



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

The Monstrous-Feminine in Jewish Tradition: On the Stories We Tell about Women

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In this class, Arielle Levites examines how our cultural ideas of who women are, and who they can be, impacts who women are permitted to be and even how women who come forward to report violence or harassment are perceived. In this context, she explores the deep story of the monstrous feminine within Jewish tradition and within contemporary culture.

Questions for discussion:

In this session, Arielle offers that there exists a deep-seated cross-cultural suspicion of women who put their own wants before those of others. She proposes that this bias impacts how we perceive both ambitious women and women who come forward with claims of sexual violence. She argues that we need to examine our old stories, and to create new stories that offer more diverse and surprising roles for people of all genders.

Some questions for further consideration:

1. How can the concept of the monstrous-feminine help us understand backlash against #metoo?
2. How can I make sense of sacred texts that seem to offer Divine endorsement for the subjugation of women (and others)?
3. What is implicit bias, and how does it impact our capacity to assess an individual's claim?
4. How can we disrupt images from ancient texts and stories? Should we?
5. What stories shape our vision of what being a "good Jewish woman" means today?
6. What are the interventions necessary to shift our paradigms on this question? What needs to change within ourselves, within our relationships, and within society, for women to be able to be integrated, whole people rather than stereotypes of either the obedient Eve or the wayward Lilith?
7. What kinds of responsibility do different people bear in this project? What steps may we take as men or as people of other genders? As parents? Employers? Citizens? Educators?