

# Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma

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Our past does not simply disappear. The painful history of our ancestors and their rich cultural wisdom intertwine within us to create the patterns of our future. Even when past trauma remains unspoken or has long been forgotten, it becomes part of us and our children—a legacy of both strength and woundedness that shapes our lives.

In this book, Tirzah Firestone brings to life the profound impact of protracted historical trauma through the compelling narratives of Israeli terror victims, Holocaust survivors, and those whose lives were marred by racial persecution and displacement. The tragic story of Firestone's own family lays the groundwork for these revealing testimonies of recovery, forgiveness, and moral leadership. Throughout, Firestone interweaves their voices with neuroscientific and psychological findings, as well as relevant and inspiring Jewish teachings.

Seven principles emerge from these wise narratives—powerful prescriptive tools that speak to anyone dealing with the effects of past injury. At the broadest level, these principles are directives for staying morally awake in a world rife with terror.

Rabbi Tirzah Firestone, Ph.D., is an author, Jungian psychotherapist, and founding rabbi of Congregation Nevei Kodesh in Boulder, Colorado.

Raised in a large Orthodox family as the younger sister of the late, groundbreaking radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (author of *The Dialectic of Sex*), Firestone's spiritual curiosity called her to search beyond the confines of her family's strict Jewish upbringing. Leaving home, she embarked upon a life-changing spiritual odyssey that she chronicled in *With Roots in Heaven: One Woman's Passionate Journey into the Heart of Her Faith*. After immersing herself in a wide variety of spiritual practices and worldviews, Firestone returned with fresh vigor to become a rabbi in a pluralistic and egalitarian Judaism.

Now Rabbi Emerita, Firestone's research on the transformation of collective trauma draws on the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and Jewish literature. Through interviews, case studies, and autobiographical stories, she demonstrates how trauma residue passes from generation to generation and how it can be transformed.

"Wounds into Wisdom is for anyone who has suffered trauma, either directly or in a family whose generational trauma is buried. It helps readers uncover suffering and use it to help others—the final stage of healing..." -Gloria Steinem

"An explosion of suffering, death and trauma has overtaken humanity during the past century and shows no signs of abating. Rabbi Tirzah Firestone speaks on every page of this deeply moving book with her heart and mind and from the deepest wellsprings of Jewish tradition to find sources of solace to transform wounds into wisdom. Her book spills over with empathy and compassion, forging a uniquely spiritual voice that heals and lifts our souls."-Susannah Heschel, Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies, Dartmouth College

"Tirzah Firestone is a compelling and genuinely fresh voice, revealing over and over again 'resonant truths that hold meaning for today.' I am moved by this book. And even when I disagree with her, Firestone makes me think in a broader way, as she will you."-Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Author of Jewish Literacy and Jewish Wisdom

"Wounds Into Wisdom is a timely and moving book that speaks to this particular historical moment, when current events are triggering deeply buried trauma and traumatizing new populations. Firestone makes a clear and urgent case for the importance of this work and its application to different contexts, and grounding it in her own family's story makes the book come alive."-Judith Rosenbaum, PhD, Executive Director of Jewish Women's Archive

"Tirzah Firestone's Wounds into Wisdom offers hope to those whose lives have been shattered by trauma. The question at the heart of this book is this: Can you emerge from tragedy wiser and more free? Her answer eloquently stated and illustrated by powerful stories and profound insight, is yes you can. If tragedy haunts your life or the lives of those who love-read this book; it has the potential to change everything."-Rabbi Rami Shapiro, Author of Minyan, and Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent

"We all fear trauma and take pains to avoid or bury it. As a result, trauma can lodge in the body or the unconscious, and, as Tirzah Firestone writes in this compelling book, can be passed unknowingly from generation to generation, 'like a train depositing its load, car after car, into our newborn skin.' The power of this book is in the stories she relates of people who've suffered extreme pain, faced it head-on, and found a path to healing. The stories soften our hearts, inspire gratitude and compassion for our fellow humans, and give us the tools to make sure the train of trauma goes no further."-Sara Davidson, N.Y. Times best-selling author of The December Project, Loose Change, and Joan: 40 years of life, loss, and friendship with Joan Didion

"This book is both a gift of wisdom and an opening of the heart. Representing years and years of feeling research, Rabbi and psychotherapist Tirzah Firestone lets us listen in to the powerful stories of people who have suffered trauma in their lives. She offers us the wisdom of a compassionate therapist whose understanding is broad and deep. But she also offers us the spiritual perspective of a rabbi who has found her way to the deeper currents of Jewish understanding. Running through Wounds Into Wisdom and binding it is an autobiographical account of her own family's trauma. That account is powerful in itself but it is also empowering-we can feel how the author has herself lived through trauma, and has even found her way to become a great healer and teacher. The book is addressed primarily to the Jewish experience of trauma in the twentieth century. But I believe it would be of profound help to anyone seeking to navigate the path to healing from trauma-which I believe in some ways, is all of us."-Rodger Kamenetz, Author of The History of Last Night's Dream and The Jew in the Lotus

"If we are ever to transform conflict and bring peace to this wounded world, we will need to understand and address collective and intergenerational trauma. In this illuminating and inspiring book, Rabbi Tirzah Firestone interweaves deeply touching personal stories including her own with keen psychological insights to guide us on a journey of awakening

and healing our traumas. Highly recommended!"-William Ury, co-author of *Getting to Yes* and author of *Getting to Yes with Yourself*. (PS from TF: *Getting to Yes* was a best-seller, translated into scores of languages. Ury is also an acclaimed international mediator)

"Wounds into Wisdom is a tour de force! Rabbi Firestone has woven together threads of truth about trauma that include her own family's life-experience of trauma inherited from the Holocaust, the new science of the inherited effects of trauma on genetic material and on the brain, studies of the social impact of traumatic events on large groups of people, and the mystical traditions of Kabbalah about the wounded human soul. She has woven these threads into a shimmering shawl of healing."-Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of The Shalom Center and author of *Godwrestling-Round 2*, among 23 other books of religious exploration and public policy

"With tender compassion and luminous insight, Rabbi Tirzah unwraps the hidden layers of stories, wounds, and wisdom that characterize the global Jewish community. She deftly lifts the complex history of modern Judaism to the light, offering an opportunity for particular reconciliation and universal healing."-Mirabai Starr, Author of *God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity & Islam* and *Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss & Transformation*

"A very important book. Rabbi Tirzah is a wounded healer. She uses the tale her own trauma in a Holocaust survivor family as a stepping-stone toward understanding survivor stories told by a wide variety of Jews, including many Israelis. But she then broadens the lens, showing how these very particularistic tales of personal struggle and healing may help people of many cultures to deal with legacies of exile and loss. A narrative of deep empathy and much wisdom."-Professor Art Green, Founding Dean of Hebrew College, Boston and author of *Judaism's Ten Best Ideas*, *Radical Judaism*, (and a slew of others)

"Brilliant, beautiful, and compels one to positive action. The people interviewed are so real and lovable...[Firestone's] writing opens ones heart to healing and hope. This is a book I will read again for inspiration and specific principles to live a joyful, liberated life." -Dr. Anita Sanchez, author of *The Four Sacred Gifts: Indigenous Wisdom for Modern Times*

"...both a labor of love as well as an intellectual tour de force.....One of the important points she makes here, drawing on the new science of epigenetics, is that trauma and its [effects] are felt not only by those who directly experience trauma, but are passed on to their children, and grandchildren. Rabbi Firestone teaches us how to listen, to ourselves and to others. Her book should be read by everyone who wishes personal healing and the healing of this traumatized world."-Tikkun

"Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma (Monkfish) by Rabbi Tirzah Firestone is written with empathy, combining research, Jewish teachings, psychological insights, her own family's stories and those of other Holocaust survivor families." - NY Jewish Weekly

"The theory of intergenerational trauma posits that psychological legacies of horror,

suffering, and loss can be unconsciously transmitted among generations of family. While the children and grandchildren may not have a direct experience of the initial ordeal, its effects can continue to impact their lives significantly; so much so that they carry the burden of an unnamed survivor's guilt. The mentality of 'never forget' morphs into a place of keeping the trauma alive. Rabbi and psychotherapist Firestone considers the suffering experienced by an entire ethnic group: specifically, Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust as well as Jews caught in the violence of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. Of her own life, the author remarks, '...I comprehended just how a family's ancestral trauma rumbles through history like a train, depositing its load, car after car, into our newborn skin.' In her experience, silence becomes weaponized, freezing spouses, children, and grandchildren in time, without redemption. Culling together a multiplicity of narratives, Firestone offers seven principles focused on facing and transforming family grief into a coherent, powerful sense of agency. VERDICT Combining religion and self-help, these timely reflections make for comforting reading." -Library Journal, Sandra Collins, Byzantine Catholic Seminary Lib., Pittsburgh

#### Other Books

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