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Zoh's Gospel

Author examines Jewish mysticism's view of the female prophets.

Maayan Jaffe

Staff Reporter

Friends and colleagues of J. Zohara Meyerhoff Hieronimus consider her a spiritual woman. On a quest toward an authentic Judaism for the past seven years, Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus presented what she considers the culmination of her journey in a new book, "Kabbalistic Teachings Of The Female Prophets" (Inner Traditions). The 418-page book offers a glimpse at what she termed a *kabbalistic*, or mystical, path of spiritual evolution, as pertinent to people's lives today as in the biblical past.

"The purpose of prophecy is for God to speak to His people," said Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus. "Prophecy, however, is not for the enlightenment of the individual [prophet] but for the benefit of the entire community."

In her book, Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus shows that each of the

"That evening, after saying my prayers, I had an amazing experience of being enveloped in honey the color of a latte coffee. It was the sweetest physiological experience I had in my life, a feeling of love, kindness and generosity from the Creator," Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus said. "Then, I saw in my mind the seven prophetesses, the lower seven *sefirot*, the seven species of Israel, the seven days of the week... and I was just amazed.

"If God does everything with purpose, why did He only need seven prophetesses? The answer came to me — the seven prophetesses represent stages of development for the whole world."

Four years later — one year of discussion about the subject, one of studying, one of writing and one of editing — Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus' thoughts became her book. The first prophetess is Sarah, and she represents loving kindness, the seed of life. She

"Each prophetess' very life, and each quality they brought to the people of Israel, is the promise of the Messianic age," she said.

The Messianic age? "The Messianic age means to me that after humanity reaches an all-time low, we will begin an ascent of awareness back to our divine inheritance," said Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus. "The Messianic age will reflect all that has come before, but it will be perfected."

It sounds esoteric



benefit of the entire community. In her book, Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus shows that each of the biblical seven prophetesses — Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chana, Avigail, Chulda and Esther — is linked to a *sefirah* (enumeration) on the kabbalistic tree of life, to a day of the week, and to one of the seven sacred species of Israel. Also, each prophetess represents a stage of development for the whole world, a seven-step plan for each person to repair his part in this world.

Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus began her study of the prophetesses four years ago as she became more intimately connected with the Jewish tradition. She said that like a child, she was awed, inspired and amazed at the depth of her own religion. She began examining the prophetesses as she worked to discover women's places in the Torah in an effort to find role models for behavior and guidance in life.

On a Sukkot eve in 2004, she said she entered a *sukkah* thinking about the seven prophetesses.

“Every human being is important, and our job is to help each other along.”

— J. Zohara Meyerhoff Hieronimus

thoughts became her book. The first prophetess is Sarah, and she represents loving kindness, the seed of life. She, said Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus, is the mother of Israel, and one with the *sefirah* of *chesed*, kindness. “Sarah taught us how to honor God's presence through ritual,” she said.

Next is Miriam, connected with *gevurah* or strength. Miriam taught Israel the importance of boundaries, and that “even our challenges — the contractions — are ultimately for our good.”

Devorah is *tiferet*, beauty, and as a judge she brings to Israel a moral code. Chana, connected with *netzach*, victory, “teaches us about our spiritual endurance.”

Avigail, linked to *hod*, majesty, represents the royal bloodline. Chulda, linked to *yesod*, foundation, helps one to understand the world to come.

“Everything we do in this world prepares our soul for the next world, and ultimately redemption,” said Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus.

Esther, the last prophetess and linked to *malchut*, sovereignty, reflects to Israel all the other qualities that the other prophetesses taught the people of Israel, which Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus said reminds the Jews of what needs to be done to receive redemption.

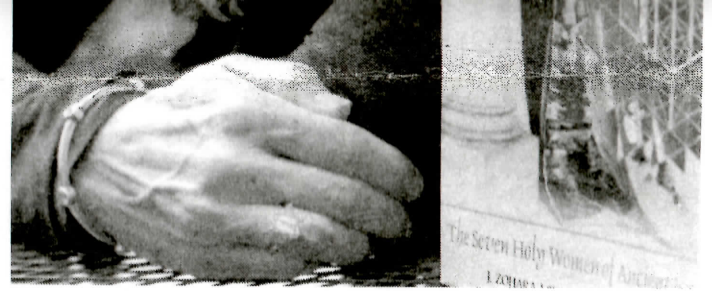
will be perfected.”

It sounds esoteric — and pretty lofty — and much of the book is, according to local reviewers. But in the mix of the convoluted kabbalah is a lot of important information.

“Zohara did an excellent job of anthologizing what Chazal [the Sages] have to say about the seven prophetesses. Even if the book had nothing besides that, it would be a very valuable work,” said Rabbi Chayim Lando, director of the local Learning Institute for Torah Empowerment.

“It makes for some intriguing reading.” Rabbi Lando called the work interesting and comprehensive. He also said Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus has put her soul into the book. “You can see her passion for *Yiddishkeit* coming out,” he said.

Rabbi Noah Shavruck helped Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus prepare the work. He said she is a “top-notch” researcher, which comes out in the book. While the book does contain some very difficult ideas and texts, he said it is “absolutely kosher.”



J. Zohara Meyerhoff Hieronimus says people can learn an important life lesson from each of the seven Jewish prophetesses.

“Nothing in there disagrees with authentic Torah values,” he said. “That was very important to her.”

For her part, Mrs. Meyerhoff Hieronimus said she just hopes the book will spread some insight to the Jewish community, helping them see the heights to which each Jew can reach.

“We may all have different religious paths, but we need to understand there is one Creator, and all of us are part of that creation,” she said. “Every human being is important, and our job is to help each other along.” □

The book is available at Barnes & Noble in Pikesville, breathe books in Hampden and Ivy Books on Falls Road, as well as at amazon.com and sevenholyywomen.com.