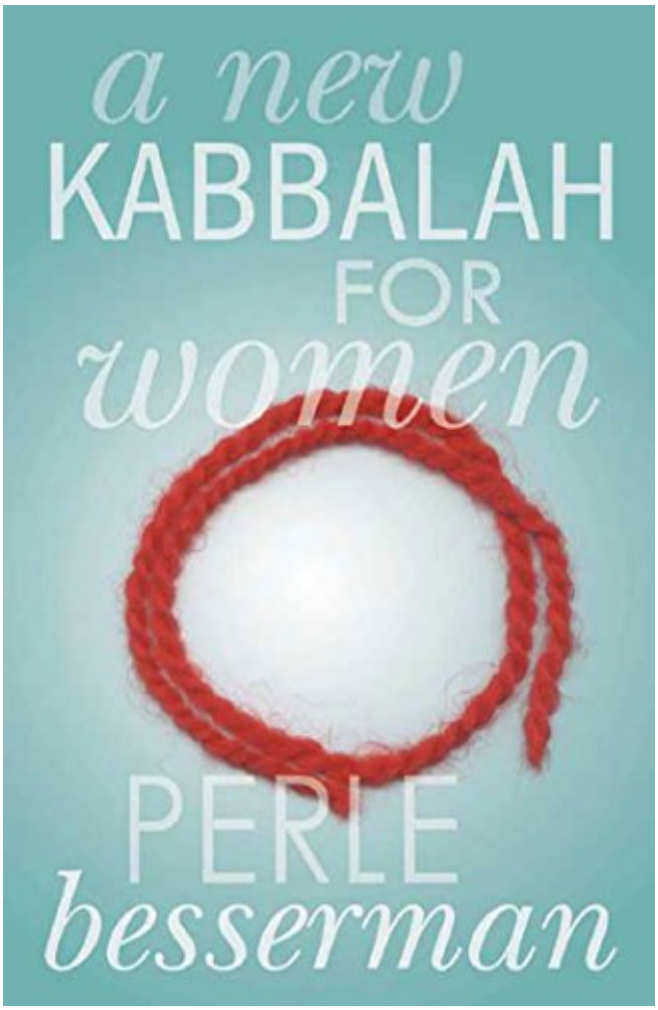
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A New Kabbalah For Women



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Synopsis

The red bracelet: it graces the wrists of numerous celebrities - from Madonna to Britney Spears - who have converted to the spiritual practice of Kabbalah. But what is Kabbalah and how can women apply it to their own lives?In A New Kabbalah for Women, bestselling author and teacher of Jewish mysticism and meditation, Perle Besserman, shares a feminine approach to spirituality. Since the time of Moses, Jewish mysticism has been barred to women, and Shekhinah, the feminine side of God, has been forced underground. Now, many women are adapting traditional mystical practices in radical new ways. Besserman is at the forefront of this revolution. In this book she traces the history of female-centered worship and tells the story of searching for her own path to truth. Combining practices from the Kabbalah with meditation, Besserman walks readers through step-by-step rituals to find their own personal connection with the divine.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am twice unqualified to review this work. I am not part of the target audience as I am not a woman,

and am not a student of Kabbalah or Jewish mystical practices.Still I read the work out of my interest in Jewish life and experience, and in my concern for the Jewish future.I therefore strongly recommend that the reader of my review take it not as any kind of definitive statement, but rather as a subjective view which needs to be complemented by the views of others.The book is a strange amalgam, but not an ineffective one . It is at once a kind of spiritual autobiography, and introduction to Jewish mystical teaching and practice. It is also and the second part of the work is devoted to this a set of exercises or teachings on how to achieve the meditative and spiritual aims which are Besserman's goal. In this last part of the work there are four Paths given, a Path of Letters, of Emanations, of Sounds, of Song and Dance. My review does not relate to these paths, and whether they are practically useful or not.The story which is told by Perle Besserman is of a girl who found herself confined, and not understood in a traditional religious framework. Her desire for a closer connection and understanding with God she felt was thwarted all through her time of religious studies. She especially felt that the Judaism she lived and learned was primarily for men. And that women were to be their footstools.She rebelled against this and went on a path of spiritual exploration. As I understand it she abandoned Halachah, living by Jewish law and instead searched to find her own spiritual truth and way in life. This led her to seek out some of the great Jewish teachers of modern times. And there is an interesting section on her experience with Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook in Israel. There is also most importantly for her the story of her friendship and learning with the Rabbi and Teacher who is considered most responsible for the revived contemporary Jewish interest in meditation and mystical practice, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. Even with him she was not content with the traditional emphasis on seeing things from the male point of view , and was urging toward his developing or revealing a way of feminine relation to the Divinity, or perhaps the feminine aspect of the Divinity. Kaplan tragically died before her course of learning with him could be completed, and she thus had to strike out on other paths. These included ways of mystical practice which do not have their source in the Jewish tradition. One central source of her learning has been the Buddhist tradition.All of this leads her to finding her own way of transforming mystical teaching which brings her to a deeper and more fulfilling sense of her own spirituality.My summary does not do justice to the richness of Besserman's language and learning. She has studied for years and in a way the most valuable part of the book is the knowledge that she does convey about Kabbalah.With all this, I found her story a not very encouraging one. On one level, on the level of an individual's struggle and effort and attainment of learning, I admire what she has done. But on the level of a contribution to the world which she comes from, to Jewish communal life, and to the Jewish future I find her enterprise seriously lacking.For what I see in it is simply another individual rejection of

Jewish communal responsibility and feeling.There is one incident in the book in which Besserman returns to visit an old friend. This friend was with her a ’rebel’ against the narrow ’Beis Yakov’ religious school world. But instead of like Besserman getting out of , she went back deeper into it. She even married the boy Besserman had a youthful crush on. When Besserman visits her she is an ultra-orthodox woman tied down by her growing family, sunk in the traditional woman’s role. Their meeting results not in a renewal of friendship but in a misunderstanding in which Besserman is unfairly chased away.Yet the picture presented here, and the drastic dichotomy between the two women and the future seems to me a false one. The fact is that the Jewish people today are suffering from a ’ birth dearth.’. We are after the Shoah in demographic decline. And the burden of having a family is not something which is as presented here , a somehow ’ valueless limiting thing’. Today far too many Jews are escaping into either ’no Jewishness at all ’ or a kind of ’ non- historical selfish individual spiritualism’ which contributes nothing to Jewish community, history and future.There is a Jewish people also. And the absence of relation to it is felt most strongly in this work.

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