

Episode 40: Trauma Legacies in the Middle East I

Guest: Rabbi Dr. Tirzah Firestone, Psychotherapist, Rabbi, Author, and Trauma Expert

Hosts: Alexandria & Yusuf

Bio: Rabbi Dr. Tirzah Firestone, Ph.D. is an acclaimed Jungian psychotherapist, rabbi and prominent leader in the international Jewish Renewal movement. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish family in St. Louis, Missouri, she is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor: her mother escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 on the last Kindertransport, her Jewish American father was one of the liberators of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. She is the younger sister of Shulamith Firestone, a pioneering radical feminist and author of *The Dialectic of Sex*. Ordained by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, one of the most influential reformers of Judaism in the 20th century, in 1992, Rabbi Firestone has since become a renowned Jewish scholar and teacher. Her groundbreaking work integrates Jewish mystical traditions, feminist insights, and contemporary psychological approaches to address and transform inherited trauma. She is the author of the award winning book *Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma* (Monkfish, 2019), which has received multiple accolades, including the 2020 Nautilus Gold Award in Psychology and the 2020 Book Award from the Jewish Women's Caucus of the American Association for Women in Psychology. Her work focuses on the intersection of trauma, spirituality, feminism, and healing, offering pathways for individuals and communities to address and transform inherited wounds.

In this Episode: Alexandria and Yusuf have a wide-ranging conversation with Rabbi Dr. Tirzah Firestone about trauma, inheritance, and healing in a fractured world. They explore her journey to becoming both a rabbi and a psychotherapist and discuss why trauma matters not only individually but across families, communities, and societies. Rabbi Dr. Firestone explains the mechanisms of trauma transmission across generations, including family stories, collective memory, and the biological effects of epigenetics, emphasizing that while trauma can be passed down, it can also be transformed through awareness and intentional healing. The discussion highlights Jewish collective trauma, the role of memory, and the continuing impact of historical persecution, including the Holocaust. It also addresses the trauma of October 7 and the war in Gaza, examining retraumatization and the suffering of Jewish and Palestinian communities. Rabbi Dr. Firestone reflects on how collective trauma manifests today, the challenges of healing amid ongoing conflict, and the role of justice, empathy, and ending violence in recovery. She closes with insights on individual and communal healing, the power of ritual and dialogue, and a message of resilience and hope for young people navigating uncertain times.

Links:

<https://www.tirzahfirestone.com/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Firestone, Tirzah. *Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma*. Monkfish Book Publishing, 2019. <https://www.tirzahfirestone.com/woundsintowisdom> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

The Cherryblossom Experiment and the Epigenetics of Trauma: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190326-what-is-epigenetics> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

On the biological and social trauma of starvation across generations please also listen to our episode with world-leading expert on hunger and mass violence Alex de Waal/World Peace Foundation (Episode 5): <https://www.ohsu.edu/school-of-medicine/moore-institute/dutch-famine-birth-cohort> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025) / <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/science/dutch-famine-genes.html> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Please also check out our other episodes to explore multiple perspectives.

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of: Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeries Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Krefß LL.M. (Cambridge)

(Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.