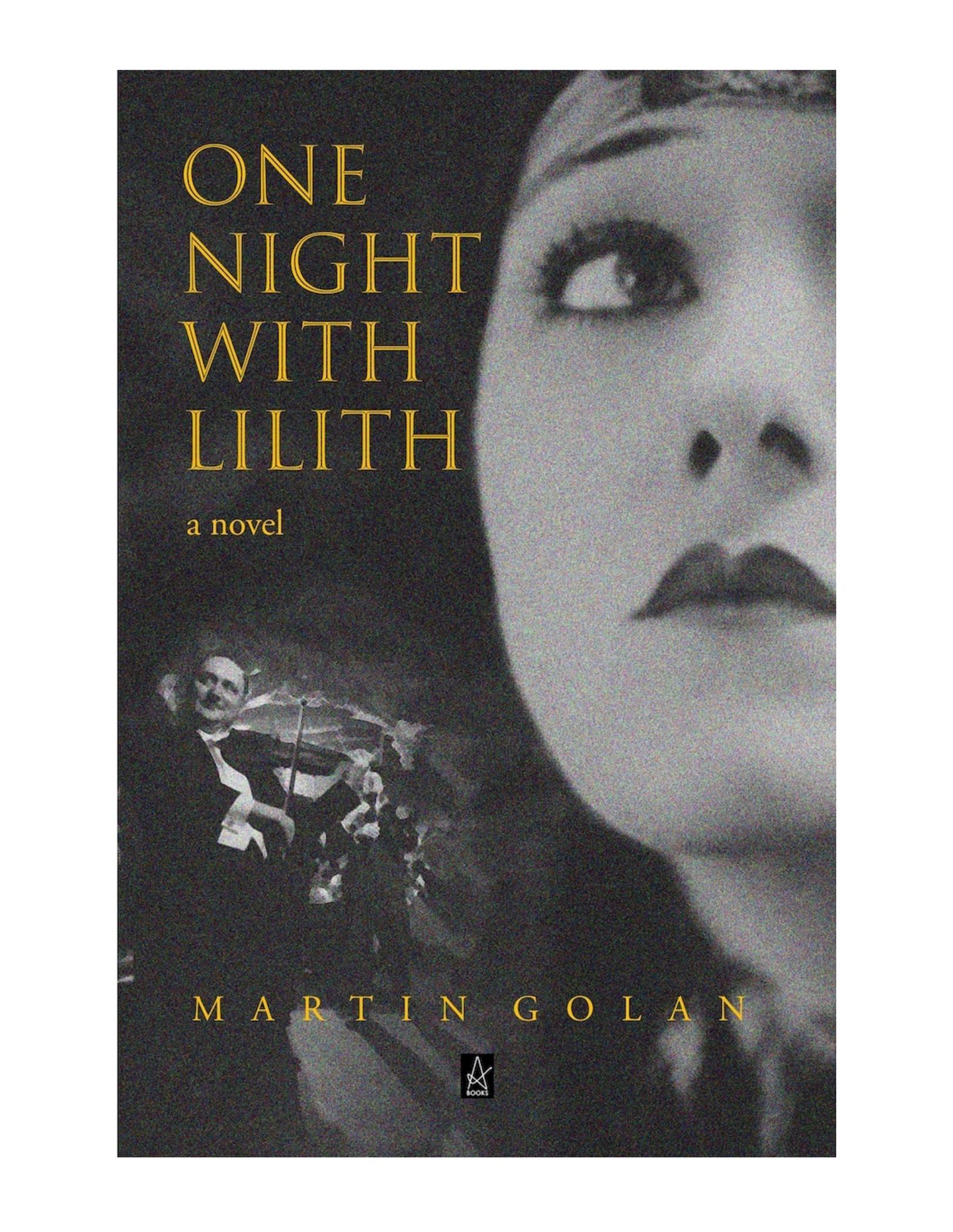


Martin Golan to discuss book at Bnai Keshet





ONE  
NIGHT  
WITH  
LILITH

a novel

MARTIN GOLAN



"One Night with Lilith"  
Sunday, Feb. 23, 5 p.m.

Martin Golan will read from his book, and Rabbi Arian Weitzman will lead a discussion.  
Bnai Keshet, 99 South Fullerton Ave.  
For more information, call 973-746-4889 or visit [bnaikeshet.org](http://bnaikeshet.org).

**By GWEN OREL**

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Martin Golan's new book "One Night with Lilith" is not a retelling of the Biblical legend of Adam's first wife, who refused to submit to him.

The book, which came out in December, is the story of the troubled marriage of a liberal Montclair couple, and of the husband's father, who escaped the Nazis by hiding in the woods.

Rob Lerner, the Montclair husband, and his father, Sol, are both obsessed with the idea of the elusive, beautiful and irresistible Lilith. For Rob, that means seeing Lilith in his artist-wife, Amy, who has demons of her own.

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Golan, a retired Reuters editor, began working seriously on the book in 2012, but said the opening of the book came to him even earlier, perhaps around 2006: a couple eats out on a restaurant on Bloomfield Avenue, and while they are out, their house and everything in it burns to the ground. A paragraph in italics tells part of Sol's story: the day he is liberated.

What attracted Golan was "the whole notion of losing your past," he said. "While I polished the book, this stayed the same. All of your memorabilia is gone. She's a visual artist, all her lifetime work is gone. All the clothing you don't want to throw away but don't like, that's gone, that's almost fun. But then I'm trying to suggest, what it would be like to lose your past. The opening came to me, and the idea of the father who was in the Holocaust being liberated, introducing that in the first sentence. If you're 'liberated' from a concentration camp, are you ever really free after that?"

"If you are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, do you ever really leave it behind? Is the past really gone?"



*Martin Golan will read from his new book at Bnai Keshet. COURTESY BNAI KESHET*

## **WRITING AT REUTERS**

When Golan, who had published a novel, “My Wife’s Last Lover,” and a collection of short stories, “Where Things Are When You Lose Them,” began to work seriously on the book, he was still at Reuters. He would work on his laptop on the bus, and write in the Reuters cafeteria, overlooking Times Square, at lunch.

“I had to adjust what I ate, I couldn’t eat an orange because I’d have to get up and wash my hands,” he said with a laugh. “Other journalists would come up to me and tell me how disciplined I was, how I was a role model. I felt like I could have accomplished so much more if I just had better work habits. So many people

have a novel inside them.”

One reason the novel took so long to write is that he went down a few different roads with it. At one point he tried telling the story via the objects in the house, rather than in a chronological way: what happened in front of the pier mirror, or under the Tiffany lamp. After six months, he realized it just did not work.

“Without a narrative flow, nobody would want to read it. There are a lot of books like that, everybody praises them. But I didn’t want a book where you have to work to push through it,” he said.

## IMAGINING LILITH

Lilith, Golan said, “is the woman you desire, but are also a little afraid of.” Unlike his character Rob, who teaches for a while in a Yeshiva, Golan has no Yeshiva background. He did research. Today many people are familiar with her name, because she’s become a symbol of feminism, a woman who stands up to men. “There is a magazine called ‘Lillith,’” Golan said. And then there’s a version of her where she is a demoness who steals children.

For Rob Lerner, the Montclair husband, Lilith is “a woman you desire in the night, and everything in life would be perfect if you could have her. She says, ‘I’m not your Lilith, I’m not anybody’s Lilith, I’m just me.’”

Golan was also inspired by a quotation from Isaiah that he uses as an epigraph for the book: “And the wild-cats shall meet with the jackals, and the satyrs shall call to one another; yea, there shall the night-monster Lilith repose, and find for herself a place of rest.” It touches him.

“All of us want a place safe and warm, to be taken care of, to feel safe,” Golan said. “It’s the only time Lilith is mentioned in the Bible. All she really wants is a place to rest.

“Rob and his father Sol’s imagining of Lilith is really just something that men do. It gives Sol a reason to live, when he sees a beautiful woman, slightly out of reach, on a hill, with the moon rising behind her. He clings to her as something that lets him get through unbelievable horrors.”

Golan’s own family came to America early in the 20th century; had they stayed in Europe they’d have been killed in the Holocaust, and Golan never born.

“I know it happened, but it’s overwhelming,” he said. “That 1/3 of the Jews on earth, a million and a half children, that it was done by human beings, the same species as we are. I felt I needed to write about the horror and arbitrariness of it. I had read a lot of books about the Holocaust, and did a lot of online research to make sure I had the right trees, that there were no weird errors. When I was at work, I would go to the Russian language news service. I got a lot of names and details like that. It’s the whole brutality. Sol was a gentle young man, like Elie Weisel. He started out believing. The Holocaust comes and knocks it out of him, he’s living like an animal just to survive.”

Golan, who now lives in Verona, after 20 years in Montclair, is a long-time member of Bnai Keshet, a reconstructionist synagogue. He is an atheist, who is strongly affiliated with Judaism. "I'm deeply immersed in my heritage as a Jew. Reading about Jewish mysticism is satisfying."

As for "One Night with Lilith," he described the novel as "basically a love story. The most interesting thing around is human beings, and how we feel about each other."

## EXCERPT

*When Sol Lerneshefsky was liberated he didn't realize he was actually free. He wandered around in the bitter cold, and had bizarre conversations he would never remember with soldiers in uniforms that weren't German. In time, the entire day dissolved, like a dream in a sunny bedroom window.*

*But it wasn't a dream that happened to Sol Lerneshefsky. Even years later, even on his deathbed, he could never figure out the right thing to call it.*

The Lerner's knew precisely when the house caught fire. They were having an argument amid the fragrances of Buddha's Kiss, their favorite restaurant on Bloomfield Avenue, and had just discovered that this was more than an ordinary marital spat. They realized, simultaneously, that their marriage would end, despite their mangled feelings about each other, despite their beloved son, despite even the intense and unspoken fear each had about being alone.

Their house, the lovely gabled Victorian on the best part of Cooper Avenue, renovated extravagantly, fretted over indulgently, and lived in thoroughly, burned to the ground.