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The Receiving: Reclaiming Jewish Women's Wisdom

"Rabbi Tirzah Firestone has given us a gift. In retrieving the names and stories of seven remarkable but obscure Jewish women, the history of religious experience is enriched, and so are we."
—ANITA DIAMANT, author of *The Red Tent*



THE RECEIVING
RECLAIMING JEWISH WOMEN'S WISDOM
RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE



Synopsis

A highly respected rabbi, therapist, and teacher restores women's spiritual lineage to Judaism and empowers women to reclaim their rightful connection to Jewish teachings, Kabbalah, and to their own spiritual wisdom.

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Customer Reviews

As a child, Rabbi Firestone loved the synagogue, until she was banished to the women's section by her father as she grew older. Little did she know, at that time, that the women's section behind the curtain had an unshared wisdom. In this book, she starts on the path of reclaiming Judaism's submerged female voice. Like the Jewish Star of David, with one point going up to the heavens and another pointing to the ground, her book reclaims the sufficient wholeness of the sensuous earth and the spiritual in Jewish learning. In each chapter, she chooses a notable Jewish female, and uses that person's life to explore Jewish thought. At times the connections are tenuous, but the book works well. In Chapter 1, we read about Hannah Rachel of Ludomir (1815-1905). She was a scholar of the Talmud who was odiously pushed down by Jewish leaders and forced to marry. Yet among the common Jews, she was a healer and counselor. Using her life as an example, Firestone explores yichud or wholeness and the role of female leadership. In Chapter 2, Bruriah (2nd Century CE), every Jewish woman's hero, is brought back to life. In her post Hellenic period, this brilliant female scholar of the Talmud left her male counterparts in awe of her erudition. But while some know just an inkling about Bruriah, Firestone successfully resurrects the stories of the brothel and the academy to show the role of Eros in Jewish philosophy. Firestone discusses how women must

bring both logic and sensuality, one's holy and erotic sides to both study and life. In Chapter 3, we are introduced to Malkah of Belz (1780-1850), the wife of the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Rokeach. She brought the divine to noble domestic activities and sat with her husband. Her life is used as a platform for the discussion of kabbalistic branches.

The other night I wandered into my local bookstore looking to browse the poetry section. In the main room, where authors come to do readings, I saw an attractive, bright-looking woman sitting at a long table and signing stock after the evening's events, which I had missed. Although Tirzah Firestone is a local author like myself, I had never met her; the truth is, she was unknown to me, as were her works. But I zeroed-in on her book, *THE RECEIVING*, and decided to pick up a copy. This was a real impulse buy for me, as I had no intention of buying anything that night, least of all a book about *Reclaiming Jewish Women's Wisdom*. (I'll argue in a moment that, however, that was not what the book was really about, at least not in its deepest aspect.) I was reminded of book signings that I had done. There she was all alone with a big stack of books; I really just wanted to support a fellow author. I'm glad I did. It's a wonderful book, and I found a fair share of treasures inside. I especially liked reading about Beruriah and Leah. But perhaps most of all I liked the story that was the inner and secret story of the book: Tirzah's. It's a story that has real magic. The author's anger at the way Judaism has often failed to connect people, especially women, to the deepest well of spirit is painfully apparent. But it never overwhelms her writing or descends into hatred or bitterness. Why? Because she seems, through the alchemy of will, faith, knowledge or grace, to have sublimated this potentially destructive emotion into a profound love of her tradition and celebration of its possibilities in furthering the deepest designs of life. This is a true hero's -- heroine's -- journey.

Rabbi Tirzah Firestone shines a new light on Zion in particular and on the world of spirituality in general with the publication of her new book *The Receiving: Reclaiming Jewish Women's Wisdom*. Rabbi Firestone, a prominent rebbe or teacher in the Jewish Renewal world also has a practice as a Jungian psychotherapist. Her passion and mission for many years is to marry and integrate the two streams of Jewish mysticism (known in Hebrew as Kabbalah whose root word means "to receive" hence the title of her book) and Jungian psychology. The Jungian term for such an operation is known in Latin as a *conjunctio*, a conjunction thereby effectuating wholeness, integration, balance (also a Jungian imperative). Rabbi Firestone brings to life on the printed page the often tragic yet inspiring stories of seven Jewish women mystics with her characteristic passion, insight, warmth,

eloquence and creativity; qualities that are the hallmark of her classes and teaching at Jewish spiritual retreats. Each of the seven women presented by her are placed in their historical/philosophical/ritual context (a period that spans 2nd century Palestine to 20th century Jerusalem). The reader will be introduced to courageous women of incredible spiritual strength who defied conventional expectations, challenged the status quo, forged new identities for themselves and thus enriched what Rupert Sheldrake might call the morphic field of Jewish spirituality. If this were all Rabbi Firestone achieved in the writing of *The Receiving*, the reader might be tempted to say as at the recitation of the Passover Haggadah, *dayenu* (it would have been enough for us).

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