

DEMONS

Textual Sources for Demons

The existence of demons is mentioned in the Torah:

Leviticus 17:7

וְלֹא יִזְבְּחוּ עוֹד, אֶת זְבַחֵיהֶם, לְשָׁעִירִים, אֲשֶׁר הֵם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם

And they shall no longer bring their sacrifice to the demons (seirim).

Deuteronomy 32:17

יִזְבְּחוּ, לְשִׂדִים לֹא אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים, לֹא יָדְעוּם

They sacrificed to demons (shedim) who are not G-d.

Several explanations are given for the Hebrew terms *shedim* and *seirim* for demons mentioned in the above verses:

Shedim is related to:

1. “**sade**” which means field, since demons generally dwell in outlying, deserted areas.
2. “**shadud**” which means deserted, for the same reason (Ramban, Parashat Yitro and Acharei Mot).
3. “**shod**”, which means robbery since they lay in ambush to harm people and rob them of their physical and spiritual well-being.

“*Seirim*” means goats, since they are seen hopping and skipping like goats.

Do the above-quoted verses prove that the Torah recognizes the existence of demons? One might argue that the Torah is simply prohibiting the worship of some fictional, false force. However, the overwhelming majority of Torah sages throughout the ages accepted the view that demons, as well as other supernatural forces, exist as the sources that follow amply demonstrate. Before reviewing them, though, consider the following arguments offered by Rabbi Menashe ben Israel in Nishmat Chaim for the existence of demons:

1] Just as the heavens and earth are full of diverse creations, so too air and fire (from which demons are made) are full of diverse creations. 2] Air, which sustains all living creatures in the physical world, certainly sustains higher creatures in the spiritual world. 3] One cannot say that since they are not seen they don't exist, because G-d is not visible, nevertheless He certainly exists. Furthermore, the testimony of a witness who says that he didn't see an event is not valid testimony.

Note: Rambam in Hilchot Avoda Zara 11:16 and the Guide 3:37 refutes the existence of demons. However, Migdal Oz, a noted commentary of Rambam wrote of him, “Rambam knew [the secrets of Kabbalah] toward the end of his life. I testify that I saw [old, original documents in which he himself affirms, and which prove, that he engaged in the study of the Kabbalah...but] since the nature of these secret matters is esoteric, he didn't publish

them but hid them” (Migdal Oz, Yesodei HaTorah 1:11). Also, Shalshet HaKabbalah 44a brings that R’ Eliya Chaim saw a letter in which the Rambam wrote to one of his disciples: “After I arrived in the Land of Israel, I found an elderly sage who enlightened my eyes to the ways of the Kabbala, and if I had known before what I have learned now, much that I wrote I would not have written”.

Origin and Proliferation of Demons

What is the origin of demons? Examine the following six sources that chronicle the creation and proliferation of demons:

1. Breishit Raba 7:7

ואת כל רמש האדמה, אתמהא. רבי אומר אלו השדים שברא הקב"ה את נשמתן ובא לברוא את גופן וקדש השבת ולא בראן.

“And G-d said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures’. Rebbe said, ‘These are the demons whose souls G-d created, but as He was about to form their bodies, Sabbath came and He didn’t create them’”.

Etz Yosef (R’ Chanoch Zundel) comments that even though demons don’t have bodies, they have forms that are incomplete. This is like the ethereal body (*guf hadak*) that we explored in *Dybuk* and *Ghosts*, and we’ll discuss later how this relates to the materialization of demons.

2. Avot 5:6

עשרה דברים נבראו בערב שבת בין השמשות...ויש אומרים, אף המזיקין.

“Ten things were created Sabbath Eve at twilight...some say destructive spirits”.

Maharal in *Derech Chaim* p. 236 explains that G-d was in the process of creating for a full six days. At twilight Sabbath Eve, it can’t be that He didn’t create – it was not Shabbat yet. However, it can’t be that created either – it was no longer a weekday. Therefore, creations at that time were not completely natural, nor entirely unnatural. They were mysteriously suspended in a spiritual twilight between the physical and spiritual realms. We’ll see more about this dual nature as we proceed.

Note: The above-mentioned idea that G-d was “in the middle” of creating demons when Shabbat came in and therefore could not continue, is obviously problematic. Couldn’t He finish on Shabbat if He wanted? How is it that He wasn’t able to finish in time in the first place? Does this mean that G-d’s will was not realized and the creation is incomplete? Regarding the first question, once G-d set up the system of six days of creative work and the seventh to refrain from that work, He abides by the rules, as it were. Regarding the second and third, the continuation of the Midrash may prove instructive. There, the matter is compared to one who is on the way carrying a gem when Shabbat arrives. He has no choice but to throw the gem down. According to this, the demons are compared to a gem, representing G-d’s desire that it be this way. Thus, demons play an important role in the continuum between the physical and spiritual. Later, we’ll see more about the function of demons in this continuum.

3. Zohar, Bereishit

רבי שמעון אמר, מאה ותלתין שנים, אתפרש אדם מאתתיה. וכל אינון מאה ותלתין שנים, הוה אוליד רוחין ושדין בעלמא, בגין ההוא חילא דזוהמא, דהוה שאיב ביה.

Rabbi Shimon said that for a hundred and thirty years Adam separated from his wife, and during that time he begot in the world spirits and demons from the force of impurity that was drawn from him.

(We'll see more about demon "reproduction" later.)

4. Zohar, Acharei Mot

בתר דאתיילידו מאדם...חד דכורא אשתכח, דאתא לעלמא מרוחיה דסטרא דקין, וקרון ליה תובל קין. וחדא נוקבא נפקת עמיה, והוה בריין וטעאן בתראה, ואתקרי נעמה. מינה נפקו רוחין ושדין אחרנין.

After the demons were born to Adam...There was one male, who was born to the spirit from the aspect of Cain, and he was named Tuval Cain. And a female was born with him. People were going astray after her, and she was called Na'amah. From her came other spirits and demons.

Cain then is a source of demons; therefore the Torah doesn't mention death by his progeny as in other families of Adam.

5. R' Bachaye, Bereishit

ויש אומרים שנעמה היתה אשת אשמדון אם אשמדאי, והשדים נולדו ממנה. וארבע נשים היו אמות השדים: לילית ונעמה ואגרת ומחלת. ויש לכל אחת ואחת מהן מחנות וכתות של רוח הטומאה אין להם מספר.

Some say that Na'ama was the wife of the demon Ashmedon and mother of Ashmadai, and the demons were born from her. There were four "matriarch" demons: Lilit, Na'ama, Iggeret and Machalat. Each one has countless camps of evil spirits.

Ashmadai was the King of demons.

Gittin 68a

(מלכים א ו) והבית בהבנותו אבן שלמה מסע נבנה וגו' אמר להו לרבנן היכי אעביד אמרו... דילמא אשמדאי מלכא דשידי ידע...ואזיל שדריה לבניהו בן יהוידע יהב ליה שושילתא דחקיק עלה שם ועזקתא דחקיק עלה שם...וגנא נחית אתא שדא ביה שושילתא סתמיה. כי אתער הוה קא מיפרזל א"ל שמא דמרך עלך שמא דמרך עלך...בעינא דאיבנייה לבית המקדש וקא מיבעי לי שמירא א"ל לדידי לא מסיר לי לשרא דימא מסיר ליה ולא יהיב ליה אלא לתרנגולא ברא...וחפויה לקיניה זוגיתא חיוורתא כי אתא בעי למיעל ולא מצי, אזל אייתי שמירא ואותביה עלויה. רמא ביה קלא, שדייה, שקליה...תרחיה גביה עד דבנייה לבית המקדש.

[From a verse we learn that the stones used for the Temple must not be fashioned with metal instruments.] King Solomon asked his advisors how he could build the

Temple...They said, perhaps Ashmadai the King of the demons might know...He sent Benayahu ben Yehoyada with a chain inscribed with a name of G-d and cuffs engraved with the name...When Ashmadai fell asleep, he threw the chain around him and closed it. When he woke up, Ashmadai writhed to get free, but Benayahu told him, the name of your master is upon you....Solomon said to him, I want to build the Temple and I need the shamir worm [that is able to cut stone by walking over it]. He replied, It wasn't given to me but rather to the Minister of the Sea and he gave it to the wild hen...Benayahu covered the hen's nest with a box of clear glass, and when the hen arrived it desired to get into the nest but was unable to. It went to get the shamir and placed it on the glass. Benayahu made a noise [to startle the hen] who dropped the worm and he took it...Solomon kept Ashmadai under chain until he finished building the Temple.

6. Nishmat Chaim, Menashe ben Israel

עזא ועזאל קיטרגו על בריאת האדם הראשון ואמרו: למה בראת אותו עתיד הוא להכעיס לפניך. אמר לו הקב"ה: אלו ירדתם בעולם השפל הייתם חוטאים כמוהו. וכן הורידם וחסאו והם בני אלוקים, דכתיב: ויראו בני האלוקים את בנות האדם כי טובות הנה ויקחו להם נשים מכל אשר בחרו. ואחרי שחטאו נתגלמו, כי כיון שהמלאך הוא שבעת ימים בארץ נעשה עב ומיד שנתגלמו באופן ששלט בהם יצר הרע כשבקשו לחזור למקומם וזכרו שם המפורש לא יכלו לעלות כי נדחו ממחיצתם והפילו אותם לארץ בהרי החושך. ומהם יצאו הנפילים וענקים גדולי הקומה אשר היו בארץ המה הגבורים אשר מעולם אנשי שם. ומהם וזרעם הם המזיקין.

[Two angels] Aza and Azael complained about the creation of Adam saying, Why did you create him, in the future he will anger you. G-d replied, if you went down into the world you would sin as well. He put them in the world and they sinned. These angels are the mighty ones about which it is written, (Gen. 6:2-4) 'The bnei ha-elohim saw that the daughters of men were fair and took from them wives as they chose.' After sinning, they materialized, since an angel who sojourns on earth for seven days becomes course, and they materialized such that they were under the influence of the evil inclination. When they wanted to return to their place by pronouncing the divine name, they couldn't ascend since they had been expelled from their realm, and they were cast down to the earth in the mountains of darkness. From them came the Nefilim and the giants that were in the earth, they were the mighty men of renown. And their offspring [from women] became the demons.

Types and Anatomy of Demons

Classified by Type

Zohar, Ki Tetze

אנון תלמידי חכמים דידיעין מאי דהוה ומאי דעתיד למהוי ואנון בדקיונייהו בארעא אנון מארי פילוסופיה איצטגניני ישראל שידעין מאי דהוה ומאי דעתיד למהוי באותות דחמה וסיהרא ולקותא דלהון וכל כוכב ומזל ומה אחרי בעלמא. ואית מנהון כבהמה פרין ורבין כבהמה דיוקנא דלהון לתתא אנון עמי הארץ...ואית אחרנין מארי סתרי תורה דאיהו ירתין נשמתין מסטרא דמלכותא קדישא.

Some [demons] are like students of the Torah that know what was and what will be. They correspond to philosophers and astrologers of Yisrael, who know what was and what will

be according to the signs of the sun and moon and their eclipses and each star and constellation; in this way they know what is seen in the world. Some of them are like beasts that increase and multiply like animals, and they correspond below to ignorant people. There are still others who have knowledge of the mysteries of the Torah, whose souls are from the side of the holy King.

Classified by Location

R' Bachaye, Parashat Yitro

מן הידוע כי השדים שלושה חלקים: יש מהם שוכנים באויר בגלגלי היסודות, והם המחלימים את האדם בלילות. ויש מהם שוכנים בקרבנו, והם המחטיאים את האדם. ויש מהם שוכנים בתהומות. ואלמלא נתנה להם רשות לעלות היו מחריבים את העולם.

There are three types of demons: Those who dwell in the atmosphere among the celestial bodies who influence a person's dreams at night; Those who dwell on earth among people and cause them to sin; Those who dwell in the depths of the earth, who if given permission, would destroy the world.

Classified by Composition

Ramban in R' Bachaye, Acherei Mot

כי עיקר היותם משני יסודות קלים, והם: האש והרוח, ועל כן יטוסו לרב דקותם וקלותם, אבל היו המורכבים מארבע יסודות גוף גם ומורגש להשגת האדם, והשדים המרכבים משני יסודות אלה הם גוף דק איננו מורגש ולא מושג לחושי האדם, אבל הם מתדמים ומתלבשים צורה לעיני הרואים, והנה הם גוף רוחני, כי כן היסודות האלה רוחניים.

The main composition of demons is from the light elements of fire and air. This is why they can fly with great speed and agility, Even though creations comprised of the four elements have form and are perceived by man, while demons are made of these lighter elements and have an ethereal body which is not perceived by man, nevertheless, they appear and take form to onlookers on account of this spiritual body.

It is for this reason that demons can appear and disappear to people at will:

Berachot 43b

לאחד נראה ומזיק, לשנים נראה ואינו מזיק, לשלושה אינו נראה כל עיקר.

To one person, [a demon] may show itself and harm him; to two it may show itself, but not harm them; to three it will not even show itself.

Berachot 6a

תניא אבא בנימין אומר אלמלי נתנה רשות לעין לראות אין כל בריה יכולה לעמוד מפני המזיקין אמר אביי אינהו נפישי מינן וקיימי עלן כי כסלא לאוגיא אמר רב הונא כל חד וחד מינן אלפא משמאליה ורבבתא מימיניה אמר רבא האי דוחקא דהוי בכלה מנייהו הוי הני ברכי דשלהי מנייהו הני מאני דרבנן דבלו מחופיא דידהו הני כרעי דמנקפן מנייהו האי מאן דבעי למידע להו לייתי קיטמא נהילא ונהדר אפורייה ובצפרא חזי כי כרעי דתרנגולא האי

מאן דבעי למחזינהו ליתי שלייתא דשונרתא אוכמתא בת אוכמתא בוכרתא בת בוכרתא ולקליה בנורא ולשחקיה ולימלי עיניה מניה וחזי להו...רב ביבי בר אביי עבד הכי חזא ואתזק בעו רבנן רחמי עליה ואתסי.

It has been taught, Abba Binyamin says: If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could endure the demons. Abaye says: They are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge around a field. Rav Huna says: Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand. Raba says: The crowding and crushing in the lectures comes from them. Fatigue in the knees comes from them. The wearing out of the clothing of the scholars is due to their rubbing against them. The bruising of the feet comes from them. If one wants to discover them, let him take sifted ashes and sprinkle them around his bed, and in the morning he will see something like the footprints of a rooster. If one wishes to see them, let him take the afterbirth of a black she-cat, the offspring of a black she-cat, the first-born of a first-born, let him roast it in fire and grind it to powder, and then let him put some into his eye, and he will see them...Rabbi Bibi bar Abaye did so, saw them and came to harm. The scholars, however, prayed for him and he recovered.

Nishmat Chaim 3:13, p 224 summarizes four types of demons. We have included some sources as examples:

1. Demons made of fire only. They are called Torah scholars and seek to help people.

Meila 17a,b

פעם אחת גזרה המלכות גזרה שלא ישמרו את השבת ושלא ימולו את בניהם ושיבעלו את נדות...אמרו מי ילך ויבטל הגזרות? ילך ר' שמעון בן יוחאי שהוא מלומד בנסים...יצא לקראתו בן תמליון. רצונכם אבוא עמכם? בכה ר' שמעון ואמר מה שפחה של בית אבא נזדמן לה מלאך שלש פעמים ואני לא פעם אחת, יבא הנס מכל מקום. קדים הוא על בברתיה דקיסר כי מטא התם אמר בן תמליון צא בן תמליון צא וכיון דקרו ליה נפק אזל. אמר להון שאילו כל מה דאית לכון למישאל ועיילינהו לגנזיה לשקול כל דבעו. אשכחו ההוא איגרא שקלוה וקרעוה.

Once the authorities made a decree forbidding Sabbath observance, circumcision and ritual immersion. The Jews asked, 'who will go and nullify the decree?' R' Shimon ben Yochai [shall go] since he is accustomed to [having] miracles [occur for him]...The demon Ben Temalyon went out to encounter [R' Shimon]. 'Would you like me to accompany you?' R' Shimon cried and said, 'the maid servant [Hagar] of father [Abraham] had an angel appear to her three times, and for me not even once. Nevertheless, let the miracle come from anywhere.

[The demon] proceeded ahead and possessed the daughter of the king. When he arrived there, [R' Shimon] said, 'Ben Temalyon leave, Ben Temalyon leave'. When they called him [to leave] he departed and went [from the daughter]. [The King] told them, 'ask of me any request, and enter my treasure vault and take anything you want'. They found the decree and took it and ripped it.

2. Demons made of fire and air. They are called human and are helpful.

Chulin 105b

אמר אבוי מריש הוה אמינא האי דשדי מיא מפומא דחצבא משום ציבתא אמר לי מר משום דאיכא מים הרעים. ההוא בר שידא דהוה בי רב פפא אזל לאתויי מיא מנהרא איעכב כי אתא אמרו ליה אמאי איעכבת אמר להו עד דחלפי מים הרעים. אדהכי חזנהו דקא שדו מיא מפומא דחצבא אמר אי הוה ידענא דרגיליתו למיעבד הכי לא איעכבי.

Abaye said: At first I thought the reason one pours water from the mouth of the vessel [before drinking] is because of stubble [floating on the surface]. The master told me the reason is because of evil water [perhaps demons drank from the surface]. A demon in the house of Rav Papa [Rashi: who served the household] once went to bring water from the river. He delayed, and when he arrived they asked him, 'Why did you tarry'? He told them, 'until the evil water passed' [apparently he waited in order to somehow nullify the danger of another demon's having drunk from the water]. In the meantime, [the demon] saw them pouring the surface water from the mouth of the vessel. He said, 'If I knew you were accustomed to doing this, I would not have waited'.

3. Demons made of fire, air and water. They are animal-like, can be "sensed" and are harmful.
4. Demons made of fire, air, water and earth. They are sub-animal, tangible, and destructive. Of these lower types, some live in deserted places and others live among people and mock and scorn them.

Appearance and Characteristics of Demons

Midrash Tanchuma, Nasso

ראשו דומה לעגל וקרן אחת יוצאה בתוך מצחו והוא עשוי אפסין.

Rabi Berechiya said, Its head is like a bull, with one horn protruding from its forehead.

Eicha Rabati

אמר רבי יוחנן שכולו מלא עינים קליפות קליפות ושערות שערות.

Rebi Yochanan said, It is full of eyes, with scales upon scales, and hairs upon hairs.

Baba Batra 73a

אמר רבה בר בר חנה לדידי חזי לי הורמיז בר לילית כי קא רהיט אקופיא דשורא דמחוזא ורהיט פרשא כי רכיב חיותא מתתאיה ולא יכיל ליה זמנא חדא הוה מסרגאן ליה תרתי כודנייתי וקיימן אתרי גישרי דרוגנג ושואר מהאי להאי ומהאי להאי ונקיט תרי מזגי דחמרא בידיה ומוריק מהאי להאי ומהאי להאי ולא נטפא ניטופתא לארעא ואותו היום (תהילים קז) יעלו שמים ירדו תהומות הוה.

Raba bar bar Chana said, I saw Hormiz the son of Lilith running on the railing of a wall in Machuza so fast that a rider galloping below on horseback could not overtake him. Once, they saddled for him two mules on two bridges of the Rognag River and he jumped back and forth from one to the other while holding in his hands two cups of wine, pouring

alternately from one to the other, without a single drop falling to the ground. And that day was as windy as in the verse, 'they [that go down to the sea in ships] were raised up to the heavens and down to the deeps' (Psalms 107:26).

Chagiga 16a

ת"ר ששה דברים נאמרו בשדים שלשה כמלאכי השרת ושלשה כבני אדם שלשה כמלאכי השרת יש להם כנפים כמלאכי השרת וטסין מסוף העולם ועד סופו כמלאכי השרת ויודעין מה שעתיד להיות כמלאכי השרת...ושלשה כבני אדם אוכלין ושותין כבני אדם פרין ורבין כבני אדם ומתים כבני אדם.

Six things were said about demons: in three ways they are like angels, and in three like humans. In three they are like angels: they have wings like angels; they fly from one end of the world to the other like angels; they know the future like angels. And in three they are like people: they eat and drink like people; they increase and multiply like people and they die like people.

This enigmatic teaching requires explanation:

Flying: If birds that are made of the 4 elements fly, all the more so the demons that are made of the two light elements of fire and water can fly. Knowing the future: They hear the future as angels do since they dwell among the constellations. But this is only the near future, also what they know can be changed. Eat and drink like humans: Not that they eat physical food as humans do, because their bodies are not of the four elements. Rather, in the same way humans have to replenish their liquids, which evaporate because of body heat, their element of fire dries up their element of air and they need to replenish their moisture. They consume the fumes from fire and vapor from water, particularly that of the incense and sacrifices offered to the demons. Reproduce like humans: Not that they physically reproduce, but they draw out the energy from improperly expressed sexuality and use it to engender spiritual beings as themselves. We'll see more about this shortly. Die as humans: Just as humans die as a result of disintegration of their 4 elements, so demons die through disintegration of their elements.

The following source describes how a sage nullified a demon:

Kiddushin 29b

הוה ההוא מזיק בי רבנן דאביי דכי הוּו עיילי בתרין אפילו ביממא הוּו מיתזקי אמר להו לא ליתיב ליה [לרב אחא] אינש אושפיזא אפשר דמתרחיש ניסא על בת בהווא בי רבנן אידמי ליה כתנינא דשבעה רישוותיה כל כריעה דכרע נתר חד רישיה אמר להו למחר אי לא איתרחיש ניסא סכינתין.

There was a demon in the house of study of Abaye that even if two people went in, and even during the day, they would come to harm. Abaye told [the residents of the town], 'Don't accept [the visiting Rav Acha as a guest in your homes, then he'll have to sleep in the house of study and] perhaps a miracle will occur [in his merit]. He went and stayed in the house of study and the demon appeared to him as a serpent with seven heads. With each bow that the rabbi bowed [in prayer], one of the heads was cut. The next day he said, if a miracle had not been wrought for me, I would have been endangered.

Note: Demons are also mischievous. Gittin 66a posits that if a man is heard shouting from a pit that he wants to divorce his wife, we must ascertain it's not a demon. Also, in Sanhedrin 44a, Rabbi Yochanan said it is forbidden to say *shalom* to someone he encounters at night, because it might be a demon.

Demon Promiscuity

Zohar, Parashat Bereishit

דהא ברנש כד איהו בחלמה אתין רוחין נוקבין וחיכן עמה ומתחטמן מנה ואלידן לבתר, אי הכי כל קרי דחמי ברנש הוא מגו רוחין נוקבין דאתין ומזדוגן עמה ומתחממן עמה ואילידן דוכרין ונוקבן... ואפילו בהאי גונא רוחין דכורין אתין לנשי עלמא ומתעברן מנייהו ואלידן רוחין וכלהון נגעי בני אדם.

Female demons appear in a man's dream enticing and seducing him. They become heated through this intercourse and give birth to demons. In this way, all nocturnal emissions are because of female demons that come and interact with a man and become heated through him and engender male or female demons. Similarly, male demons come to women who become impregnated by them and give birth to demons. These are the plagues of man.

The following account is recorded in Shivchei Ha-Ari, the praises of the Arizal: The Ari was learning with his disciples when he suddenly told them he saw two female demons dressed in red silk, adorned with gold jewelry, gems on their heads, and gold necklaces around their necks about to seduce two young men. In the morning, the disciples looked into the matter and found that that's exactly what happened.

Sefer HaManhir, Responsa 116 deals with a case in which a demon seduced a woman two times by first posing as her husband and then as the *paritz*. The author ruled that the woman is permitted to her husband because a demon's intercourse is not real intercourse.

The following verse protects one from demon seduction:

Psalms 91:10

לא תאנה אליך רעה, ונגע לא יקרב באהלך.

"No evil shall encounter you, no plague shall approach your tent"

This is explained by the Kabbalists to mean: 'No evil shall encounter you' – the female demon Lilit shall not encounter you at night to entice you. 'No plague shall approach your tent' – nor shall the male demon Samael approach your wife.

Therefore this verse is recited in the bedtime *shema*. May we be blessed and be guarded in peace.