

# ***THE PROPHETESS: A NOVEL***

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Evonne Marzouk

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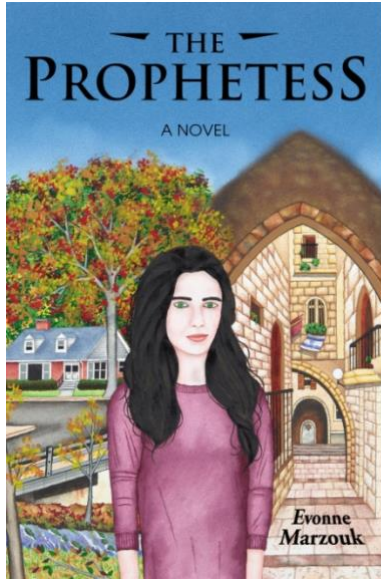
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## *Publisher Info*

- Been a top-ten indie since its start in 1992
- Publishes 4-6 books a year
- Distributed nationally by Baker & Taylor Publisher Services
- Frontlist and backlist titles represented in Hollywood by APA (Agency for the Performing Arts)
- Publishes almost all types of books, from memoirs to mysteries, young adult novels to history and biography
- Bancroft books have received numerous starred reviews—four, in fact, for two 2018 summer books—and have won numerous awards
- *The Missing Kennedy*, a NYT ebook bestseller, was on the cover of *People Magazine* when published in 2015
- Recent mystery (*Her Kind of Case*) received star reviews from all but one of trade review publications
- Published the books of two Pulitzer Prize winners (Alice Steinbach, Stephen Hunter)

## OVERVIEW: MAGICAL REALISM WITH RELIGIOUS OVERTONES FOR YOUNG ADULT READERS

*The Prophetess* tells a modern story about Rachel, an American teenage girl called to join a secret community of Jewish prophets. The story weaves Jewish tradition, mysticism, modern Jewish American life, and discovery of Israel into a coming-of-age story of a girl discovering her power and purpose in life. The book is targeted at young adults but is also very appropriate for all ages and people of all faiths.



### Shorter

An American teenage girl, searching for her purpose in life, is called to join a secret community of powerful Jewish prophets.

**Logline:** After her grandfather dies, unexpected visions and a mystical teacher carry Rachel on an inspiring journey to discover her gifts and fulfill her life's purpose.

# SUBMISSION FOR REVIEW/FEATURE

**Title Submitted:** The Prophetess: A Novel

**Author:** Evonne Marzouk

**Subjects:** Fiction/Young Adult/Jewish/Women/Mysticism/Coming-of-Age/Mother-Daughter/Literary

**Publication Date:** October 2019

**\$25.95**

## Top Eight Reasons to Review:

1. *The Prophetess*, unlike most YA fiction, tackles, head-on, the subject of religion (see *New York Times* story later in this press kit).
2. Praise from writers and educators in the Jewish community, including Matthue Roth, author, *Never Mind the Goldbergs*; Ruthie Feldman, author of *The Green Bubbie*, as well as a Jewish educator and artist; and Elana Weinberg, Jewish educator, Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy.
3. *The Prophetess* incorporates **Jewish spiritual wisdom** into a **coming-of-age story** about an American teenage girl. At 17, Rachel is dealing with the usual challenges of adolescence – **schoolwork, romantic relationships**, parties, and friends – while also confronting an **unexpected spiritual calling** drawing her into a different, mystical world. She discovers her own strength as she **follows her dreams** and becomes the woman she was destined to be.
4. *The Prophetess* presents a much broader role for **Jewish women** than the traditional roles of mothers and wives. In this book, Jewish women are essential **spiritual leaders, teachers, students, and confidantes, equal to men** who serve in similar roles.
5. *The Prophetess* explores the power of **generational legacy** and **familial bonds**. Through her relationship with her grandfather (**a Holocaust survivor** and **Orthodox Jew**) and her mother (who gave up her traditional observance), Rachel discovers how **promises carried from generation to generation can guide us into the future**, a quintessential piece of Jewish wisdom.
6. In *The Prophetess*, Rachel learns **spiritual Jewish lessons** about the **purpose of life**, the **nature of G-d** and our human capacity to **connect directly with G-d**, and what it means to live life as a soul rather than a body. **Rich with Jewish wisdom**, this story will inspire **spiritual seekers** of all traditions.
7. The author is a **recognized young Jewish leader** who has been featured in national and local publications and was selected as one of the *New York Jewish Week*'s "36 under 36."
8. Bancroft Press is one of the **top-ten indie book publishers** in the U.S., with award-winning YA fiction, and has been throughout its 29 years of existence.

# ***THE PROPHETESS AUDIENCES***

## **Jewish young adults**

- *The Prophetess* is a story about a 17 year-old girl who is called to join a secret community of Jewish prophets. It's a coming of age story about discovering spiritual wisdom.
- The book fills a young adult literature gap:
  - There are few good young adult novels dealing with Jewish wisdom in modern times. The recent successful *Lamp of Darkness* series takes place in the past and is about a boy.
  - In a December 25, 2018 article in *The New York Times* Book Review ("Is Any Topic Off Limits When You Write for Teenagers? Maybe Just One"), Donna Freitas notes the gap in spiritually meaningful books written for young adults. She writes:

“while young adults may be more skeptical about traditional religion, their hunger for a more inclusive, nontraditional spirituality is a constant... Yet few Y.A. protagonists identify with a particular faith tradition, or claim spirituality as something of interest.”
- This book will also be of interest to teachers and librarians working with Jewish young adults, for example in Jewish schools.

## **Jewish women**

- *The Prophetess* features Jewish women in a wide variety of ages and leadership roles. Importantly, their roles transcend the mother/wife role typical in traditionally Jewish literature. Key characters include:
  - Rachel, the main character, called to be a Jewish prophetess
  - Devorah, the current “teacher of the generation,” an old woman revered for her leadership, who is not married and has no children
  - Elisheva/Alissa, Rachel’s mother, who plays a key role in facilitating Rachel’s journey
  - Rena, a key teacher and guide along Rachel’s path
  - Tirtza, a young prophetess who becomes Rachel’s friend and confidante
  - Lauren, a young woman who is excelling in her classes and going to Yale
  - Maya, a young woman learning about her value beyond attracting boys
- All Jewish women will be able to find meaning in a story of a young girl discovering her power and purpose in life. All audiences may be inspired by the message of finding power in following their dreams.
- The book also highlights the important relationship between mothers and daughters, and between women and other female mentors and teachers.
- The book provides Jewish mystical teachings that many Jewish women are seeking and learning today.
- Recently, a young Orthodox Jewish woman in Baltimore organized a global series of “geula gatherings” bringing together approximately 20,000 women in over 100 locations to sing, dance, and pray for redemption and deeper connection to G-d. Future activities in this network will continue. The author was part of the planning committee for her community’s event in Silver Spring, MD. The organizer is on the target list for a blurb and this audience is a perfect fit for this book.
- Key publications and organizations to target:

- *Hadassah Magazine*
- *Kveller*
- *AMIT Magazine*
- *Jewish Women's Archive*
- *Jewish Women's Foundation (local offices)*
- *JGirls Magazine*
- *Yeshivat Maharat*
- *Drisha*
- *Grok Nation*

### **Orthodox Jews**

- In *The Prophetess*, the main character finds herself drawn into the Orthodox Jewish community. Many Orthodox Jews have had, or know someone who has had, the experience of becoming religious and will be able to relate to this story.
- The traditional Jewish values and wisdom presented in this story will appeal to Orthodox Jews, who are educated in and passionate about Jewish tradition.
- It also presents Jewish mystical views, which are often not available to Orthodox Jews who have not been presented with the opportunity to study them, and may be interested in them.
- Some key publications and organizations to target:
  - *Jewish Action (OU Magazine)*
  - *Rabbinical Council of America*
  - *Chabad – Torah Café, My JLI*
  - *Jew in the City*
- Orthodox websites more open to mysticism:
  - *Hevria*
  - *Breslov Center*
- The book may also be of interest to “Open Orthodox” Jewish communities and institutions, which tend to be more spiritually minded and open to different types of Jewish thinking, such as Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (for men) and Yeshivat Maharat (for women).

### **Reconstructionist and Renewal Jews**

- This Jewish audience is especially likely to be interested in the spiritual and mystical aspects of Judaism. They may have learned some of this Jewish information within their communities, but the information is likely not complete. They will still be hungry for more spiritual Jewish information and probably have never seen it in this novel form.
- The book may be of particular interest to those involved in Jewish institutions related to these streams of Judaism, such as the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the Shalom Center, and the Kohenet Jewish Priestess Institute.

### **Wider Jewish Community**

- Jews who are not Orthodox may find this a refreshing story about Judaism. It presents an idealized traditional Jewish community with women in key leadership roles, and men and women in partnership. It presents Judaism in a light many may not be expecting.
- It also presents Jewish mystical views which may be of interest to people in this audience, who have not likely learned them in any general Jewish education.
- All Jews may be inspired by the story's presentation of the legacy of elders (Holocaust survivors) and their gift to the next generations.

- The author has previously been featured in the following local Jewish publications:
  - *Washington Jewish Week*
  - *New York Jewish Week* (selected as one of the “36 under 36”)
  - *Chai FM (South Africa)*
  - *New Jersey Jewish News*
  - *Tablet/Vox*

### **People with ties to Israel**

- The story presents an inspiring and beautiful view of the land of Israel, its connection to the Jewish people, and its importance for Jewish spiritual pursuits. This view is likely to resonate with Jews and Christians who have been to Israel, and/or feel connected with the land of Israel.
- Key publications include:
  - *Jerusalem Post*
  - *Times of Israel*

### **People in the Baltimore community**

- The main part of the book is set in the Jewish community of Pikesville, which will be familiar to those who have lived in or visited that community. The book cover depicts a Baltimore neighborhood.

### **People with Interfaith Interests**

- The book includes information about observance of Jewish tradition and Jewish mysticism which may be of interest to all faith-based audiences.
- Chris, one of the main characters in the book, is a Catholic teenage boy who plays an important role supporting Rachel in her Jewish journey.
- Helpful publications and programs may include:
  - *Interfaith Family*
  - *Interfaith Voices*
  - *On Faith*

### **Spiritually-inclined individuals**

- The book includes information about Jewish mysticism and philosophy which will be of interest to individuals who are interested in spirituality, as wisdom literature.
- The book provides the key message that all human beings are souls on a journey, with a purpose and the ability to connect to the Infinite.

### **People with Fibromyalgia/Chronic Pain**

- The book author has been diagnosed with fibromyalgia and has struggled with chronic pain. In the book, Rachel, the main character, deals with the unexpected experience of pain and other physical disruptions. She comes to understand that they are part of a larger story, with a purpose in her growth and development.
- Individuals with fibromyalgia and other chronic illnesses may find familiarity in these experiences. If the book helps them broaden their thoughts of what may be possible in life, despite their struggles, it will have achieved something important.
- It may be inspiring to individuals with chronic pain to know that the author has struggled with similar challenges and achieved a lifelong dream.

### **Jewish Environmentalists**

- The book author is a former leader of a Jewish environmental organization, Canfei Nesharim. She is a recognized name within that community. She completed her role as executive director of Canfei Nesharim in 2014; many will buy the book because of a personal connection and/or to find out what she's been doing recently.
- The book includes Jewish mystical themes which are often of specific interest to Jewish environmentalists.
- The book will be printed on recycled paper to target this audience.
- The book will be promoted to the author's contacts via Jewish environmental networks and newsletters.

### **Jewish innovation networks**

- The ROI Community is a network of more than 1000 young Jewish innovators funded by the Schusterman Foundation. The book author is an active member of this network, which supported the book through microgrants.
- The book author will work with the leaders of the ROI Community to promote the book through this network.
- The book author also founded an organization which was accepted into of Bikkurim: An Incubator for New Jewish Ideas (now incorporated into JumpStart) and has previously written for Presentense. These Jewish innovation networks will also provide opportunities for book promotion.

## TARGET MARKETS AND MESSAGES

Possible Market	Proposed Message
Jewish newspapers (Washington Jewish Week, New York Jewish Week, Jerusalem Post, Ejewishphilanthropy, Chai FM, NJJN, etc.)	-Young woman discovering her power and gifts, coming of age -About the author next step for Evonne
Orthodox publications: Jew in the City; Jewish Action (OU Magazine)	Becoming Orthodox and discovering the wisdom of Jewish tradition
Orthodox publications/organizations more open to mysticism (Hevria, Chabad – Torah Café, My JLI, Breslov Center, some synagogues)	-Spiritual wisdom: knowing yourself as a soul on a journey -Spiritual wisdom: the possibility of prophecy and direct connection with G-d
Kveller	Motherhood and the special bond between mothers and daughters
Grok Nation	-Young woman discovering her power and gifts, coming of age -Finding power in following dreams
Hadassah Magazine	The legacy of elders (Holocaust survivors) and their legacy and gift to the next generations
Jewish Women’s publications/orgs (Jewish Women’s Archive, Jewish Women’s Foundation (local offices), Jgirls magazine, Yeshivat Maharat, Drisha	-Non-rabbinical women as equal leaders in a unique kind of Torah community -A role for women in Jewish life that does not require being a mother (Devorah – a main female character who is not a mother)
Interfaith Media (Interfaith Family, Interfaith Voices, On Faith, etc.)	-Spiritual wisdom: knowing yourself as a soul on a journey -Spiritual wisdom: the possibility of prophecy and direct connection with G-d
Fibromyalgia magazines (FMAmare, Fibromyalgia Magainze, FMCPAware)	About the author: living with fibromyalgia
Social media	All, with unique messages sent on Instagram, facebook, and twitter at least 4 times per week. (see below)



## **PRAISE FOR EVONNE MARZOUK'S *THE PROPHETESS***

"*The Prophetess* is an absorbing novel about an American teenage girl called to join a secret community of Jewish prophets. It weaves Jewish tradition, mysticism, modern Jewish-American life, and discovery of Israel into a coming-of-age story about a girl discovering her power and purpose in life. I found it hard to put down, and grabbed every free minute to see what happened next. Readers will thoroughly enjoy this superb novel."

—**RABBI DOV PERETZ ELKINS, AUTHOR OF *CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE JEWISH SOUL*, AND WINNER OF THE JBC'S NATIONAL JEWISH BOOK AWARD**

"This is a beautiful book. It gently unfolds and blossoms. As the book evolves, the reader is drawn deeper and deeper into thought and emotion, mimicking the journey of the young heroine. The relationships feel authentic and challenge us to examine our own family and friendship dynamics."

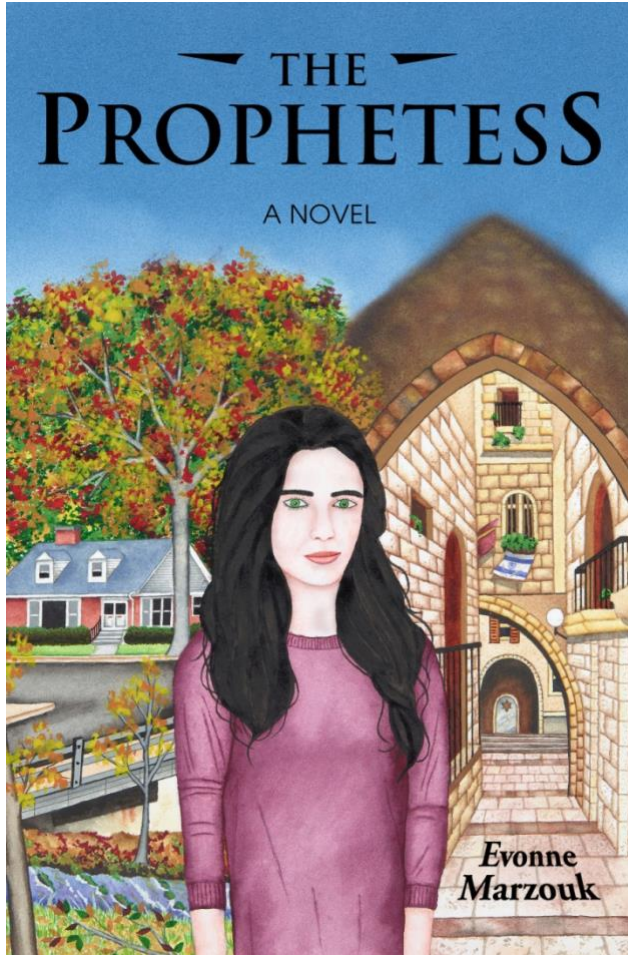
—**LISA LITMAN, DIRECTOR, PJ GOES TO SCHOOL (A PROGRAM OF PJ LIBRARY)**

"*The Prophetess* is a deep and affecting spiritual page-turner. This very specific coming-of-age story about a Jewish teen's blossoming relationship with G-d explores universal themes of love, purpose, family, identity, commitment, tradition, and faith. Tender, refreshing, luminous, and thoroughly immersive."

—**MICHELLE BRAFMAN, AUTHOR OF *WASHING THE DEAD* AND *BERTRAND COURT***

"A story that straddles the ancient and modern worlds, that's both timeless and imminent, and that's full of legends but speaks of true things ... *The Prophetess* masterfully captures the age

when everything is strange and new and dangerous—the emotional instability of being a



teenager and the spiritual instability of—*spoiler alert*—finding out you're a prophet. Evonne Marzouk's *The Prophetess* is a story that begs to be read."

— **MATTHUE ROTH, AUTHOR, *NEVER MIND THE GOLDBERGS***

"Exquisitely crafted. Evonne uses her imaginative skills to create a world for a modern prophetess ... and she describes brilliantly the very real struggles of adolescence to navigate relationships and to claim, and reclaim, her authentic Jewish heritage."

— **RUTHIE FELDMAN, AUTHOR OF *THE GREEN BUBBIE*, AS WELL AS A JEWISH EDUCATOR AND ARTIST**

"Evonne Marzouk's *The Prophetess* is an amazing coming-of-age tale set in the modern world. Rachel's journey has so many twists and turns; there is a surprise every chapter. It is a story of love, loss, redemption, and finding yourself, all while navigating high school. This book will help you find your purpose in life. As a teen, I related to the characters and their daily

struggles. I think that this novel is a must read. It has a great plot with interesting characters, and it always has you coming back for more. I couldn't put it down."

—**AYELET LEDERMAN, 13**

"Rachel's fascinating, beautifully-written story definitely resonates with me. It opened my eyes to a fresh perspective on the effects of prophecy. It created a narrative for me to understand how this Divine gift could change familial and social relationships forever. And it made me appreciate those willing to hear this calling despite the personal sacrifice they must endure."

—**ELANA WEINBERG, JEWISH EDUCATOR, MELVIN J. BERMAN HEBREW ACADEMY**

"*The Prophetess*, a coming-of-age novel written by Evonne Marzouk, is an enthralling story for people of all ages. It has an easy-to-follow plot that appeals to young readers, offers a relatable lifestyle for young adults, and provides a new perspective on life as a young Jewish girl who benefits her society."

—**OLIVIA, ATHEIST, AGE 14 (GREAT FALLS, VA)**

“Evonne Marzouk's *The Prophetess* is a beautiful story of spiritual searching and coming of age. With an expert hand, she manages to meld the ancient and the modern to create a compelling story of growing up both spiritually and emotionally.”

— **ADINA RISHE GEWIRTZ, AUTHOR OF *ZEBRA FOREST* AND *BLUE WINDOW***

“I really did not know what to expect and, being a Catholic, I was concerned I might find myself lost in a religious world that was foreign to me. I was quickly drawn in by the story of Rachel, a 17-year-old who is working through questions about life, faith, and relationships. Rachel's story felt strangely familiar and mirrored my own experiences in many ways. I think other readers would find the same to be true for them. I particularly appreciated Rachel's confusion about prayer, suffering, sacrifice, and forgiveness. Rather than feeling lost in a different religious world, I found an invitation to learn and understand a bit about Orthodox Judaism and prophetic tradition. Rachel's friends were a study in themselves, variously supporting, challenging, and being confused by her actions and choices. I thought the author did a very good job of depicting the late teen and early adult years of life.”

—**MARY BEAUDOIN, DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, SAINT RAPHAEL CATHOLIC CHURCH (ROCKVILLE, MD)**

"A unique, spiritual fantasy about a modern teenager called upon to fulfill an ancient Divine calling. Marzouk's masterful weaving of mysticism, modernity, and magic creates a truly original and unforgettable coming-of-age story."

—**LEAH CYPRESS, AUTHOR OF *MISTWOOD* AND OTHER YA NOVELS**

“I really liked everything about this novel. There was something so peaceful and comforting about it, like a soothing balm. I don't even know how to begin to describe the feelings I had while reading it, but I became emotional a few times. I loved how Rachel had this group of prophets who became like a family to her. Evonne writes a teenager's voice and perspective really well. The dialogue is strong throughout, and the descriptions make everything easy to visualize without taking away from the narrative. I cared a lot about Rachel, Beth, Yonatan, Devorah, and the other characters. *The Prophetess* was amazing. I already want a sequel to be written! ... Back in high school, I read a book called *What Happened to Heather Hopkowitz?* and it got me interested in Orthodox Judaism (or at least made it seem less overwhelming for me). *The Prophetess* reminded me of it in some ways. Even though I am more observant now, it reminded me of why I chose this path. This is a well-written debut and an incredible story that I hope everyone has the chance to pick up and devour. Even though it is marketed for a young adult audience, adults will enjoy it too.”

—**MELISSA AMSTER, BLOGGER**

“What would happen if an American teenager began receiving visions from God? How would it affect her relationships, her education, her self-conception? In *The Prophetess*, Evonne Marzouk answers these questions with empathy and insight. As the journey of the main character (Rachel) expands out from her family, friends, and community into mysticism, prophecy, and trips to Israel, Marzouk brings her relationships, along with the reader, into Rachel's new and surprising realities. A gripping read with many resources at the end of the book to learn more about the ideas and rituals introduced in the engaging story.”

— **RABBI DOROTHY RICHMAN, MAKOR OR: JEWISH MEDITATION CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA**

“In this polished, suspenseful novel, the author creates a book category that doesn’t exist, or at least one I haven’t been exposed to. It takes talented writing to keep a story like this realistic and believable, at least to someone like me who prides herself on not reading fantasy. The very real, developing, and deep emotions and relationships among the characters kept me invested in them and eager to see them through their journey. I couldn't stop reading, but I also didn't want the book to end. I now care about the characters so much that I want to know if the author can write a sequel. Why can't this be a series? I'm not ready to let these characters go!”

— **NATASHA ROSENSTOCK NADEL, AUTHOR OF *HEALTHY FAMILY, HEALTHY YOU: THE HEALTHY MAMA’S GUIDE TO FEEDING YOUR FAMILY WELL – SIMPLY AND SANELY!***

“Everyone experiences the trials of maturing into adulthood. We examine our values, our religion, our place in the world, our place in our family, and our goals in life. We choose a path leading to our future. *The Prophetess* by Evonne Marzouk is an engrossing story of a young woman, Rachel, on the cusp of adulthood grappling with the issues facing all high school seniors. Following the death of her religious grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, Rachel connects with her Jewish identity and discovers her special gifts as a prophetess. While navigating through academic, social, and familial demands, Rachel learns to develop her gifts. She finds her identity and chooses a direction in life. Rachel's story, though told from an American-Jewish perspective, is a universal one and affords readers at any age, especially young adults, an opportunity to reflect on their own gifts, choices, and goals. Reading *The Prophetess* is a thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking experience. Delving into its pages is highly recommended for anyone living among other people and travelling through life—basically all of us!”

— **MICHELE GLAZER BEN, ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATOR, YAVNEH ISRAEL**

"This book is truly life changing. It gives me a different perspective on my Judaism (Reform) and how to look at problems. I talked to my librarian about getting the book for the library and she said that it would help other people have different perspectives on Judaism. I recommend this book to anyone who likes books about people discovering their true selves and how they see their religion."

— **JENESSA MAZELEV, AGE 12, LIVERMORE, CALIFORNIA**

“An intriguing, mysterious, and engrossing combination of mysticism, Jewish observance, and concerns any typical teenager might have: family dynamics, school, romance, and friendship. Daily life and mystical experience combine in ways that drew me in and made me want to keep reading. New twists keep appearing, making it hard to put the book down. *The Prophetess* is easy to read and, at the same time, filled with compelling emotions and ideas.”

— **STEPHANIE WELLEN LEVINE, AUTHOR OF *MYSTICS, MAVERICKS, AND MERRYMAKERS: AN INTIMATE JOURNEY AMONG HASIDIC GIRLS***

“*The Prophetess* is a lovely story, told with humility and grace. Rachel's seesawing journey through deep questions of friendship, relationship, and spirituality is one that many young adult readers will appreciate. The theme of maintaining religious observance amid a secularized

environment also resonates. *The Prophetess* was a captivating read, worthy of your time and soul.”

—**MARC RUDOLPH, FOURTH & FIFTH GRADE TEACHER, COMPASS CHARTER SCHOOL, BROOKLYN, NY**

“Although Judaism teaches that the prophetic era ended with the death of the prophet Malachi (around 312 BCE), this remarkable book invites the reader to suspend disbelief and accept that there are prophets and prophetesses among us today, working unseen healings through prayer and helping to keep the world in balance. And Evonne Marzouk does a brilliant job of helping us believe that is possible. She is a gifted storyteller. Her characters resonate with true human feelings, and the way she portrays the journey of Rachel from ‘twice a year Jew’ to one so observant and possessed of a divine connection to God is genius. While the book appears to be marketed towards a YA audience, it’s clearly for adult readers as well.”

—**SUSAN KAPLAN, MEMBER, JEWISH BOOK COUNCIL AND JEWISH BOOK CARNIVAL (TUCSON, AZ)**

“What a compelling story! Bringing the ancient concept of prophecy into modern day?! The author opened a world of possibility — that anyone could be “divinely gifted,” that each of us has a role here on earth that is larger than we can see, that the ancient can still be relevant, and that the unfathomable can be attainable. This was a beautiful story — one I am excited to share with my middle schooler and discuss at length... as we eagerly await its sequel!”

—**ARIELE MORTKOWITZ, DIRECTOR OF SVIVAH**

"*The Prophetess* will appeal to young girls grappling with coming-of-age challenges, women of all ages wrestling with questions of observance, spirituality, and the Divine, and anyone simply in the market for a good, cannot-put-it-down read. It is an engrossing page-turner.”

—**SHARON FREUNDEL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, JEWISH EDUCATION INNOVATION CHALLENGE**

“Evonne Marzouk’s YA novel is in a class all by itself. It features teens challenged to find the best versions of themselves, but the spotlight is on Rachel, growing into her frightening gift of prophecy. The first symptoms are painful, mentally and physically. In short order, they become more frequent and more debilitating. She tells her friends, baffled by her behavior, that these are simply severe migraines. Though she adores the prophet-mentor who supports her in understanding her ‘gift,’ she still worries that she will not take timely enough action to avert disasters she can foresee. The mélange of prophetic lore (not exactly biblical), Jewish mysticism, and journeys into Israeli culture and Jewish tradition all serve to make this a truly unique reading experience.”

— **FAYE SILTON, AUTHOR AND JEWISH EDUCATOR**

### **SPECIAL NOTES & AWARDS**

- **AMAZON’S BEST SELLING NEW RELEASE OF MARCH 2019 IN TEEN & YOUNG ADULT JEWISH FICTION**

## SYNOPSIS OF *THE PROPHETESS*

RACHEL, a seventeen-year old girl living in suburban Baltimore, awakens one summer morning to learn that her grandfather, ZAIDE, has died. An Orthodox Jew, Zaide often taught Rachel Jewish wisdom when she was a young girl. His death raises questions about her family, including her mother ELISHA, who gave up traditional observance before Rachel was born.

At synagogue on the high holidays, Rachel notices YONATHAN praying and he invites her to learn with him. Thinking of Zaide, Rachel agrees. Rachel has been experiencing odd visual disturbances and visions. When this occurs while learning with Yonatan, he reveals that Rachel is called to be a prophetess. As their learning continues, he teaches her deep wisdom based on Jewish mysticism.

Rachel walks home with CHRIS, a friend, neighbor, and longtime crush. Chris is inspired by her recent learning and kisses her, but Rachel realizes they can't have a relationship because he isn't Jewish. Furious, Rachel rebels against Yonatan's direction. Rachel learns from her error and their lessons continue. In meditation with Yonatan, Rachel meets DEVORAH, a Holocaust survivor and female leader of all the prophets.

Rachel is going on a winter youth trip to Israel and Yonatan arranges to meet her there. They share Friday night dinner with Devorah in Jerusalem, and join other prophets for a traditional Sabbath in the holy city of Tzfat. Yonatan tells Rachel he will not be returning to Baltimore.

Back at home, Rachel's visions urge her to help JAKE, a difficult boy in her Poetry Club. School closes early one day due to snow, and Rachel finds him convulsing and frostbitten after using "spice." Rachel calls an ambulance and rescues him.

When he recovers, Jake pledges to stay clean to honor Rachel's heroism. With him at a restaurant on Friday night, Rachel tries to send spiritual light to Jake, but something goes wrong and she is punished. When her spiritual efforts prevent a terrorist attack in Israel, she recovers. Rachel and Jake begin running together for exercise.

Rachel's sister BETH is in a college dance program in California. She comes home for Passover having lost too much weight. In the middle of her family's seder, she loses consciousness due to a heart problem, and an ambulance takes her to the hospital. Back at home, Beth's parents sign her up for a live-in eating disorder program. Rachel takes action to support Beth's dream of being a dancer. Rachel's father, HOWARD, is learning to let his daughters follow their dreams.

In visions, voices call Rachel to Jerusalem. When Elisha encounters Rachel after a vision, Rachel finally tells her mother all that has been happening. Elisha reveals that Zaide knew Rachel would be called. After finals, Elisha presents Rachel with a ticket to Israel.

In Israel, in the midst of dreams and visions, Rachel saves another prophet, NOACH, from would-be murderers in New York. Rachel visits Devorah and learns that Devorah is dying. The

prophets spend one final Sabbath with Devorah before she dies. On the night of Shavuot, Yonatan and Noach lead Rachel to the Western Wall and reveal her destiny: to take Devorah's place as leader of all the prophets. Rachel claims her power and chooses this life.

## IS ANY TOPIC OFF LIMITS WHEN YOU WRITE FOR TEENAGERS?

By Donna Freitas  
New York Times  
Dec. 25, 2018

A persistent question for those of us who write young adult literature is, What are we not allowed to do or say when writing for teenagers?

I usually answer with an anecdote about a near-crisis at my publisher nine years ago, regarding a single use of the F-word in my second novel (the F-word remained). Now, I say, we are long past that worry. A writer can go as dark and violent as it gets (see “The Hunger Games”). Sex is more than fine (see all of B. T. Gottfred’s giddy, explicit novels). Graphic, instructive, erotic, romantic, disappointing: Bring it all on! Even better, current Y.A. novels now have many L.G.B.T.Q. protagonists (see Meredith Russo’s “If I Was Your Girl”), which was not the case even 10 years ago. Now, I say, the sky is the limit.

But reader, I lie.

Religion. Religion is the last taboo.

Yes, there exist Y.A. novels that contend with religion or spirituality in some way — not a lot, but some. Francisco X. Stork’s “Marcelo in the Real World” has one of the best conversations about sex and religion I’ve ever encountered. Marcelo is deeply curious about God, and regularly talks to a rabbi about his religious questions.

I think Alex Sanchez’s beautiful, smart “The God Box,” about a gay teenager who comes out at a high school in a conservative Christian community, should be required reading for young people (my college students agree). Deborah Heiligman’s “Intentions” focuses on sex abuse in a Jewish community, and Brendan Kiely’s moving “The Gospel of Winter” does the same in the Catholic tradition. And we’ve come a long way from 2007, when “Does My Head Look Big in This,” by Randa Abdel-Fattah, a wonderful book, introduced the rare Muslim teenage character to American readers.

Fuller treatments of religion in recent Y.A. have come in Julie Berry’s “The Passion of Dolssa” and Laura Amy Schlitz’s “The Hired Girl” — but both are historical fiction, set in bygone eras. Religion and spirituality still feel off limits within Y.A. set in the present.

The source of this feeling of mine — that a Y.A. writer had best stay away from the topic of faith — is elusive, a kind of vapor that began swirling around me a decade ago when I wrote my first Y.A. novel, “The Possibilities of Sainthood,” about a Catholic girl who longs to become the first living saint, followed by “This Gorgeous Game,” about a young woman struggling with her faith amid the Catholic abuse scandal.

In the years after those first two books I found myself going underground. I wrote stories about losing a parent, about a young gymnast who gets her first gold medal and an ice skater who



makes it to the Olympics; even a science fiction trilogy that takes up the perils and possibilities of new technology. Being too overt about religion in a Y.A. novel seemed a mistake, maybe even an act of self-sabotage — unless one is writing about cults or lampooning religion à la Pete Hautman’s “Godless.”

While I used to say that I have a Ph.D. in religious studies, I started referring instead to my dissertation topic, postmodern French feminist philosophy. That way, no one would assume I was conservative, antisex and intolerant. To be known as a person of faith, especially of the Christian, Catholic variety, I noticed, was to cause a kind of allergic reaction, to provoke suspicion and distrust.

Of course, it’s for all the right reasons that talk of religion in the mainstream Y.A. publishing world makes people nervous. We worry someone might be trying to convert or indoctrinate teenagers; we resist preachiness about certain moral perspectives. Religions and religious people have done and still do reprehensible things in our world, to women, to children, to some of the people I care most deeply about.

Calls for censorship of novels for children and young adults typically arise from religiously affiliated quarters; Harry Potter has been banned because of fears of witchcraft, and *His Dark Materials* has been banned because Philip Pullman is an outspoken atheist.

Talk of religion makes *me* twitchy for all those reasons, and because I am feminist, liberal, pro-L.G.B.T.Q. Religion can make me enraged, dismayed, disgusted.

And yet, it is a part of me. Maybe one of the best parts.

I see it in the big questions (the bigger the better) that percolate in my brain, that drive my curiosity into a thrilling frenzy, and in the playful, at times comedic, cultural trappings of my Italian-Portuguese immigrant family. I was the kid — and still am the adult — who wanted to know *why* we are here, *if* there is a God, *what* it means to live a good life.

In my yearning to widen my knowledge of religious experience and ideas, I studied saints, mystics, philosophers, writers on a search for spiritual enlightenment. The Catholic tradition of my youth can be reprehensible, blind, maddening, even criminal, and it also can be rich, complex, beautiful and justice-oriented.

Religion and spiritual questions are forces — powerful ones — in the lives of so many Y.A. readers. While there’s been an increase in young people who profess no religious affiliation (about 30 percent claim the “none” label, with L.G.B.T.Q. young adults twice as likely to identify this way), many more respond positively when asked if they consider themselves “spiritual” to some degree. Several studies, including the longitudinal National Study of Youth and Religion, and one of my own from 2008 that involved college students, have clocked American young adult interest in broad ideas about spirituality and God at about 80 percent.

As a frequent speaker on college campuses, I can confirm that while young adults may be more skeptical about traditional religion, their hunger for a more inclusive, nontraditional spirituality is

a constant. I find that even atheists tend to perk up when discussing the possibilities and freedoms a more open, forgiving spirituality might bring to their lives.

Yet few Y.A. protagonists identify with a particular faith tradition, or claim spirituality as something of interest. Even fewer pray occasionally, or attend services with their families, or wonder about God, or struggle with doubt and faith alongside the rest of the things they do — play sports, go to school, fall in love, have sex, come out. One study from 2013 found that nearly 90 percent of protagonists in award-winning and best-selling Y.A. titles claim no religious or spiritual identity whatsoever. That does not align with the real lives of American teenagers.

To ignore religion in Y.A. cedes the entire conversation about religion and spirituality, and all that it stands for, to exactly the kind of intolerant voices that Y.A. publishing has fought so hard against. Teenage readers search for themselves in books. The world of Y.A. is an activist one — an ideal sphere in which to interrupt the toxic religion-speak and attitudes that dominate our politics and culture at the moment, and to model the kind of spiritual longing so many young adults harbor, often secretly. Like me, they learn to be ashamed of it.

Just recently something has changed for me. Writing my latest novel, I found myself going back to those topics and themes, that hunger to explore faith, doubt, spiritual longing — despite the equally powerful alarm bells ringing inside me about doing just this. I couldn't help myself. As I once more took up the big questions of religion, I was writing the stories of my heart.

I'm still nervous, but I'm trying to remember the big audience out there of young adults who share my need. And as all teenagers come to know, sometimes what seems like breaking the rules is the only way to be true to ourselves.

*Donna Freitas is the author, most recently, of "The Healer," and a professor at Adelphi University.*

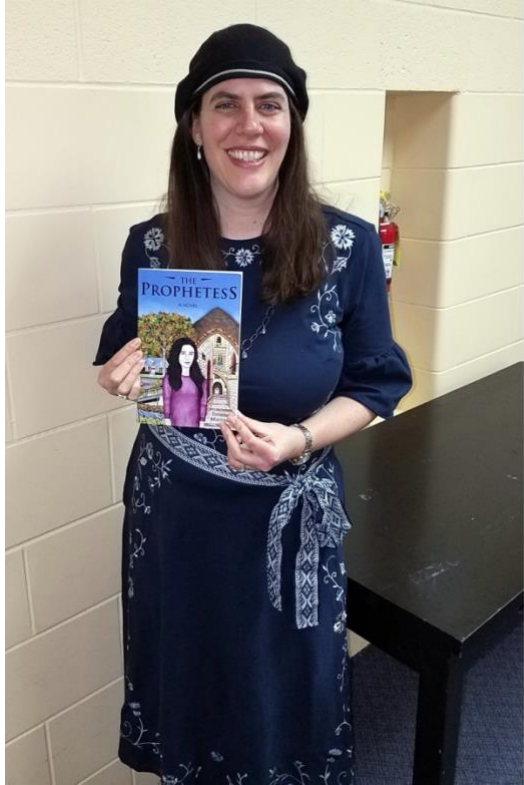
## **KEY MESSAGES OF *THE PROPHETESS***

- 1) Family
  - a. Motherhood and the special bond between mothers and daughters
  - b. Fatherhood: Can a dad support his daughters and also let them go?
- 2) Coming of age for a young girl
  - a. Love story: Can a girl find happiness along with her life purpose?
  - b. Finding power in following your dreams
- 3) Jewish feminism
  - a. Non-rabbinical women as equal leaders in a unique kind of Torah community
  - b. A role for women in Jewish life that does not require being a mother (Devorah – a main female character who is not a mother)
- 4) Spiritual wisdom
  - a. Knowing yourself as a soul on a journey
  - b. The possibility of prophecy and direct connection with G-d
  - c. There is nothing but G-d
  - d. Discovering the wisdom of Jewish tradition
- 5) Holocaust and Jewish elders
  - a. The Jewish world in gradual, meaningful healing from trauma of the Holocaust
  - b. The legacy of elders (Holocaust survivors) and their legacy and gift to the next generations

## Q&A With *PROPHETESS* AUTHOR EVONNE MARZOUK

### What do you see as the take-home message of *The Prophetess*?

At the beginning of the story, Rachel comes across a children’s prayerbook given to her by her grandfather. In the margin, he wrote, “For Rachel – may she grow into all her gifts.” We all enter life with gifts, but will we seize the opportunity to grow into them? Rachel has specific



and unique gifts that take time to understand; the book explores how she begins to grow into them.

I don’t expect readers of the book to become prophets, or even necessarily to become more Jewishly observant as a result of the story. My hope is that they will begin to ponder what gifts they haven’t yet grown into, and seek out the guidance and wisdom they need to grow into them.

### What kinds of books did you read as a young woman, and how did they inspire your writing of *The Prophetess*?

One summer in college, I was browsing a book store on the boardwalk in search of wisdom. On a random shelf in the aisles, I came across *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield, a novel about a spiritual awakening. I didn’t know then that it was a

bestseller; I didn’t know it would sell millions of copies. I didn’t know the writer had self-published and sold hundreds of thousands of copies out of the trunk of his car before a publisher picked it up. I bought it and I read it with the desperate hunger of a girl trying to make sense of it all.

*The Celestine Prophecy* wasn’t the only book I read during that wisdom-seeking time. I read *Siddhartha* and *The Alchemist*; I read *Conversations with G-d*. I read *Life 101* and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. I collected wisdom quotes from a wide range of sources and recorded them in a *Women’s Voices* journal.

Each of these books taught me lessons, but none really gave me what I was seeking. It took me years to realize that I already had a wisdom tradition: Judaism. And none of these books had provided the wisdom that fit with the bits of wisdom I’d received in my upbringing; none matched the particular shape of my soul.

I wrote this book to fill that gap; to inspire people from within my own tradition. I still hope non-Jews can appreciate it, the way I enjoyed *Siddhartha* or the *Tao Te Ching*. But especially, I hope it will provide young women with the something missing for my younger self: an enjoyable, coming-of-age novel that teaches wisdom from within the Jewish tradition.

### **What question is this story trying to answer?**

When I began to write this book, I was struggling with the traditional view that Jewish prophecy ended after the Biblical period. I was trying to understand whether Jews really believed G-d had stopped talking to people. My own experiences seemed to disagree, in that I'd personally had experiences of truly meaningful connection with G-d.

In 1996, the Prime Minister of Israel Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated by a Jew claiming to have heard the instruction "from G-d." This was an earthshaking experience for me. Could having a relationship with G-d actually lead someone to such actions? Was it possible to have a relationship with G-d that would cause someone not to be mentally unstable or even, horribly, murderous? These kinds of questions were swirling in my mind as I began this story for the first time.

To write the book, I did a lot of research to understand what traditional Jews expect out of our relationship with G-d. In some ways it's quite different from other religions, such as Christianity. For example, we believe in Divine Providence (*hashgacha pratit*), that "the hand of G-d" is always working in the background, both at a historical and personal level. But many Jews are uncomfortable with the idea of a direct, personal relationship with G-d.

Prophecy is a particularly high level of relationship with G-d, and in Jewish tradition it's understood as out of reach for basically everyone at this stage in history. In the book, I explore the questions: What if prophecy didn't end? What if it just went underground? What could it possibly look like to be called to be a prophetess today?

**In the story, Yonatan, a 30-something year-old male prophet, is sent to teach a 17-year-old Jewish girl. This could have produced some troubling moments, but their relationship never becomes inappropriate. How do you feel about the risks their relationship presents?**

I've worried a lot about giving young girls the wrong message, that they should always trust the older man who has come to "teach them something." There is a lot of risk in these kinds of relationships, and I do think women should keep their guards up. Rachel understands that from the start, when she tries to create some of her own boundaries for their discussions. Yonatan has his own boundaries in the book, many of them based on Jewish tradition: he's careful not to touch her, or to put them alone in a place where they couldn't be discovered. They meet in the synagogue and she never goes to where he lives. She always maintains some power over her own safety. If Yonatan had tried to cross those boundaries, I think Rachel would have run away immediately, which would have been completely appropriate.

Despite all of my hesitation here, the reality is that some of the most powerful spiritual interactions I've had have been learning from men. When it comes to topics like Jewish mysticism, in real life Jewish men are often the ones who have learned the information. If

women want to learn these teachings deeply and authentically, some women might need to learn from men.

I wanted to present a picture in this book where a man has evolved enough that it *is* safe for a girl to learn from him. I believe that these relationships are possible and can be powerful, when the appropriate boundaries are in place. But I still think girls should always be careful.

**You've written about your mother's death, six years ago. How did her death affect the telling of this story?**

Losing my mother was one of the most difficult things I've ever experienced in my life. We were very close. At the time, I was thirty-six, a mom, and I was busy and not really thinking much about the long-term future. Her illness and death changed my perspective on life. Part of that was just *going for things* that I hadn't been putting a lot of effort into, like making this book a reality.

But there's also this: Until she died, I didn't really understand the power of death. How it can change the people left behind, and leave them with a legacy, with choices, with agency, and with responsibilities. I think that wisdom is also written into this story.

**You graduated with a degree from the prestigious Writing Seminars program at Johns Hopkins University, and you mention in the acknowledgements that you had Dr. Chaim Potok as a professor there. What did you learn from him and how did it impact your writing?**

Learning from him certainly made an impression on me. What I remember most was a lesson he offered about how all cultures have a "core" and a "fringe." The core of the culture is the place where the people are most committed and devoted. At the fringe, the culture is a smaller part of their identity.

Dr. Potok taught us how people who live at the fringes of a culture may be strongly influenced by an encounter with the "core" of any culture, whether their own or someone else's. A meaningful interaction between two people who come from different "cores" can be transformational to both.

In *The Prophetess*, I'm playing with a deep "core" culture—the secret culture of Jewish prophecy. Rachel's interaction with that core changes her profoundly.

**You ran Canfei Nesharim, a Jewish environmental organization, for more than a decade. How does that work relate to this story?**

Creating and leading Canfei Nesharim was a wonderful experience. It was a gift to write and teach Jewish wisdom about protecting the environment, which is very important to me, and to develop my skills as a leader. Because we were teaching traditional Jewish views, I also had the opportunity to learn a lot of Torah. I worked with Rabbi Yonatan Neril (now director of the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development in Jerusalem), who provided a wealth of Jewish sources to help put together our messages. Some of the lessons were very spiritual in nature and made a deep impression on me.

Through my learning, I started to find harmony between the importance of working on the outside world (to protect the environment) and the inner world (to improve ourselves). I guess those same ideas have found their way into *The Prophetess*.

### **Have you ever had a teacher like Yonatan?**

Despite many efforts, I haven't had anyone come to teach me all the secrets of prophecy. I wish they would! But I have had a few extraordinary meetings that felt – maybe? – divinely orchestrated. Here's the most important one: I began regular Jewish learning with a chavruta (study partner) after my mother died, and for one of our learning projects I picked *Inner Space* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan off a list tucked into a book about Kabbalah I'd bought in Tzfat.

After we'd learned the entire book, I mentioned to a friend in Jerusalem what I'd been learning, and he told me that the book had been published posthumously. The actual author/editor was alive and teaching in Jerusalem, and was teaching a class *on that book* for the first time in twenty years!

That's how I began learning with Rav Avraham Sutton, who has had a profound influence on my understanding of Judaism and has provided a lot of insights I've tried to incorporate into *The Prophetess*.

### Author's Jewish Background

#### **What kind of Jewish education did you have as a child?**

Growing up, I didn't have a particularly strong Jewish education. I went to Hebrew school at a synagogue called Temple Zion outside Philadelphia. I entered the Hebrew school later than most of the other kids, and ended up getting a lot of remedial tutoring just to learn the basics, which felt humiliating for a student who did quite well in public school.

However, I do remember some of those teachers, tutors, and the cantor and rabbi at that synagogue. I remember feeling that there was something here – something with a lot of meaning that I couldn't quite access. That stuck with me.

#### **Despite your limited Jewish education, you ultimately decided to become a practicing Orthodox Jew. That's a long road from your early experiences. When and why did you decide to become religious?**

My road to Jewish observance really began with my experiences in BBG – the girls' side of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. There were a lot of other girls in my chapter who also didn't have many strong Jewish experiences, so I didn't feel alone the way I did in Hebrew school. We did things like writing our own Friday night services, which might include a few prayers, spiritual quotes, and popular songs. I became a leader in my chapter, and in 1992, I went to BBYO's week-long International Convention in Starlight, PA. That was the first time I was on my own with a camp full of Jews. They kept kosher in the camp; it was the first time I'd ever been in a kosher setting. It was also the first time I was with a whole group of kids welcoming Shabbat.

In 1993, I spent four weeks at that same camp participating on BBYO's International Leadership Training Conference (ILTC). After four weeks there, I started reconsidering whether I wanted to eat things like pork.

### **When did you first visit Israel?**

I came back from ILTC wanting to go to Israel. I'd heard amazing stories about Israel from other kids at the camp, and I'd met an Israeli shaliach there, who also inspired me. I was in my senior year of high school, and it seemed entirely unlikely that I would get to go before college. My parents definitely weren't going to pay to send me, and I knew I had to work the summer before college.



Then an amazing thing happened. A program called the "Israel Programs Center" came to my high school and launched a contest. The winners of the contest would get to go to Israel on an expenses-paid trip – and one of the components was "creative writing." I was, at the time, the editor of the school's literary magazine. I wrote my heart out into a story and I won. We went to Israel for twelve days and paid nothing.

Thinking back now, the whole thing feels entirely surreal. Why did they come to *my* high school, just at the point when I was ready to go to Israel, with a writing contest at a time when I was one of the strongest writers in the school? But that's what happened and that's how I got to go.

### **Tell me about your first experiences with the Orthodox community.**

When I came to Baltimore in 1994, I was finally in a place where I could learn more about Jewish tradition from actual Orthodox Jews. The Jewish Student Association offered a program where students could learn with young men and women from the Pikesville community in Baltimore. I had two learning partners – Devorah Friend and Miriam (Cohen) White.

I remember so clearly the first time Devorah brought me into a synagogue in Pikesville; it was for the megillah reading on Purim. It was my first time in an Orthodox synagogue. I didn't like that I had to sit so far from the men; but after the reading, she led me around to see the entire building. She told me I could leave my things as we wandered: "they're perfectly safe here." She



brought me back to her house for dinner, and I felt welcomed into a world I'd only imagined till then.

As I said in the book, I had no idea you could just “walk in.” Like Rachel, I wore a skirt. All I'd needed was an invitation.

**In this story, Rachel struggles with keeping a strong relationship with family and friends while being drawn into the world of the prophets. How did your parents react when you became religious?**

It wasn't easy in the beginning. I knew neither of my parents would have chosen this for me. I'm an only child, and now that I have my own children, I can understand it must have been painful for them to see their daughter making such different choices. But in the end, I was able to show them I was still the same person, and still committed to a strong relationship with them. I think it helped that I married a level-headed, nice guy that they could also have a good relationship with.

When my first son was born, my mother bought a set of kosher dishes to keep in her house for him to use. That meant so much to me. I'm still quite close with my dad, even though we are very different. We try to keep the love between us front and center, and not focus on areas where we disagree.

[Writing/Publishing the book:](#)

**You said you started this book in college, but you're now well past that stage. What finally happened that enabled you to finish it?**

First of all, I had a baby. When my second was born, I gave up some of the projects that had been occupying me for years, and I went on maternity leave. That gave me a chance to return to this book after years of putting it off.

I also had a great writing coach, Kristen Moeller. The most important insight from our work together was that it was a lot easier for me to edit old drafts than to write the parts of the book that felt murkier and unclear. When I finally committed to write *those* parts, I could put together a complete draft. There was plenty of time to edit once the first draft was done.

**Who was the first person to read the complete manuscript?**

My husband. He's my cheerleader. He genuinely wants me to fulfill my dreams and make a difference in the world. I'm incredibly lucky to have him.

**What is your relationship with the ROI Community?**

The ROI Community is a network of young Jewish innovators, and I am proud and grateful to be part of it. What makes ROI special is their support for individuals. As a young Jewish leader, I was often able to receive funding and support for my projects, but when I concluded those specific projects, their support ended. ROI kept investing in me, including microgrants for my writing coach, developmental editor, and cover art for this book.

ROI is a project of the Schusterman Foundation, and I sometimes think of Lynn Schusterman as my fairy godmother. She and her husband, Charles, were investing in BBYO when it was my key to entering into Jewish life. They were investing in Hillel when I was in college, and they provided all the resources for ROI that have made such a difference to me as an adult.

The network is called ROI (“return on investment”) – because they are seeking to get value out of the young people they’ve invested in. I think they’ve gotten their investment back on me.

### **What was your prior relationship with Bancroft Press?**

Professionally, I’ve spent most of my adult life in the environmental field. But before my career went in that direction, I saw myself as a writer and editor. I co-edited a school newspaper, *The Charles St. Standard*, and I wanted to work in publishing, so I applied for a college internship with Bancroft Press.



I had worked one summer at a different publishing company in Philadelphia, doing a range of administrative and promotional tasks, but I’d never edited a book before. I remember Bruce Bortz, the publisher, asking me what my book editing experience was, and having to answer that I had none. Still, he brought me on and we began a productive relationship; I’d edited three books for him by the time I graduated.

When I began my environmental career, we fell out of touch, until I wrote to tell him I’d finished a novel and would like to discuss it. I was amazed by his quick and warm response. It had been twenty years since I’d worked for him.

### Other Details about the Author

### **When did you first start creative writing?**

When I first started putting sentences together. I wrote a Haiku in second grade that was published in our school newsletter and sat framed on my desk for years. I was already writing long, involved stories when I was ten, when a teacher wrote “Judy Blume, look out!” on a writing assignment I handed in. Publishing a novel was the dream of that ten year old. I wish I could go back and tell that little girl how things have worked out.

### **What made you choose the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars program?**

This is another example of what, in Jewish tradition, is called *hashgacha pratit* (G-d’s divine intervention in life). My mother and I went on college tours the summer before my senior year in high school. In Washington, D.C. we visited Georgetown, GW, and American University. On our way back, we planned to stop at Johns Hopkins, but we were both thinking we’d just skip it and head straight home. We had the impression that Hopkins was a medical school and wouldn’t be especially useful to a student who wanted to pursue writing.

At the last minute, we decided to go. We ended up with a student tour guide from the Writing Seminars program. She told us how much she enjoyed the program, and mentioned that her advisor was Stephen Dixon – an author I'd been reading all that summer.

By the fall, I was applying Early Decision to Hopkins – and it's a good thing I did. Aside from all the other good reasons, that's where I met my husband.

**As Rachel learns to become a prophetess, sometimes her experiences are physically painful. You've struggled with chronic pain throughout your adult life. How have those experiences affected this story?**

I do know what it's like to find yourself unexpectedly in pain with no apparent cause, and that awareness has certainly worked its way into this story. Though I really have struggled with fibromyalgia over the years, I feel fortunate that I've been able to manage it with diet, exercise, vitamins, and a whole range of alternative medicine treatments.

In the book, Yonatan tells Rachel that her struggles with prophecy will never get in the way of what G-d has planned for her. Recently, I've been reminding myself that if I'm able to do the things I'm really committed to, even if I need help – if it's not stopping me from fulfilling G-d's plan for me, then in the big picture I'm doing okay.

In the story, Rachel eventually comes to understand that her pain has a meaning and a purpose, and that it's not forever. I'd like to come to that kind of conclusion one day.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BOOK CLUBS

1. During Rachel's journey of learning to be a prophetess, the prophets struggle with the tension of teaching her and protecting her. Do you think they were successful at finding the right balance? How might Rachel's story have been different if they had been more or less protective? Now that Rachel has asked them to "tell her things," how might their relationship change?
2. Rachel's family and friends call her Rachel, but the prophets call her by her Hebrew name, Rahel. A similar dynamic exists with Rachel's mother, Alisha/Elisheva. How does the use of names reflect different aspects of a person?
3. Gifts play an important role in this novel. For example, Rachel enters the story with a necklace from her grandfather, a poetry journal from Lauren, and a make-up set from Maya. During the story, Yonatan gives her a prayer book, Devorah gives her a blanket, and Jake gives her a ring. How do these different gifts help Rachel along her journey?
4. Rachel's journey teaches her both about Jewish tradition and about the mystical truths of life. Because of what she learns, she is left feeling the need to observe Jewish tradition even if prophecy is stripped away from her. Can you understand this conclusion? Do you think you would make the same choice?
5. Devorah and Noach have a unique partnership. Why do you think she refused his offer of marriage when they were young? Why do you think it took until her deathbed to admit her love for him?
6. Devorah, Noach, and Rachel's grandfather each lived through the Holocaust, but managed to keep their faith in the end. How were their post-Holocaust journeys similar and different? How did they each find purpose and the ability to have a good life?
7. In this novel, the prophets have the ability to support and uplift each other by channeling G-d's light. Have you ever experienced someone uplifting you in a similar way? Have you ever given "light" of some kind to another? What was the experience like? How was it similar or different to the descriptions in this story?
8. Yonatan rose from the depths of despair to teach Rachel, because he understood what was at stake. Devorah tells him, "Do not underestimate the resilience of the human heart." Can you think of other examples or role models for this kind of resilience, in history or in your own life? What lessons can we learn from this?
9. Chris seems to understand prophecy long before Rachel has the courage to tell anyone else. Why do you think the concepts of prophecy make sense to him as a Christian? What do you think of their friendship? Do you think their relationship will continue with Rachel in Israel?

10. Despite her hesitation, Rachel accepts a friendship ring as a gift from Jake before she leaves Baltimore. How does her relationship with boys evolve throughout the book? What future, if any, do you think is possible for Rachel and Jake?

## AUTHOR'S FACEBOOK LIVE BOOK TALK

Evonne Marzouk was live. 5 hrs · 🌐

I met with my publisher today and we made this live video, which includes the pitch I gave at the Jewish Book Council. It's short... have a listen! Comment to let me know what you think.

10 2 Comments 3 Shares 108 Views

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant ▾

Write a comment...

Geoffrey Smitt · 1:47 · Wow!!!! My little girl! Could I be any more proud? 😊

Love · Reply · 2h

JoAnn Gerson replied · 1 Reply · 1 hr

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/tjt1fs95235uxev/Pitch%20only.mp4?dl=0>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Evonne Marzouk grew up in Philadelphia. While still in high school, she had two stories published in *The Apprentice Writer*, published a story in *Shofar*, and was awarded first prize in fiction in a contest by the Israel Programs Center, which won her a free trip to Israel.

She was an active member of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, serving as President of Chavalla BBG, Sisterhood Chair of Philly Region, and as an International Chair. She attended BBYO's International Leadership Training Conference in Starlight, PA in 1993.

Evonne attended the Johns Hopkins University and received a B.A. from the Writing Seminars program, with a minor in Religious Studies, graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1998. While at



Hopkins, Evonne served as co-editor of, and frequent writer for, *The Charles St. Standard*. From 1996-1998, she worked part-time as a book editor at Bancroft Press, editing *You Might as Well Laugh* by Sandi Kahn Shelton (1996); *Generation of Wealth* by Julius Westheimer (1997); and *Live by the Sword* by Gus Russo (1998).

In 1998, she was selected First Runner-Up in the *What Being Jewish Means to Me* Essay/Expression Contest of the American Jewish Committee. From 1998-99, she served as the COEJL Legislative Fellow in the Legislative Assistant Program at the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, representing the Jewish community on environmental issues on Capitol Hill.

She founded and led the Green Group at Keshet Israel Synagogue from 2000-2007, and also served as an executive board member of Shomrei Adamah (Guardians of the Earth) from 2000-

2002.

Evonne founded and is the former director of Canfei Nesharim, an organization that teaches Jewish wisdom about protecting the environment. In 2004, Canfei Nesharim was accepted to Bikkurim: An Incubator for New Jewish Ideas. For ten years, Evonne led Canfei Nesharim, working with rabbis, scientists, educators, and community leaders to create and distribute a wide range of materials demonstrating the depth of Jewish tradition on this topic, including Torah teachings on the environment for each weekly Torah portion, each Jewish holiday, and a comprehensive set of core teachings on the environment, which was later gathered into a book,

*Uplifting People and Planet: Eighteen Essential Jewish Lessons on the Environment*, available in e-book format on Amazon.com.

In 2008, Evonne was invited to join the ROI Community, an international network of Jewish activists, entrepreneurs and innovators. In 2009, she was selected as one of *The New York Jewish Week*'s "36 under 36." In 2011, with ROI's generous support, Evonne launched and led the team to develop Jewcology.com, a web-based portal to support resource sharing and collaboration across the Jewish-environmental community. From 2007-2014, she also led Maayan Olam, a Torah-Environment committee in Silver Spring, MD.

Evonne began work for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1999. In 2001, through an IPA agreement, Evonne worked as a program associate for the Center for a New American Dream, where she conducted outreach for a project called Turn the Tide, to engage individuals and organizations to take simple steps to reduce their impact on the environment.

In 2002, she was the youngest person on the United States delegation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.

She has played a key role in work on the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint.

She also manages a number of other communications and website projects for EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs.

Through her work at EPA, she was awarded a Bronze Medal for Commendable Service, for diligent and exemplary contributions to the 14th Session of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation in Morelia, Mexico on June 26-27, 2007; the International Affairs Award (2009), for enhancements to quality of work and dedication to developing core values for the office; OITA Communicator of the Year (2012-2013); the Russell Train Sustainability Award (2015 National Honor Award), for significantly advancing the work of the Lead Paint Alliance towards its goal of eliminating lead paint globally by 2020; and a Bronze Medal for Commendable Service, for efforts in support of United States participation in the Second UN Environment Assembly (2016).

Evonne continues to serve as an executive board member for Canfei Nesharim and as a steering committee member for Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light.

She blogs on Medium at <https://medium.com/@evonnemarzouk> and continues to speak and teach in the Jewish community about Torah and the environment, among other topics.

She lives in Silver Spring, MD and attends Kemp Mill Synagogue with her husband and two sons.