may well be the products of learned Semitic scribes. Of the following self-contained Sumerian compositions, the first three have echoes within the GE: Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living; Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven; Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld; Gilgamesh and Agga; The Death of Gilgamesh. A Sumerian flood story which does not feature Gilgamesh is eventually redrafted for inclusion in the GE.

B. Versions

We do not yet know when and how the independent narratives about Gilgamesh were first woven into a whole; a very late tradition, which is beyond present confirmation, has assigned the composition of the epic to a Gilgamesh contemporary, a diviner named Sin-leqi-unninni. By the LB Age, Gilgamesh's adventures had come into full vogue in the Near East so that major Mesopotamian sites continue to yield GE copies and fragments (some as yet unpublished). Emar in Upper Syria and Megiddo in Canaan have contributed Akkadian fragments as has Hattušaš, capital of the Hittite empire. Additionally, Hattušaš has produced Hittite and Hurrian adaptations of Gilgamesh's exploits.

Because no complete edition of the epic has survived from a single site, scholarship has created a composite using tablets originally belonging to diverse renditions (or recensions) of two major versions of the GE: one stemming from the latter half of the Old Babylonian (OB) period (1750–1600 B.C.E.), the other influenced by Neo-Assyrian (NA) scholarship (750–612 B.C.E.), but refined over the next four centuries. A third edition, of which we have but fragments, may have been completed during the Middle Babylonian (MB) period (around 1250 B.C.E.). Some scholars attribute one of the later versions to the legendary Sin-leqi-unninni. The various versions of the GE share major characters as well as specific episodes. They differ appreciably, however, in how they begin or end, and in the way they manipulate individual scenes. They also diverge in their perspectives on life, their controlling metaphors, and the themes which give integrity to the whole narrative. A comparison may be made with the various editions of the Tristan narratives which shared characters and episodes, but addressed differing audiences.

C. Contents of Two Versions

The NA version of the GE opens with the poet's invocation and "argument" about a man who has seen and accomplished everything possible; who has learned much from common experience as well as from hidden sources (the netherworld?); who has knowledge of a pre-diluvian past inaccessible to ordinary mortals; who chooses to record everything about his exhausting journey. Nothing of the tale, therefore, is invented, and lest anyone doubts its authenticity or accuracy, the poet takes the audience on a tour of Uruk. The listeners draw closer to its walls, enter its Eanna temple, and inspect the fortifications built by the protagonist. They are guided to a corner where, upon extracting a lapis lazuli tablet from a copper box, they can read a most beautiful hymn to the hero, Gilgamesh: an awesome king, offspring of the goddess Ninsun and of the mighty Lugalbanda. This hymn, in fact, inaugurates the OB version of the GE.

Nothing in ancient literature matches the generative and integrative powers of this poem, as it prepares the audience to expect the extraordinary: deeds eliciting pain and suffering, but also conferring illumination and wisdom, abound, and mysteries about the Flood and the Netherworld are resolved. The poet's exercise is not just pedagogic, however, for in disclosing Gilgamesh's ultimate achievement—the building of Uruk's defenses—is within human ability, the poet accords the audience a standard by which to measure Gilgamesh's triumphs or failures and instills in it an ironic vision by which to evaluate flaws when he acts beyond human capacity.

The tale quickly establishes its setting, opening on an obstreperous king who will not grant his urban subjects their dignity. Upon appeal, the gods ask Aruru to produce a "double"—the Akkadian here is difficult—of Gilgamesh, equally aggressive, so that the two can absorb each other's energy. Aruru, however, creates a double of the god Anu, thereby changing the future of that relationship. Enkidu's formation reverses the virtues of cultured folk: he cannot groom, feeds like animals, and prefers their company. Enkidu, therefore, compares to Gilgamesh, not in physical stature (although the OB version is literal here), but in his ability to thwart nonurban dwellers who live by snaring animals. A frustrated hunter solicits Gilgamesh who sends a harlot to tame Enkidu. The NA is psychological in recounting the ensuing transformation. Even after a week of mating, Enkidu establishes no emotional bonds with the woman. When he eventually discovers his humanity, sexuality is not the teacher; rather, the human odor he absorbs frightens the animals into abandoning him to the lass's comfort. The harlot moves him from his now empty world to that of Gilgamesh. There, the goddess Ninsun readies her son Gilgamesh for Enkidu's arrival by interpreting powerfully foretelling dreams.

In the OB version, however, the animals' rejection does not cause Enkidu's illumination, instead, the harlot becomes maternal and pedagogic immediately after their sexual bout. She shares her clothing with Enkidu and leads him, "like a child," to a gathering of shepherds. The scene turns comic as Enkidu serially reverses those habits which separate him from humankind, making him hunt what he once protected. In the OB the role of Ninsun is minimized as a shorter dream sequence is placed before the harlot comes to Enkidu.

The story in tablet 2 is carried best by the OB version. Enkidu enters Uruk and blocks Gilgamesh's entrance into the nuptial hall (where presumably Gilgamesh is abusing his power). The two lock into a terrible fight from which Gilgamesh emerges victorious. However, recognizing each other's strength, they become fast friends.

ANCHOR BIBLE (8)
DICTIONARY

Tablet 3 is likewise damaged, but much less so in the OB than in the NA version. Gilgamesh seeks glory beyond Uruk, despite Enkidu's premonitions about sinister ends. The NA retains Ninsun's maternal role: she frets over her son's restlessness, places him under the protection of the Sun-god Shamash, and binds Enkidu to his service. The OB, however, focuses on Gilgamesh's plans and, in a remarkable passage, has Gilgamesh admit to human limitations, "Who my friend can scale heaven? Only the gods live forever under the sun. As for mankind, numbered are their days; whatever they achieve is but wind." Gilgamesh's aspirations are not yet beyond human achievements, for although he expects to die battling Huwawa (NA: Humbaba), his deed will long be remembered. In this version, as the town forges powerful weapons for the heroes, it is Gilgamesh who seeks Shamash's help.

The struggle against Humbaba/Huwawa occupies two badly preserved tablets. The 4th tablet of the NA version finds Gilgamesh and Enkidu quickly reaching their destination ("the distance of a month and fifteen day they *traversed* in three days") and egging each other to enter their foe's lair. Tablet 5 is set within the Cedar Forest, which in the OB version includes Mt. Hermon and the Lebanon. The two receive cautionary dreams which they perversely misinterpret. Humbaba attacks and is nearly victorious. Shamash interferes, and the monster begs for mercy. Enkidu, however, urges Humbaba's death, which comes after a brief gap. OB fragments, however, credit Enkidu with the mortal blow and have him discover the secret dwelling of the gods.

Successful beyond their wildest hopes, the heroes acquire perilous hubris. In Tablet 6, known almost completely from NA sources, Ishtar, the divine manifestation of human passions, wants to grant Gilgamesh her favor. He refuses her, but is needlessly insulting as he uses coarse language to catalog her previous indulgences. Angry, Ishtar forces the god Anu to release his bull against the two heroes. Gilgamesh is matador to Enkidu as picador as they dispatch the animal and further anger Ishtar by misusing its carcass. The tablet ends brilliantly, with another of Enkidu's premonitions, "[In my dream,] my friend, why are the great gods in council?"

The gods are in council—we learn from tablet 7—to punish the insolent pair. Shamash directs their anger toward Enkidu and, as he lay dying, the poet arrests the narrative to reflect on the human condition. Enkidu curses first the harlot, then the hunter who brought him to such an end, imposing upon them a life of want and misery. Upon Shamash's interference, however, Enkidu recants, converting his words into blessings. Tablet 7 continues the NA poet's assimilation of other myths. Enkidu has enough breath to report on the Netherworld, resorting to a vocabulary duplicated in Ishtar's descent to the Netherworld.

Preparing to bury his friend, Gilgamesh reconsiders his former perspective on life. He now protests a death which comes suddenly, stealthily, and prematurely. As tablet 8 (NA) obsessively rehearses Gilgamesh's outrage, the epic emulates Gilgamesh's overheated mind; it turns surrealistic, favoring marvelous settings and fantastic characters.

Disheveled and wasting away, Gilgamesh embodies his friend's unpromising beginnings. He roams the countryside, seeking Utnapishtim. Tablet 9 (NA) intimates that Gilgamesh's wanderings are also inward. Gilgamesh begs for a dream, but in a cryptic scene whose ambiguity and centrality evoke Jacob's Jabbok struggle, Gilgamesh rises to battle unknown enemies (his own fears?). It is conceivable that the epic's remaining activities are but one night's hallucinations.

Gilgamesh arrives at Mashu, twin-mountain fulcrum for Heaven, Earth, and Netherworld whose deadly guardians, scorpion-creatures, direct him to Utnapishtim through an immense, pitch-dark tunnel. At its end, Gilgamesh finds a garden of precious stones. The OB version, apparently lacking these details, has a scene not available to the NA wherein Shamash discourages Gilgamesh's foolish search for immortality.

Of the OB tablet 10, we have but two scenes. In one, Siduri, the gods' tavern keeper, delivers Akkadian literature's most quoted verses ("Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou? . . ." In the other, Gilgamesh meets Surshanabi who can ferry him to Utnapishtim. Henceforth, we lose track of the OB version and can only guess how it ends. That Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtim is certain; that the latter dissuades him from his impossible goal is also certain; how he does so, however, is unknown.

Tablet 10 of the NA cultivates the comic. Siduri bolts her door, thinking Gilgamesh a murderer. Appropriating threats Ishtar used to summon the Bull of Heaven (above, tablet 6), Gilgamesh threatens Siduri. She regretfully guides him toward a boatman (here called Urshanabi) who can cross him to Utnapishtim. The cryptic violence of tablet 9 is replayed, but this time Gilgamesh destroys implements ("Stone items") necessary for crossing the Water of Death. Gilgamesh uses easily decaying substitutes which can leave him stranded at immortal Utnapishtim's island. "The distance of a month and fifteen day" is effected in three days (see tablet 4, and the two carry on a powerful dialogue wherein Utnapishtim affirms truths the OB assigns to Siduri.

Stunned by Utnapishtim's unheroic bearing, Gilgamesh can hope to similarly realize immortality. Utnapishtim, however, stifles Gilgamesh's expectations; his own translation to eternal life proves to be exceptional in circumstance, for the gods will no longer send a devastating flood against humanity. The flood episode, adapted for inclusion into the GE from the NA (rather than the OB) *Atrahasis*, crowns the NA 11th tablet and fulfills the poet's introductory promise to divulge impossible knowledge.

Gilgamesh's commonplace evaluation of the heroic also proves superficial. Albeit ordinary looking, the divinized Utnapishtim needs no sleep and cleverly proves that it is otherwise for the mortal Gilgamesh who needs a seven-day slumber. As Utnapishtim entrusts to Urshanabi Gilgamesh's preparation for reentry into the human world, the poet brilliantly replays steps Enkidu had taken toward civilization. The two steer their boat toward that direction.

The OB version of the GE, which probably had no flood story to tell, may well have ended on this or on a similar proof of Gilgamesh's mortality. The NA rendition, however, shifts suddenly into another test scene. Gilgamesh is summoned back and told of a rejuvenating plant, deep in the waters. He retrieves it, but fearing its powers Gilgamesh decides to test it first on an elderly person from Uruk. When a snake eats the plant and sheds its skin, Gilgamesh

recognizes the loss of opportunity. Sadder but wiser, Gilgamesh returns home, accompanied by Urshanabi. The epic wheels upon itself as Gilgamesh quotes the poem's paean to Uruk's mighty structure and in assuming the poet's voice, Gilgamesh breaks out from his narrative confines to guide all those searching his autobiography for wisdom.

Gilgamesh discovers his limitations as a mortal. His fears of death, however, may yet be with him. The NA version, therefore, closely reproduces in its 12th tablet portions of Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld, a Sumerian tale which may be linked to the cult of Gilgamesh as an infernal deity. Gilgamesh interviews the ghost of Enkidu, who amplifies on themes delivered already in tablet 7: Men with many sons, who die in bed or in battle and who retain the love of bereaved are more likely to find peace in the beyond. Enkidu's instructions may thus give comfort to Gilgamesh, freeing him from morbid anxiety about death.

D. Gilgamesh and Biblical Studies

When first published, the GE's flood narrative shocked Europe no less than any of Darwin's theories, for it placed into question the uniqueness and authenticity of the Hebrew experience. Links between the GE and Hebrew Scripture are more responsibly evaluated nowadays than during previous generations when Gilgamesh was grist for the *Babel/Bibel* controversy. While scholars still compare the flood accounts in the GE and in Genesis, there is an appreciation that both have adapted traditional narratives to suit their own contexts. Moreover, scholars now generally avoid making judgmental contrasts among the accounts (e.g., which one has a better blueprint for a seaworthy ark or communicates a more spiritual description of the deity). There is also continuing interest in the harlot scene, since it reminds us of Adam's loss of innocence. The GE is often mined for its information on death and the afterlife whenever similar topics are entertained for the Hebrew world.

The most useful studies of the GE and the Hebrew Bible develop from recognition that even in its fragmentary shape the GE is a superb literary accomplishment whose artistry is worthy of comparison with the most accomplished pages of Scripture; that resolving how the GE's versions achieved their intricate structures can enhance our understanding of Hebrew narrative techniques; that so rich a storehouse of words, characters, metaphors, themes, and scenes can only make us better aware of the heritage the Hebrews could adopt, adapt, or even reject.

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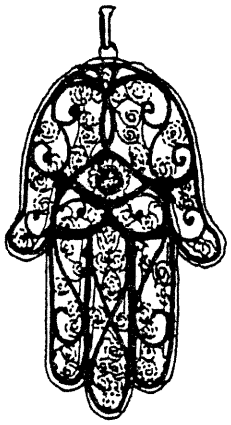
HAMSA – חַמְסָה. The **hamsa*– from the Semitic root meaning "five"– is a *hand-shaped *amulet worn to ward off the *Evil Eye. This practice may have originated among the ancient Canaanite peoples– Philistines and Phoenicians– who would make the "hand of Baal" (*horns using the index finger and pinky) over their heads, to protect against the *Evil Eye. It is likely that Israelite traders carried this gesture (also used to mock a cuckold) east and west to enter European, Indian, and Chinese folklore.



Yemenite style filigree *hamsa*, worn as a pendant.

Representing the protective hand of God, hand amulets, known variously as "the hand of Miriam," "the hand of Fatima," and "the hand of Mary," have long been used in Mediterranean cultures. Although Muslims named the *hamsa* after Fatima, the daughter of Muhammed, the tradition predates Islam by at least 1,000 years. It is speculated that Jews were among the first to use this form as a protective amulet.

Often a *hamsa* has a single *eye embedded in the middle of the palm to symbolize the watchful eye of God or to deflect the gaze of the Evil Eye. Occasionally, Jewish *hamsas* have a sixth finger, perhaps to observe the prohibition against making "a sculptured image of . . . what is on the earth below,"[1] that is, a human hand.

Still respected as powerful amulets among Jews originating in Muslim countries, *hamsas* have in modern times become quite popular as good luck charms without overt magical significance. Through the influence of Sephardi Jews in Israel, *hamsas* have become common among Western Jews as well.

[1]Exodus 20:4.

RAINBOW – קֶשֶׁת. Many cultures in the ancient world tell of a great primeval flood that came close to destroying all life on *earth. The most famous account is the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh upon which the biblical flood narrative is probably based. In the biblical version, God promises *Noah that "never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood." To seal this oath, God sets a rainbow in the *clouds as "a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth."[1] According to the rabbis, this covenantal rainbow, consisting of *seven *colors, was created at twilight on the Sixth Day of Creation together with the other miracles.[2]

Just as a warrior lowers his bow to signal his peaceful intentions, so the biblical rainbow symbolizes the appeasement of divine wrath. In our own time, peace activist and theologian Arthur Waskow has appropriated this ancient symbol of peace for Jewish antinuclear activism. Contemporary environmentalists use the rainbow as a symbol of an ecological covenant to preserve life on earth.

In Hellenistic culture, the bow was the *Zodiac symbol for Sagittarius the Archer. The Hebrew name for this sign was "*keshet*," meaning both bow and rainbow.

The prophet Ezekiel likened God's Presence to "a rainbow which shines in the clouds on a rainy day."[3] According to the *Zohar*, the mystical Book of Splendor, the rainbow in the clouds that appeared to Noah was God. When *Moses later ascended Mount *Sinai, "the Rainbow took off her garments and gave them to Moses. Wearing that garment, Moses went up the mountain."[4] One interpretation identifies this rainbow with the **Shekhinah*, God's feminine aspect; another with *Yesod*, a male sexual symbol, which unites with the cloud, symbolizing female sexuality.

[1]Genesis 9:8–17; [2]*Pirke Avot* 5:6; [3]Ezekiel 1:28; [4]*Zohar* 2:99a (Daniel Matt's translation).

The Sword of Moses, tenth century

I. To conjure a spirit write on a laurel-leaf: "I conjure thee, Prince whose name is Abraksas, in the name of SIGYY IIWII YII GUTYUS IIWII AFRNUIIII IIWII ASGNUIIII IIWII IITNUSYY IIWII that thou comest to me and revealest to me all that I ask of thee, and thou shalt not tarry." And the one conjured by thee will come down and reveal himself to thee.

II. If you wish to kill a man, take mud from the two sides of the river and form it into the shape of a figure, and write upon it the name of the person, and take seven branches from seven strong palm-trees and make a bow from reed with the string of horse-sinew, and place the image in a hollow, and stretch the bow and shoot with it, and at each shot say ATTRS B' SHLUMYM MYBGSS B' SHUTTYAYA may "X" be destroyed. [For "X" insert the name of your enemy.]. . . .

III. To walk upon the water without wetting the feet, take a leaden plate and write upon it HBKSHFHYAL YHWHH ASRGHYAL YHWHH HZASNHYAL YHWHH MUDDGHYAL YHWHH and place it in thy girdle, and then you can walk. [Jewish folk tradition says Jesus was able to walk on water through the power of magic.]

IV. Against any enemy. Write upon a new-laid egg, on a Nazarene cemetery: "I conjure you, luminaries of heaven and earth, as the heavens are separated from the earth, so separate and divide 'X' from his wife 'X,' and separate them from one another, as life is separated from death, and sea from dry land, and water from fire, and mountain from vale, and night from day, and light from darkness, and the sun from the moon; thus separate 'X' from 'X' his wife, and separate them from one another in the name of the twelve hours of the day and the three watches of the night, and the seven days of the week, and the thirty days of the month, and the seven years of *Shemittah*, and the fifty years of Jubilee, on every day. [Every seventh year is a *Shemittah* year. After seven *Shemittahs* comes the Jubilee, the fiftieth year.] In the name of the evil angel Tmsmael, and in the name of the angel Iabiel, and in the name of the angel Drsmiel, and in the name of the angel Zahbuk, and in the name of the angel Ataf, and in the name of the angel Zhsmael, and in the name of the angel Zsniel, who preside over pains, sharp pains, inflammation, and dropsy, and separate 'X' from his wife 'X,' make them depart from one another, and that they should not comfort one another, swiftly and quickly."

V. *The Wisdom of the Chaldeans, fourteenth century*—HOW TO MAKE SOMEONE FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU

[On the sixth day Anael functions. He is the ruler appointed on all manner of love. This ruler is in the likeness of a woman. She has in one hand a mirror in which she beholds herself, and in the other a comb with which she is combing her head. She, like unto other angels, has serving angels; she also holds her hands outstretched. At her right arm serves an angel whose name is Arbiel, on the left one called Niniel, over her head one whose name is Lahabiel, and at her feet one called Ahabiel.

If thou wishest to employ him [Anael], make a tablet of fine silver, draw upon it the likeness of a woman in accordance with the woman thou likest; then write on her shoulder her name and the name of her mother, and the name of the one who loves her, and that of his mother, and draw her hands outstretched. Draw then under her right arm the figure of a nice young man, and write on his shoulder Arbiel; under her left arm draw the image of another young man and write on his forehead Niniel; behind her draw the image of a man with red ink and write on his shoulder Lahabiel.

The use of this picture of the woman on the tablet is that it gains for thee the love of that man or woman whom thou desirest with a strong and unbreakable love. Thou hast only to touch this tablet and they will run after thee and fulfill thy desire, especially that woman whose name thou hast written on the tablet.

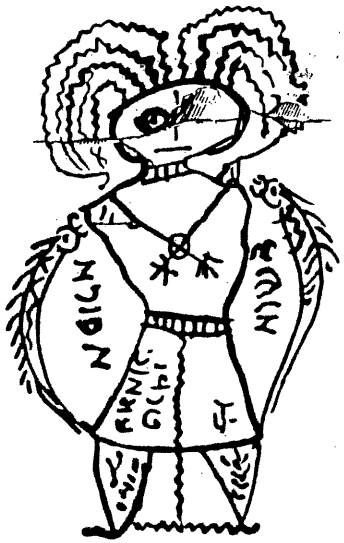
And thou must utter the following conjuration: "I conjure thee, Anael (thou and thy servants who are called by thy name, and whose name is included in theirs, viz.: Arbiel, Niniel, Ahabiel and Lahabiel), in the name of Uriel, with the countenance flaming all round, inflame so-and-so with my love and with my strong affection, and may her destiny be united with mine in the same manner as Adam was united to Eve. May she not have any chance to eat or to drink, or to sleep, or to stand, or to sit, before she is in love with me. . . . and until she comes to me and fulfills all my wishes and desires." Then warm the tablet on the fire and thou wilt see marvellous things.

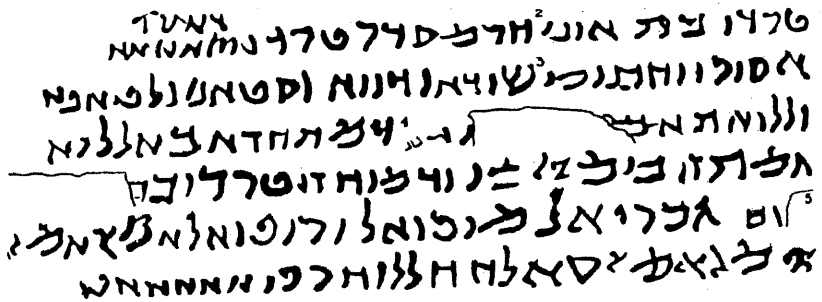
If the person in question is a man, then say: "That he may fulfill my wish," viz., this or that thing. On the back of the tablet write *Sit*, for this is his [Anael's] Seal, and write it in the hour of Venus.

JUDAISM AND THE OCCULT

(Aramaic, c. 5th century A.D.)

AN INCANTATION BOWL AGAINST THE POWERS





(The words) Tardi daughter of Oni o Hormisdar Tardi in the name of AAAAAA be exorcised & sealed o Demon Devil Satan Ogres Liliths that appear by night & that appear by day & that appear to Tardi daughter of Oni in the name of Gabriel Michael Raphael amen amen amen amen selah halleluia per AAAAAA

(Hebrew, 17th century)

A SABBATEAN AMULET AGAINST ALL EVILS

purified in the entire skull
the upright guardian of love in brain's
track splendor of the pupil of
that eye is fastened on my forehead
purely in the trunk of love the lamp
of will of truth shines back across the node
of the closed brain the brightness of
the sun inside her brain the root of
mercy's plant fills up the skull
the brain & in its sight are
life & peace in middle of cruel
whips of faith & he
the prince of thoughts would tell me:
"your lips are into scarlet" cure
& faithful guard to her who
wears this amulet against all
evil & misfortune & distress against all
troubles in the mind for now & always
eternally amen selah amen!
& may the strength of YHVH be greatly magnified!
o God I pray you cure her now! Amen so
be thy will! Amen amen

(Hebrew, 14th century)

A CHARM AGAINST LILITH

"Black Striga
black on black
"who eats black blood
& drinks it
"like an ox she bellows
"like a bear she growls
"like a wolf she crushes

(German & Hebrew, 14th century)

A POEM TO EASE CHILDBIRTH

o bear mother lie down
o you womb
o old as I am lie down
do not carry me into
the grave
to be buried inside me
lie down
there's a book called the bible
it says
o bear mother lie down
in your place
where God wills it
o holy this power of God

The "Jewish" Meaning of Family

Number 12: Make a Big Deal of Purim

by Joel Lurie Grishaver

It is much better to overemphasize Purim than to worry about Halloween.

This year the premier Conservative day school in Los Angeles wound up with a great fight between parents at an open house. It was the great Halloween controversy.

This day school had learned that day schools have to be more than good regular schools which also teach Judaica—they have to promote Jewish life. To that end, they run parent programs, family events, some community worship experiences, and just like most congregational schools, they occasionally take the kids away to camp for a non-formal weekend experience.

For whatever reason, this day school scheduled a junior high school Shabbat retreat on a weekend on which Halloween fell on Saturday night. The retreat, which started on Thursday, was scheduled to end with *Havdalah* at sundown, with the kids arriving home early that evening.

At the open house, an informal gathering turned into a game of "How Dare You?"

A Parent: "How dare you schedule a weekend over Halloween—what are you going to do about it?"

Another Parent: "How dare you set Halloween against Shabbat—why are you sending your child to a day school?

Another Parent: "How dare you let your child celebrate Halloween at all, it is a Christian holiday, Jewish kids shouldn't celebrate it!"

Another Parent: "I want my daughter to feel good about being Jewish. Judaism shouldn't make them feel bad. How dare you suggest that I deprive them of a holiday that is as innocent and naive as Halloween—it isn't Christmas!"

And so it went. If you were one of these parents, would you tell your Day School to:

a. Reschedule the weekend.

b. Hold the weekend without change.

c. Insure that the kids will be back early enough to have a Halloween experience.

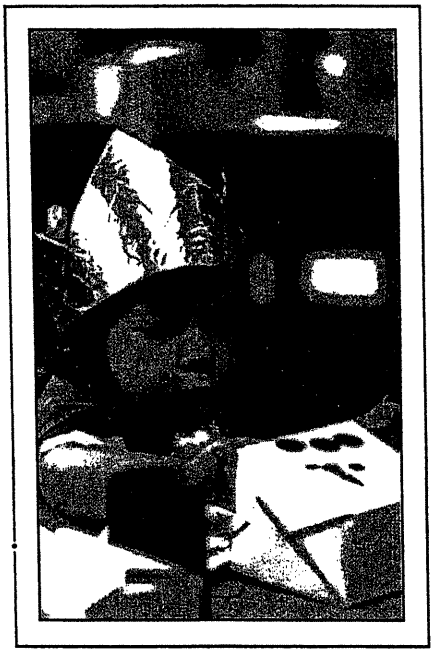
d. Extend the night and run a Halloween experience under the school's safe direction.

e. Expand the quality and impact of the school's Purim celebration.

You know the Mark Twain quote, the one about his father getting smarter as he got older. That is what writing this book taught me about my parents. In hindsight, despite all the things I yelled at them when I was a teenager, they have now evolved into a world class set of Jewish parents.

For Halloween, we carved a pumpkin and left a bulb glowing in it all night (candles were deemed too dangerous so my father rigged this battery thing). It went right in the front window where we should have kept our Hanukkah menorah—if we had known about the mitzvah of advertising the miracle. When we were little, we got to buy one of those store-bought costumes with the plastic and elastic masks. When we were older, we threw together something. Soon, however, costumes weren't cool—and they were given up or minimalized. Whatever the dress, my family "did" Halloween, but it was no big thing. We liked the candy and I can remember the shopping bags full of it—splitting and sorting it on the floor. Today, I can't tell you what costumes I wore—I can't connect to any great details.

By sixth grade, I remember distinctly, sugar-dosing greed was exchanged for a tzedakah opportunity. Those were the years when orange UNICEF milk containers were big—we abandoned our quest for candy and roamed far and wide (further than I had ever even thought about going before) to gather gelt to make the world a better place. We did for others that which



we would not do for ourselves. In those days, in that limited time before we knew better, Halloween taught me about self-sacrifice and the art of charitable fund raising. I made my first *tzedakah* appeals dressed in some thrown-together hobo costume on those October nights.

Within a short time, however, UNICEF fell from grace—and in the void, Halloween greed made a big comeback. A couple of years later, we learned about the Palestinian math textbooks which were funded by UNICEF monies. These were math books which asked, "If there are six Israelis and four Jews are killed by a brave guerilla, how many Zionist oppressors are left?" A year or two passed, then we heard the stories of razor blades hidden in apples. After that, we started taking our candy to the emergency room to X-ray it. Halloween isn't all it used to be. UNICEF is gone. Greed is back, Casper the Friendly Ghost is gone, and Freddy Krueger is now a really popular costume.

On the other hand, my family went crazy over Purim. Starting weeks in advance, my father became a tailor. He spent weeks fashioning the best and most original Purim costumes for me and Judy. If you've ever seen one of those documentaries about what poor neighborhoods in Rio do to get ready for *Mardi Gras*—you know what my house was like. There were bangles and tinsel everywhere. My earliest memory was of a satin King Ahasuerus costume. It was purple on the outside, lined with gold satin. I had this studded and bejewelled cape which would have done Elvis proud. The coolest thing about it, however, was the crown. My father took an old baseball hat and made into the center of a satin turban. It, too, was encrusted in faux finery. The crown was then sewn onto the top of the turban. I used it for a couple of years and won some first prizes. Later, I had this great Haman costume with a long flowing black satin cape, lined—of course—in red satin. The three-cornered hat was a padded affair, sort of a giant *hamentash*, sewed around an old sailor's hat.

My sister's two best Purim costumes were even more creative. Once my father made her a gorgeous grogger costume. It was a huge cardboard box with a face hole cut out. It was covered in aluminum foil and had a mailing tube handle which was also covered in foil. The two amazing things about it were, first, that my father managed to glue down all of this foil with out wrinkling any of it and second, that there was this great art deco border which took two nights to draw in three different colors of magic marker: red, blue, and green. Judy became a deco version of the dancing cigarette box. However, Judy's best costume was as a Torah. My father, the tailor, made her a white satin Torah mantle with this wonderful gold tasseled fringe. Her head went through the top where the roller handles would normally go. To go with it, he molded a tin breastplate, carved a wooden pointer (which was then covered in foil), and added a crown. It was really stunning.

The point here is very simple. Halloween was never banned—therefore, it was never carried the enticement of a forbidden pleasure. It was a simple one-night affair which was enjoyed and forgotten. I didn't become Stephen King— it isn't one of my High Holidays. My family were Reform Americans, we only observed one day of Halloween.

When I compare the residual details in my memories of Halloweens and Purims past, I am amazed at how rich the detail is in my memories of Purim. In retrospect it taught me that my parents' wisdom made real sense. They didn't waste the energy needed to fight Halloween; giving Purim real impact was far more productive. Halloween teaches us that it is good and sometimes fun to confront our fears. It is a holiday which plays with evil in order to face fear. What concerns me about Halloween is not so much its pre-Hallmark origins in All Saints' Day and All Hallows' Eve, but its tendency towards meanness. It is not the treat that concerns me, but Halloween's validation of trickery. Purim is sweets, noise, and costumes, too. But it comes from someplace different. Purim is the story of how every Jew (even an intermarried Jewish woman who was only a good enough Jewess at best) can be a hero—and that when we act together we are stronger than evil. I love "B" movies, but they don't direct my life. Halloween is Roger Korman's Holiday—it is a George Romero epic. Esther is the kind of character Meryl Streep should play. It is Oscar

material—it deserves a much bigger budget.

And now back to *Talmud 2000* (the fantasy Talmud that each of us evolves in our minds):

a. **Should parents keep their kids from participating in Halloween?** My own feeling (not an authoritative response)—only if they can easily get away with it. I could do without Halloween—it is too subject to abuses—but fighting it too much only renders it too important.

b. **Is Halloween a valid reason for skipping Hebrew School?** Not on your life. There is plenty of time to make the rounds before or after class. I don't even recommend an early dismissal.

c. **Can Halloween defer Shabbat?** If you can make Shabbat more important and skip one year, do it. If you can't, consider: (a) running a Halloween event for your child and friends on Thursday or starting it with *Havdalah* in Costumes on Saturday, or (b) do it early Friday night and then make Shabbat, or if it is a question of a dance or party (which can't or won't be avoided)—apply the "Always make sure that Shabbat comes first" rule, and let them go (if you must)—after dinner.

d. **Would I let my child miss a whole weekend at Camp because trick or treat might be missed?** No. (Unless it is a real fight—enough kicking and screaming and crying and door slamming and I would give in—but not until that point. Then, even if I lost, I would have won a moral victory, the importance of Jewishness would have been emphasized.)

Now, here is the hard question:

Must Purim costumes be exclusively Jewish? Real Jewish Law doesn't speak to this question, but we need to:

Joel: What made Purim different when I was a child was that every costume affirmed Jewish Identity.

Carol: When I grew up in a Reform congregation I thought all Purim costumes had to be Mordechai, Esther, Ahashuerus, and Vashti and Haman. When I joined a Conservative one and learned that a Purim costume could be anything, I loved it. It was liberating.

Observation 1: When it comes to Purim costumes, Reform congregations are stricter than more traditional congregations. Ironic!

Joel: Two years ago at my Temple, the Jason in my class came to Purim in a *Friday the 13th* Jason Hockey Mask and Shane came dressed as Freddy Krueger—is that Purim?

Carol: I don't know.

Comment: When you live in a mainly Jewish culture, Purim is a wonderful time to play with non-Jewish images (even Freddy Krueger)—when you operate in a predominantly non-Jewish culture, the chance to enact Jewish roles and do Jewish play is really important. In other words, like most other truths, it depends.

Epilogue

There is a famous Jewish teaching pun in the Talmud (which really only works in Hebrew):

"Yom ***Purim*** *k'Yom ha-Kippurim."* Purim Day is like Yom Kippur. The Talmud doesn't explain this strange and inviting comparison.

Ask yourself, "How is Purim like Yom Kippur?" There are lots of right ideas you can find. Playing this idea, the Kelemer Maggid taught:

"On Purim, Jews dress up and masquerade as non-Jews, while on Yom Kippur they dress up and masquerade as pious Jews."

We can learn a lot from this lesson. Classic Jewish wisdom saw Yom Kippur as the climactic moment of the Jewish year, and often began teaching about Jewish life with Rosh ha-Shanah. We can learn that it is equally valid to begin with Purim, to start with play rather than guilt.

JOEL LURIE GRISHAVER IS THE CREATIVE CHAIR OF TORAH AURA PRODUCTIONS. THIS ARTICLE IS EXCERPTED FROM JOEL'S FORTH COMING ALEF DESIGN GROUP BOOK: 40 SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SAVE THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

What Does Being Jewish Mean?

The Story Behind the Book

by Karen A. Katz

Several years ago my friend Jan Greenberg had been returning from a shopping trip with her family when they saw a dead animal in the road. Rachel, who was then about eight, began to cry inconsolably and asked her parents why God lets animals get hit by cars. My friends did their best to answer her question in a way that would help her understand the goodness and compassion of God, and hoped they had done an adequate job. When Jan called me to relate the upsetting incident, I told her I thought they had, but added a few cents worth of my own.

Jan and her husband, Larry, told Rachel that it wasn't God's intention for animals to be hurt or to suffer. They also told her that there are problems in the world which God doesn't step in to cure because He wants people to get involved in solving them.

I added that sometimes God allows something sad to happen so that we can learn how to be more caring and careful of one another and of the creatures God created to share the earth with us.

It wasn't the first time Jan and I consulted each other when Rachel or one of my boys, Mitchel and Steven, posed unexpected and very challenging questions about God and Judaism. About the same time, Mitch, then eight, had asked if the Messiah would have superpowers like He-Man; Steven at eight wondered if converts were just a tad bit Christian.

There ought to be a book just for kids which answers these questions,