

- [Home](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [News](#)
- [Links](#)



Main Menu

- [Home](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Latest News](#)
- [Articles](#)

Latest Items

- [Georgia - The First to Outlaw Slavery](#)
- [Sarasvati-Sindhu Civilization and Bharatiya Culture](#)
- [Greek and Indian Cosmology: Review of Early History](#)
- [Babylonian and Indian Astronomy: Early Connections](#)
- [Hindu Contributions to Japanese Religion](#)
- [HINDU TODAY - RAMA NAVAMI EDITION April 2013](#)
- [Rural India - Humanity's Last Stand](#)
- [Lakota Belief and Ritual on Sacred Kan](#)
- [Native India - A Resurgent India](#)
- [Watch Vedic Empire Presents on Youtube](#)
- [To-Kan: A Secret Name of God](#)
- [New Book: The Serpent, The Eagle, The Lion & the Disk](#)
- [The Primal Revelation at the Heart of Civilization](#)
- [Krishna Worship: One of Humanity's Most Ancient Traditions](#)
- [The Great Blue Spirit Nagi Tanka Skan Skan](#)
- [The Lion of Time](#)
- [Contacting Vedic Empire Productions](#)
- [Rakhi Bond of Love Saves the Life of Alexander](#)
- [Ancient Pompeii's Lakshmi Statuette](#)
- [Hindu Radio-Breaking the Sound Barrier](#)
- [Philippines- A Golden Heritage](#)
- [Gympie Gold inlaid Quartz](#)
- [Ancient Hindu Mariners and Australian Gold](#)
- [Lets Connect on Facebook](#)
- [Why is Prayag-an ancient center of Hinduism now called Allahabad?](#)
- [Have Mosques ever been built atop non-Islamic Holy Sites?](#)
- [The Blue God of Judaism](#)
- [Greek Othrys and the Vedic Adri Montains](#)
- [HINDU CIVILIZATIONS OF AUSTRONESIA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA](#)
- [Vedic Brahma and Apache Kuterastan](#)
- [Phoenician Alphabet, Adopted by the Greeks](#)
- [The Phoenician Creation Story](#)
- [India-Homeland of the Phoenicians](#)
- [Evidence Linking Ancient Troy and Central America](#)
- [Rig Veda and the Phoenicians](#)

[Administrator](#)

The Blue God of Judaism

Written by Rabbi Robert dos Santos Teixeira, LMSW

Introduction



The Blue God of Judaism? Yes, the blue god of Judaism. The god that Jews worship is as blue as the Hindu god Shiva, the supreme being in Shaivism, the oldest sect within Hinduism. In some ways, the ancient Hebrews were more similar to modern-day Hindus than Jews. They acknowledged the existence of deities other than YHWH (whom Christians generally refer to as Yahweh) and, like their neighbors, looked to a pantheon of gods and goddesses to satisfy their individual and collective needs.¹

EXPLORING THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN YHWH / JUDAISM AND SHIVA / SHIVISM

Their principal deity, however, became and remained YHWH, whom they imagined as having anthropomorphic form.² This article aims to contribute to and further recent discussion of YHWH's masculine form,³ i.e., the Lord's body. Hopefully, in so doing, long-overlooked similarities between YHWH and Shiva will receive due attention, and the feminine form of YHWH⁴ will re-emerge more fully, thereby triggering a re-appreciation for the life-creating and life-sustaining oneness of the divine masculine and the divine feminine, perhaps the most ancient tenet of Judaism. It is the color of the Lord's body that interests us here. Examination of

biblical, talmudic, midrashic, and mystical texts reveals that the Lord's body is blue! The Hebrew terms tarshish, sapir, and tekhelet that convey the blueness of YHWH's masculine form, accoutrements, and abode come from Sanskrit, not surprisingly, which, by itself, invites greater exploration and comparison of the similarities between Judaism and Hinduism, particularly Shaivism.⁵

The Book of Daniel

To begin, we turn not to fragments of an ancient manuscript acquired on the antiquities market but to the Book of Daniel, the last work to enter the canon of the Tanakh (which Christians refer to as the Old Testament). Taking final shape in the mid-second century B.C.E., it refers to events that took place much earlier, in the sixth century B.C.E. In Daniel 10, Daniel, the main character, while on the bank of the Tigris, has an extraordinary vision. Explains Daniel:

“I looked and saw a man dressed in linen, his loins girt in fine gold (10:5). His body was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and legs had the color of burnished bronze, and the sound of his speech was like the noise of a multitude” (10:6).⁶

Though the “man dressed in linen” that Daniel sees is the most magnificent of the anthropomorphic beings encountered by him in the book bearing his name, a majority of Jewish commentators, including R' Yitzchak Abarbanel, R'Saadia (ben Yosef) Gaon, and R' Levi ben Gershon (or Ralbag), did not identify him as the Lord but as the angel Gabriel.⁷

The case for identifying the “man dressed in linen” (10:5) as Gabriel becomes weak rather quickly, however. Daniel first meets Gabriel in Daniel 8, where he learns his name, and then again in Daniel 9, where he calls him by name, yet on both occasions Daniel fails to describe Gabriel's appearance.

If the man in Daniel 10 is indeed Gabriel, why doesn't Daniel recognize him?⁸ Moreover, why would the author of this work wait until Daniel 10 to describe in detail a being who appears in both Daniel 8 and 9,⁹ and why would Daniel faint or grow faint (Daniel 10) in the presence of Gabriel with whom he is already familiar (Daniel 8 and 9), unless, of course, Daniel is encountering more than one being?¹⁰

A closer look at Daniel 10 reveals that it is entirely plausible Daniel interacts with up to five heavenly beings.

First Heavenly Being: Daniel sees a “man dressed in linen” (10:5) and hears the sound of his speech (10:6).

Second Heavenly Being: Daniel hears a male being speaking, causing him to be overcome by a deep sleep (10:9).

Third Heavenly Being: Daniel feels the touch of a hand, which shakes him onto his hands and knees (10:10).¹¹

Fourth Heavenly Being: Daniel listens to a male being tell him to stand up; this being goes on to explain that he was “sent” to him (10:11) because of his prayer (10:12), had been “opposed” and “detained” by the “prince of the Persian kingdom” until Michael came to his aid (10:13), and will help him understand future events having to do with his people (10:14). Later on, this same being speaks to him (10:19), telling him that he will “go back to fight” the Prince of Persia (10:20), will battle the “Prince of Greece” (10:20), and will reveal to him “what is recorded in book of truth” (10:21).

Fifth Heavenly Being: Daniel, who had become silent, sees “one who looked like a man” who touches him on the lips, which precipitates his speaking (10:16). The “one who looked like a man” again touches Daniel, strengthening him (10:18), allowing him to continue to converse.

Even if we merge the First and Second Heavenly Beings and go on to merge the Third and Fifth Heavenly Beings, we are left with three beings: the Lord (10:5, 6, 9), an assistant (10:10, 16, 18), and an angel (10:11-14, 19-21).

R’Avraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, by the way, rejected the view that the man in Daniel 10 is Gabriel but failed to offer an explanation.¹² Rav Joseph ben David Ibn Yahya, on the other hand, was more forthcoming.

Of the “man dressed in linen” (Daniel 10:5), Ibn Yahya writes, “A perfect man – extraordinary – special in form. Allegorically, this refers to the Holy One, Blessed is He.”¹³ The linen, he goes on to say, symbolizes the “complete light” with which the Holy One enwraps himself.¹⁴

If we explore the similarities between Daniel 10:5-6 and the theophany of Ezekiel 1:1-28, the identity of the “man dressed in linen” becomes still clearer.¹⁵ Man, loins, body, beryl, face, lightning, eyes, flaming torches, and burnished bronze are words that appear in Daniel 10 as well as Ezekiel 1. The Hebrew word, qalal, which means burnished, occurs in only two places in the Tanakh, Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:7!¹⁶ Both passages are theophanies, each centered on an appearance of the Lord!

Tarshish

A key word in Daniel’s description of the “man dressed in linen” is “beryl,” tarshish in Hebrew. The New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) Version of the Tanakh¹⁷ seven times translates tarshish as the common noun beryl and twenty-four times incorporates it directly into the English as the proper noun Tarshish. In English translations of the Old Testament, when tarshish is translated, beryl appears the most frequently followed by chrysolite and topaz. So, what is beryl?

Beryl, or beryllium aluminum cyclosilicate, is a mineral, which ranges in size from a few millimeters to several meters.¹⁸ Normally translucent or transparent, the presence of impurities results in its occurring in a variety of colors; colorless beryl is known as pure beryl, green beryl as emerald, pink beryl as morganite, red beryl as bixbite, bright yellow beryl as golden beryl, and blue beryl as aquamarine.¹⁹

To Daniel’s eyes, did the man whose “body was like beryl” appear to be clear, green, pink, red, bright yellow, or blue? The meaning of tarshish, whether used as a common or proper noun, suggests that Daniel saw a man whose body was like blue beryl or aquamarine.

In the following six verses the NJPS Version of the Tanakh translates tarshish as beryl: Exodus 28:20, Exodus 39:13, Ezekiel 1:16, Ezekiel 10:9, Ezekiel 28:13, and Song of Songs 5:14. We will take a brief look at these verses.

Exodus 28:20 and Exodus 39:13. In Exodus 28:20 and 39:13, tarshish / beryl is the name of a gemstone in the high priest's "breastplate of decision," appearing in the fourth row of mounted stones.

Targum Onkelos to Exodus translates tarshish not as beryl but as "the color of the sea."²⁰ The late Sidney Hoenig, Professor of Bible and Jewish History at Yeshiva University, described the color of the gemstone tarshish as "'aquamarine,' the sea-blue or sea-green variety of the beryl" and understood tarshish / beryl in Daniel 10:6 as a reference to this stone; "throughout the entire Bible," he wrote, "tarshish is to be consistently understood as the general expression for 'sea.'"²¹

For Ibn Yahya, tashish, as used in Daniel 10:6, refers to the color of a particular gemstone, "a precious stone resembling tekhelet."²² He goes on to say that tarshish "is an allusion to the Heavens, which, in their physicality, appear bluish," and he then defines tekhelet as "a blue dye derived from a Mediterranean snail that is applied to some of the tzitzit,"²³ the fringes attached to four-cornered garments, in fulfillment of the biblical commandment found in Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12.

Ezekiel 1:16 and Ezekiel 10:9. In Ezekiel 1:1, the prophet proclaims, "the heavens opened and I saw visions of God." He goes on to describe four incredibly fantastic creatures, each of which had four wings and four faces—one of a human being, one of a lion, one of an ox, and one of an eagle—and next to each creature was a wheel, the rim of which was covered with eyes.²⁴ The prophet reports that the wheels—there were four of them—"gleamed like beryl" (1:16). Later on, he sees the wheels again, describing them as "like the beryl stone" (10:9).

Ezekiel, in the opinion of Merkabah mystics and others throughout the centuries, glimpsed the Lord's merkabah, or chariot, in which the Lord travels while sitting enthroned. The wheels of the Lord's chariot, then, are the color of tarshish / beryl, which R'David Kimchi (Radak) describes as a "bluish stone."²⁵

Ezekiel 28:13. In Ezekiel 28:13, we learn that tarshish / beryl, along with eight other precious stones, once adorned the king of Tyre, who, in the dirge that Ezekiel delivers, is referred to as a "cherub" (28:14). Though tarshish / beryl is not associated with the Lord in this verse, it was used to adorn a figure, described in almost mythical terms, who was highly esteemed in the Lord's eyes.

Song of Songs 5:14. In Song of Songs 5:14, tarshish / beryl refers, though not explicitly, to a precious stone, and it is used once again as part of a phantasmagorical description of a man's body, "His hands are rods of gold, studded with beryl" (5:14). The male character in the story, however, is not an ordinary man but the Lord. For centuries, a majority of rabbinic commentators saw him as the Lord and the female character as Israel.²⁶

As already mentioned, twenty-four times the NJPS Version of the Tanakh incorporates tarshish directly into the English, where it appears as the proper noun Tarshish. For Rashi, Tarshish refers to a sea by that name. For example, in Ezekiel 27:12, the prophet Ezekiel, speaking of Tyre, says, "Tarshish traded with you because of your wealth," that is, "the Tarshish Sea traded with you because of your wealth."

If the man that Daniel saw is the Lord (Ibn Yahya) and if (according to the biblical text) "his body was like tarshish" and if tarshish (often translated as beryl) is the color of the sea (Targum Onkelos), the color of a bluish stone (Radak), the color of

the blue dye tekhelet (Ibn Yahya), or the color of the Tarshish Sea (Rashi), what are we saying? We are saying that the body of the Lord is blue!

Shir'ur Qomah

Let us venture beyond the Bible to look for more evidence of the Lord's blue body. We begin by turning our attention to the mystical Shir'ur Qomah, "The Measurement of the (Divine) Body," which more than likely was composed during the Gaonic period in Babylonia between the 6th and 7th centuries C.E.²⁷ Drawing, in part, on what appears to be ancient source material,²⁸ this work describes, measures, and names parts of the Lord's body, even calculating the distance between various parts.

The Lord's body, though anatomically similar to a man's, appears to be strikingly different. For example, the unidentified narrator (who introduces the text) says to the Lord, "You are fire,"²⁹ and Rabbi Akiva (who testifies to what Metatron told him about the Lord) says, "His height is 2,300,000,000 parsangs."³⁰

Lines from the short and long versions of the Sefer Haqqomah recension of the Shir'ur Qomah offer a stunning visual picture of the Lord's body, a body both fantastic and gigantic, which the mystics hoped to glimpse upon ascending to the higher spiritual realms.³¹ Only five times, as the lines of the Shir'ur Qomah themselves reveal, does the author actually quote from the biblical text. The verses that appear verbatim are Song of Songs 5:10, 11, 12, and 13, which are verses from a well-known theophany, and Daniel 10:6.

The Hebrew of Daniel 10:6, "ugvियाhto ch'tarshish" ("his body was like tarshish"), occurs in all five recensions of the Shir'ur Qomah.³²

The authors of Daniel and Shir'ur Qomah, by using the Hebrew term tarshish to describe the Lord's body, are saying that the body of the Lord is blue!

Sapir and Tekhelet

Let us continue to search for evidence of the Lord's blue body by exploring the meaning of the Hebrew sapir and tekhelet, two other bluish terms. In the NJPS Version of the Tanakh, sapir or sapphire appears eleven times.

Sapir/sapphire, like tarshish/beryl, is the name of a gemstone in the high priest's "breastplate of decision," appearing in the second row of mounted stones (Exodus 28:18 and Exodus 39:11). This gemstone's association with the Lord is even stronger in the Song of Songs, elsewhere in Exodus, and in Ezekiel.

In Song of Songs 5:14, sapir/sapphire, also like tarshish/beryl, is used to describe the body of the male character, whom Jewish commentators, as previously mentioned, have long recognized as the Lord. The female character describes "his belly" as "a tablet of ivory, adorned with sapphires" (5:14).

In Exodus 24:10, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel ascend the mountain where “they saw the God of Israel” (24:10). “Under His feet,” the text tells us, “there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire” (24:10).

In Ezekiel 1:27, the prophet Ezekiel sees above the four fantastic creatures “the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire” (1:27). And in 10:1, he sees “something like a sapphire stone; an appearance resembling a throne” (10:1).

The Song of Songs reveals that the supernal body of the Lord is composed of the precious ingredient sapir/sapphire. Exodus suggests that the Lord stands on a pavement of sapir/sapphire. And Ezekiel twice infers that he sits on a throne of sapir/sapphire.

Also in the NJPS Version of the Tanakh, tekhelet or blue appears fifty times. Tekhelet/blue was found throughout the Tabernacle, the tent in which the Lord dwelt before the days of the Temple; for example, the color tekhelet/blue was incorporated into the ten strips of cloth, which were used to construct the Tabernacle itself (Exodus 26:1).

In like manner, tekhelet could be found on the priestly vestments of Aaron, the high priest, and his sons. For example, tekhelet/blue was included in the tiny pomegranates that hung around the hem of the robe of the ephod (Exodus 28:33). In addition, in preparation for transport, cloths of tekhelet/blue were used to cover the furnishings of the Tabernacle, such as the Ark of the Pact (Numbers 4:6).

The color tekhelet/blue, then, figured prominently in the construction of the Tabernacle, in the creation of the priestly vestments, and in the transport of the Tabernacle’s furnishings. And it was also the color of a cord that the Lord commanded the people of Israel to attach to the fringes of their garments.

The Cord of Blue

In Numbers 15:37-40, we read:

The Lord said to Moses as follows: (15:37) “Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner (15:38). That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge (15:39). Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God” (15:40).

Let’s take another look at Numbers 15:39, “That shall be your fringe [the cord of blue]; look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord.” Focusing on this verse, Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, in the talmudic tractate Menahot, pointed out that the Hebrew *atav*, which appears here as “it,” can also be translated as “Him.”³³ If we make this substitution, verse 39 reads, “That shall be your fringe [cord of blue]; look at Him and recall all the commandments of the Lord.” Ben Yohai is saying that the body of the Lord is blue!

The cord of blue, as we will see, is very much bound up with the Lord's blue body. Of the color blue, Rabbi Meir said, "Why is blue specified from all the varieties of colors? Because blue resembles [the color of] the sea, and the sea resembles [the color of] heaven, and heaven resembles [the color of] the Throne of Glory."³⁴

The late Ben Zion Bokser, a Conservative rabbi and scholar, in referring to Meir's words, stated, "There are four elements in the chain of associations through which the color blue becomes a reminder of the 'throne of divine glory,' the blue thread, the sea, the sky, and the divine throne."³⁵ Bokser was right in speaking of a chain of associations but failed to include the most important element. That chain, it can be asserted, consists of five elements: the blue thread, the sea, the sky, the divine throne, and the Lord's blue body. Bokser himself wrote, "The thread of blue was, in other words, a link with the deity, and gazing on the blue, one was really, by a chain of associations, gazing on the divine."³⁶

In another example, this one from Midrash Tehillim, Rabbi Hezekiah, who, like Rabbi Meir, also links the cord of blue to Ezekiel's vision of the divine throne, says, "When the children of Israel are wrapped in their prayer-shawls, let them not think that they are clothed merely in blue. Rather let the children of Israel look upon the prayer-shawls as though the glory of the Presence were upon them."³⁷ In still another example, this one from Mishnath Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Eliezer says, "the Holy One praised be he, commanded us concerning the thread of blue because whenever we behold it we behold the face of Shekhinah,"³⁸ the feminine face of the Divine.

Jewish mystical literature reveals that the realm in which the Lord dwells, together with his female companion, is also blue. In discussing how Sefer ha-Bahir, or the Book of Illumination, explains the sefirot (ten archetypal attributes of the Godhead),³⁹ the late Gershom Scholem, who initiated the academic study of kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), wrote:

"The word [sefirot] is not derived from safar, to count, but from sapir, sapphire. They [the sefirot] are thus sapphire reflections of the divinity, and Psalm 19:2: 'The heavens declare the glory of God,' is interpreted by the author [of Sefer ha-Bahir] in accordance with this etymology: 'the heavens shine in the sapphirine splendor of the glory of God.'"⁴⁰

Bearing in mind this very interpretation, offered by the author of Sefer ha-Bahir, the author of the Zohar writes:

"As soon as the bride beholds her spouse, 'the heavens declare the glory of God.' 'The heavens' are the bridegroom, who enters under the bridal canopy. 'Declare' (meSaPeRim) signifies that they radiate a brilliance like that of a sapphire, sparkling and scintillating from one end of the world to the other."⁴¹

Conclusion

The anthropomorphic masculine form of YHWH, i.e., the body of the Lord, is translucent blue, indeed, fiery blue, as evidenced by biblical, talmudic, midrashic, and mystical texts, such as the Book of Daniel, Menahot, Mishnath Rabbi Eliezer, and Shi'ur Qomah. The Hebrew terms tarshish, sapir, and tekhelet are used to describe the blueness of the Lord's body as well as his accoutrements and abode.

For example, in the Book of Daniel, the main character, Daniel, comes face to face with an incredible being, whom he describes using the words "ugvyahto ch'tarshish," which translate as "his body was like tarshish" (Daniel 10:6). Joseph ben David Ibn Yahya recognized this being as the Lord, and Radak understood tarshish to be a bluish stone.

The Sanskrit origin of tarshish, sapir, and tekhelet shifts our attention to the Hindu pantheon, where we find the blue deity Shiva, whose behavior and whose cult, as scholars have been quietly pointing out for more than a century, appear similar, in certain aspects, to that of YHWH. Shiva manifests himself as a “pillar of fire” (jyotirlingam) in Vayu Purana 55.13-57 and YHWH appears as a “pillar of fire” in Exodus 13:21-22 and 14:24, for instance. The similarity of these theophanies warrants our taking a brief look at them.

At the end of Exodus 13, the Israelites (Hebrews), who have just thrown off the shackles of slavery in Egypt, set out from Succoth to encamp at Etham, located at the edge of the wilderness:

The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they may travel day and night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people (13:21-22).⁴²

And in Exodus 14, as the Egyptians pursue the Israelites into the Sea of Reeds, which the Lord parted to facilitate their escape, i.e., the escape of the Israelites, the Lord makes himself visible:

At the morning watch, the Lord looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic (14:24).

In the Vayu Purana 55, the deities Brahma and Vishnu gradually realize that they have witnessed a manifestation of Shiva:

In the darkness of the flood, it was seen by Brahma and Vishnu. In the total homogeneity of a dissolved universe, Vishnu and Brahma were arguing over their relative supremacy when they were interrupted suddenly by the superluminous glow of a strange pillar of fire. Joined by Brahma, Vishnu sped toward the indescribable flaming light, which grew before their eyes into infinity, rending heaven and earth. Overwhelmed and terrified by their unfathomable vision, the two gods sought the beginning and end of its burning immensity. Brahma, flying upward with the wings of his bird shape—the wild gander—could not see its top, nor could Vishnu, diving down for a thousand years in his shape of a boar, see the bottom of that fire linga of him who is the light and destruction of the universe. Both of the bewildered gods returned exhausted to the level they had started from, and within the flaming linga they beheld Shiva in golden glory. He illumined the dark flood, and the two gods, Vishnu and Brahma, bowed before him. Thunderous laughter, or the sound AUM, issued from the pillar, filled the sky, and Shiva dispelled their fear (VaP.55.13-57).⁴³

In sum, YHWH of Judaism and Shiva of Hinduism, two blue-complexioned deities, manifest themselves as pillars of fire and then speak from inside the pillars, filling those present with terror. Similarities such as these will hopefully encourage exploration of others as well as foster dialogue between Jews and Hindus, adherents of two of the world’s most ancient and wisdom-filled spiritual traditions, which may, in fact, be closer to one another than previously imagined.

Notes

1See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) and David Penchansky, *Twilight of the Gods: Polytheism in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) and *What Rough Beast?: Images of God in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999). I had the pleasure of corresponding with both of these authors, whose comments served to further clarify my thinking.

2See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Iconic Visualization and the Imaginal Body of God: The Role of Intention in the Rabbinic Conception of Prayer," *Modern Theology* 12, no. 2 (1996): 137-62 and Alon Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theology Review* 87, no. 2 (1994): 171-95.

3Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) and Stephen D. Moore, "Gigantic God: Yahweh's Body," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 70 (1996): 87-115.

4See Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000) and Mark Sameth, "Who Is He? He Is She: The Secret Four-Letter Name of God," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Summer 2008): 22-28. Sameth points out that the tetragrammaton (Yud Hay Vov Hay) when written in reverse (Hay Vov Hay Yud) forms the Hebrew words hu and hi, he and she in English. He goes on to write: "And that is why our Jewish mystics, before donning their tallitot or tefillin in prayer, recite a kavanah, a mystical intention, to unite Yud Hay and Vov Hay l'shem yichud, for the sake of God's unification. And that's why the mystical book *Sefer Bahir* teaches that the meaning of the large bet, which opens the Torah, is the union of the two principles of the masculine and feminine, united in the primordial act of Creation" (page 25). Five, maybe six years ago, a homeless Jewish man by the name of Mordecai, who frequented Jackson Square, in New Orleans, told me of reversing the four-letter name to form the Hebrew equivalent of He-She. In my view, He-She and the countless images of Shiva and Shakti in sexual embrace point to the same reality, the masculine and feminine creative, divine forces are (ecstatically) united, thus making the continuation of life possible.

5Regarding tarshish, see Michael Russell, *A Connexion of Sacred and Profane History, from the Death of Joshua to the Decline of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah; intended to complete the Works of Shuckford and Prideaux, vol. 3*, (London: J.G. and F. Rivington, 1837), which appears in *The Church of England Quarterly Review*, 11 (July 1837), 13; the author maintains that Tarshish comes from the Sanskrit tarsha, tarisha, or tarisha, which means "the ocean" and / or from the Sanskrit tar, tarana, tari, or tarina, which means "a vessel." (Note: Diacritical marks are needed above "a" and "i" in tarsha, tarisha, tarisha, tar, tarana, tari, tarina.) See also John Cunningham Geikie, *Hours with the Bible / The Scriptures in the Light of Modern Discovery and Knowledge, vol. 1*, (New York: James Pott & Co., 1889), 235; the author writes, "The name Tarshish, however, strikingly corroborates the statement in the Table of the settlement having been first made by a race of Aryan, Japhetic extraction, for it has been found to be only a form of the Sanscrit or Aryan word, Tarischa—"the sea," or the "sea coast," and this meaning is affirmed by an old tradition of the Rabbins to have been for ages applied to it." (Note: Diacritical mark is needed above "i" in Tarischa.) See also Matthew George Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 3rd ed.* (London, New York: Thomas Nelson, 1897); of tarshish the author writes, "a Sanscrit or Aryan word, meaning 'the sea coast.'"

With regard to the Tarshish-India connection, see E. Robertson, "Notes on Javan," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 20, no. 3 (April 1908), 473; the author states that Jerome and Eusebius (*Onom. Sac.*) understood Tarshish as referring to "a region in India." See also Zacharias P. Thundy, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions* (Boston: BRILL, 1993), 213; by focusing on I Kings 10:22, the author helps to strengthen the connection. That verses reads, "For the king had a Tarshish fleet on the sea, along with Hiram's fleet. Once every three years, the Tarshish fleet came in, bearing gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks" (I Kings 10:22). Thundy maintains that the Hebrew tuki (peacock), shen habbim (ivory), and kof (ape) come from the Sanskrit tokei (peacock), ab (ivory), and kapi (ape); he cites Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative*

Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages (London, 1913), 88-89, and Max Muller, *The Science of Language* (New York, 1891), I: 188-191.

Regarding tekhelet, various commentators, in seeking to explain its etymology, point out that it frequently occurs (in the biblical text) along with the Hebrew argaman / argewan (purple or reddish purple), from the Sanskrit ragamen and ragavan, from the Sanskrit raga (red), and go on to suggest it, i.e., tekhelet, comes from the Sanskrit kala (deep blue). See Ehud Spanier, ed., *The Royal Purple and the Biblical Blue: Argaman and Tekhelet* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1987), 94; Spanier, who focuses on the D.Litt. thesis of Rabbi Isaac Halevy Herzog, "Hebrew Porphyrology," submitted to the University of London in 1913, cites Herzog's explanation of the etymology of kala ilan (the Talmudic term for the indigo-colored vegetable dye sometimes used to produce the cord of blue); according to Herzog, kala derives from the Sanskrit kala (deep blue) and ilan from the Aramaic ilan (tree).

Regarding sapir, Geoffrey W. Dennis, author of *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism*, views it as a "Sanskrit loan word;" linguists who share his view point to the Sanskrit sanipriya (sacred to Saturn), from Sani (Saturn) and priyah (precious); see his blog *Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism, The Sapphire Heaven*, Thursday, April 26, 2007, at <http://ejmmm2007.blogspot.com/2007/04/sapphire-heaven.html>.

6Unless otherwise noted, *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) is the source of all scriptural citations.

7Hersh Goldwurm, ed., *Daniel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1979), 272.

8Donald E. Gowan, *Daniel, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2001), 143. See also Jephthah Ibn Ali, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 53; the author writes, "This angel is not Gabriel....Nor does he [Daniel] describe any of the angels whom he mentions as he describes this angel, owing to his fear and terror of him."

9Gowan, 143.

10Andre Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 206; in the author's view, Daniel faints three times: 10: 8-10, 15, 18-19.

11See also C.F. Keil, *The Book of the Prophet Daniel, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), 412; the author, who believes Gabriel is the only heavenly being active in Daniel 10, acknowledges that the text does not clearly identify the being who touches Daniel in 10:10 or the being who touches him in 10:16 and 10:18.

12Goldwurm, 272.

13Joseph ben David Ibn Yahya (1494-1534), Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Amsterdam: Printed by Wilhelm Christian, 1633), 203-204; these two pages were translated from the Hebrew into English by David Sclar of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, New York. See also Wesley Williams, "Shadow of God: Speculations on the Body Divine in Jewish Esoteric Tradition," *Work in Progress* (2005): 1-63. I was surprised that the author, who makes a strong case for (ancient) Israel's participating in the Ancient Near East "ANE Blue Body Divine tradition," didn't flesh out the identity of the man in Daniel 10:6 or mention / use Ibn Yahya as a source. He asserts that the "luminous Divine Presence (Kavod) shining through the dark/black body of Adam produced a blue iridescence (tarshish/sapphir/tekhelet) or rainbow symbolized by the colors of the high priestly garments" (page 47). For Williams the "dark/black body" is key; he appears to be using his scholarship to support the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, who taught that at creation the one supreme god took the form of a black man.

14Ibn Yahya, 203-204.

15Lacocque, 206. Speaking to the connection between the two accounts, the author sees the man of Daniel 10:5 as "described in terms parallel to those which Ezek. 1 uses for the divine majesty."

16 The NJPS Version of the Tanakh reads "flaming torches" (Daniel 10:6) and "fire, suggestive of torches" (Ezekiel 1:13) and "burnished bronze" (Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:7).

17The New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) Version of the Tanakh is the English translation of the Tanakh preferred by the Conservative and Reform movements.

18Martin Prinz, George Harlow, and Joseph Peters, *Simon & Schuster's Guide to Rocks & Minerals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 300.

19Prinz, Harlow, and Peters, 300.

20Israel Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Exodus: An English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1990), 266. Exodus 28 and 39 go on to tell us that each stone is to be engraved with the name of one of Jacob's sons (28:21, 39:14). Rashi maintained that the order of the stones corresponds to the birth order of the patriarch's sons. Because tarshish / beryl is the tenth stone mentioned, it is associated with Zebulun, the tenth son born to Jacob. The association of Zebulun with tarshish strengthens the connection of tarshish to the sea. In Genesis 49, a dying Jacob predicts what the future holds for each of his sons; he says of his tenth son, "Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore; he shall be a haven for ships" (49:13). Interestingly, Zebulun is associated with another bluish term, tekhelet, which specifically refers to the "cord of blue" (Numbers 15:38) that the Lord commands Israel to attach to the corners of their garments. According to the Talmud, what gave this cord its rich color was the chilazon (shell-fish), which the tribe of Zebulun harvested (Megillah 6a); the words of blessing that a dying Moses speaks to the tribe of Zebulun refers to this specific livelihood, "For they draw from the riches of the sea and the hidden hoards of the sand" (Deuteronomy 33:19).

21Sidney B. Hoenig, "Tarshish," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 69, no. 3 (January 1979), 182.

22Ibn Yahya, 203-204; the author, in discussing tekhelet, quotes Rabbi Meir, “‘Whoever observes the mitzvah of tzitzit, is considered as if he greeted the Divine Presence, for tekhelet resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles God's holy throne’ (Sifre, Shelah, 15:39).”

23Ibn Yahya, 203-204.

24Above the creatures, Ezekiel sees “the semblance of a human form.” Ezekiel’s description is similar in tone to Daniel’s description of the “man clothed in linen” whose “body was like beryl.”

Ezekiel relates these details:

Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form. What appeared as his loins up, I saw a gleam as of amber —what looked like a fire encased in a frame; from what appeared as his loins down, I saw what looked like fire. There was a radiance all about him. Like the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. This was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the Lord. When I beheld it, I flung myself down on my face. And I heard the voice of someone speaking (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

25Goldwurm, 273; the author/editor reports that Rashi was of the same opinion and directs the reader to Chullin 91b. He regards Rashi’s believing the wheels had the appearance of crystal as a later addition.

26Commentators, both Jewish and Christian, have understood the male and female characters in the Song of Songs in a variety of ways, some even seeing them as deities. See Arthur Green, “Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflection on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context,” *Association for Jewish Studies* 26, no. 1 (April 2002), 16-17; “the Song of Songs,” the author writes, “is an epithalamium written by King Solomon, the mystic hierophant, to celebrate the marriage of male and female within God, blessed Holy One and shekhinah, a marriage to which earthly Israel are related both as offering and as wedding attendants, but not as marriage partner.” See also Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday, 1977), 210-29; the author suggests that the Song of Songs can be understood against the backdrop of the marzeah; see Eleanor Ferris Beach, “The Samaria Ivories, Marzeah and Biblical Texts,” *The Biblical Archeologist* 55, no. 3 (September 1992), 130; the author quotes Pope who defined the marzeah as “a social and religious institution which included families, owned property, houses for meetings and vineyards for wine supply, was associated with specific deities, and met periodically, perhaps monthly, to celebrate for several days at a stretch with food and drink and sometimes, if not regularly, with sacral sexual orgies.” In addition, see Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1969) and Theophile James Meek, “Canticles and the Tammuz Cult,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 39, no. 1 (October 1922), 1-14 and his “Babylonian Parallels to the Song of Songs,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, no. 3/4 (1924), 245-252.

27Martin Samuel Cohen, “The Shiur Komah: A Critical Edition of the Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary” (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982), précis.

28The short version of the Sefer Haqqomah recension suggests that either the Lord or his crown has horns: “The crown on His head is 500,000 by 500,000; its name is Israel [ysr-‘l]. And on the precious stone that is between His horns is engraved ‘Israel, my people; Israel, my people, is Mine’” (Cohen 1982, 216 ‘Section F, Lines 113-15’). As an alternative, Cohen offers

“it’s” in place of “His,” indicating that the stone is located between the horns of the crown but fails to explain his reasoning (Cohen 1982, 219). I believe that this reference to horns points to the use of ancient source material in the composition of the Shi’ur Qomah. Did the Hebrews conceive of the Lord as having horns or as wearing a horned crown? Their neighbors often depicted their own deities with horns or crowns with one or more pairs of horns. Perhaps Jerome was right in translating the Hebrew “qaran” into the Latin “cornuta esset” as were those who went on to translate cornuta esset not as “radiant” but as “horned.” The text of Exodus 34:29 from the Latin Vulgate reads: “cumque descenderet Moses de monte Sinai tenebat duas tabulas testimonii et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ex consortio sermonis Dei.” And the text of Exodus 34:29 from the Douay Rheims reads: “And when Moses came down from the Mount Sinai, he held the two tables of the testimony, and he knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord.”

29Cohen 1982, 187 (section A, line 5).

30Cohen 1982, 189 (section B, lines 16-17). A parsang, according to Cohen, is equal to about three-quarters of a mile (Cohen 1982, 207).

31Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1983), 43-45; the author states that the text of the Shi’ur Qomah survives basically in five recensions: Sefer Razi’el, Merkavah Rabbah, Siddur Rabbah, Sefer Hashi’ur, and the Sefer Haqqomah, which is “the most well attested in the manuscript sources,” coming in long and short versions, both of which are divided into lines; the short version is divided into fourteen sections (A thru N), and the long version contains interpolated material following sections C, J, L, and N, designated as Cx, Jx, Lx, and Nx.

So, what does the Lord’s body look like? Lines from the short and long versions of the Sefer Haqqomah recension of the Shi’ur Qomah that offer a visual picture of the Lord’s body are quoted below:

You are fire (A, 5)... You are fire consuming fire (A, 6)... Therefore are we obligated to praise, beautify, glorify, exalt, bless and magnify [the] (C, 28)...luminous king (C, 36)...shining king (C, 38)... And on his heart are seventy names (D, 63)... His beard is 11,500 parsangs (D, 77)... The appearance of the face and the appearance of the cheeks are in the image of the spirit (D, 78-79)... His body is like tarshish (D, 79-80). His splendor is luminous (D, 80)... And on His forehead are written seventy letters (D, 76)... The black of His right eye is 10,000,500 parsangs (D, 89-90)... The name of the white of His right eye is Paharkasiah (D, 90)... His arms are folded (D, 94)... His cheeks are like a bed of spices (D, 95-96)... His mouth is fire consuming fire (F, 112)... And on the precious stone that is between His horns is engraved “Israel, my people; Israel, my people, is Mine” (F, 114-115). My beloved is shining and ruddy, pre-eminent among the ten thousand (F, 115-116). His head is finest gold (F, 116). His eyes are like doves by watercourses (F, 116)... And the sparks that go forth from it [the eye with which he sees from one end of the universe to the other] gives light to all men (H, 130)... His body resembles a bow, and the bow is [something] like the semblance of fire [forming] a house around it (I, 132)...The Holy One, blessed be He, holds him [Metatron] in [the] facial radiance (Jx, 11)... And the Holy One, blessed be He, gives of His brilliance (Jx, 13)... You are luminous (Lx, 9)... You are bright (Lx, 12)... He is all light (N, 188)...

Quoted here are lines from sections A, C, D, F, H, I, Jx, Lx, and N of the short and long versions of the Sefer Haqqomah recension of the Shi’ur Qomah. In Cohen 1982, section A can be found on page 187, C on page 193, D on pages 197-99, F on page 216, H on pages 222-23, I on page 225, Jx on page 230-31, Lx on pages 243-44, and N on pages 248-249. After each quotation, the section and line(s) appear in parentheses.

Half of these lines (from the short and long versions of the Sefer Haqqomah recension of the Shi’ur Qomah) show dependence on verses of the Tanakh. And all of these verses, which Cohen identifies, refer to the Lord or have been widely

interpreted as referring to him:

you are fire (A, 5—Ez 1:27; Dan 10:6),

you are fire consuming fire (A, 6—Ex 24:17; Dt 4:24, 9:3),

his body is like tarshish (D, 79-80—Dan 10:6),

the black of his right eye (D, 89—Zech 2:12),

his cheeks are like a bed of spices (D, 95-96—Song 5:13),

his mouth is fire consuming fire (F 112—Ex 24:17; Dt 4:24, 9:3),

my beloved is shiny and ruddy (F 115—Song 5:10),

his head is finest gold (F 116—Song 5:11),

his eyes are like doves by watercourses (F 116—Song 5:12),

his body resembles a bow, and the bow is [something] like the semblance of fire [forming] a house around it (I, 132—Ez 1:27-28).

32In his note on the use of Daniel 10:6 in the Shi'ur Qomah (Cohen 1982, 209-210), Cohen directs the reader to Ezekiel 1:26 and Song of Songs 5:14. In his view, tarshish refers to a blue-colored gemstone.

33Menahot 43b.

34Sotah 17a.

35 Ben Zion Bokser, "The Thread of Blue," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 31 (1963), 4-5.

36Bokser, 4.

37Bokser, 10; the author quotes Midrash Tehillim on Psalm 90: 16. See William G. Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 99, for this translation.

38Bokser, 17; the author quotes from Mishnath Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 14.

39Dennis, 233.

41Zohar I, 8a; see Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, trans., The Zohar, vol. 1 (London, England: Soncino Press, 1984), page 33, for this translation.

42See Allen Edwardes, Erotica Judaica: A Sexual History of the Jews (New York: Julian Press, 1967), 6; the author ascribes a phallic interpretation to the pillar of cloud and fire; he writes, "Moses led his myriad refugees back to the land of their origin—guided and protected by the soaring symbol of their infinite Spirit, a nebulous phallus by day and an igneous phallus by night." His interpretation is consistent with the way in which the pillar of fire is understood in the Puranas; it is regarded as the Shivalingam (Shiva's phallus).

43Stella Kramrisch, The Presence of Siva (Chowk, Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1988), 159; the author cites VaP.55.13-57 as the source of this story and invites the reader to compare the stories found in LP.1.17.32-59 and KuP.1.25.67-101.

Source:[Rabbi Robert dos Santos Teixeira, LCSW](#)

[About Rabbi Robert](#)

Source: HPI USA: The God that Jews worship is as blue as the Hindu God Shiva, the supreme being in Shaivism, (believed by Shaivites to be) the oldest sect within Hinduism, says Rabbi Robert dos Santos Teixeira, LMSW. In some ways, the ancient Hebrews were more similar to modern-day Hindus than Jews. They acknowledged the existence of deities other than YHWH (Yahweh) and, like their neighbors, looked to a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses to satisfy their individual and collective needs; their principal God, however, became and remained YHWH, the fierce warrior who freed them from slavery in Egypt. He once had an effable name, a masculine body, and a female companion. Examination and discussion of biblical, talmudic, midrashic, and mystical texts reveal that the body of the Lord is blue. The fact that the Hebrew term used to describe the Lord's blue body comes from Sanskrit, as do other Hebrew terms associated with him, is nothing short of amazing and invites further exploration of the many similarities between Judaism and Hinduism, particularly Shaivism.

(Note: After posting this brief article from HPI I was contacted by Rabbi Robert dos Santos Teixeira. He kindly offered me a complete copy of his article 'The Blue God of Judaism';. The Rabbi highlighted the fact that making such information available has the potential to bring people together. A recognition of our common roots in the eternal traditions of love & devotion. Thank you Rabbi. Shalom-Hari Om. Vrndavan Parker)

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[Next >](#)

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