

Streams of Shattered Consciousness, by Rabbi David-Seth Kirshner

On October 7, Rabbi David-Seth Kirshner woke up to celebrate his 50th birthday. It was meant to be a momentous day, a new chapter in the accomplished community leader's life. He was looking forward to an upcoming vacation, exhaling after the High Holiday season, and enjoying some cake.

However, upon waking up and hearing the most-gut-wrenching news, he found himself comforting community members while dealing with his own anger, rage, shock, fear, anxiety, and grief over what was one of the most devastating attacks in Jewish history.



Rabbi David-Seth Kirshner in Jerusalem

To process his own emotions, Rabbi Kirshner picked up the only weapon mightier than a sword: a pen. Or in today's world, a keyboard, and started writing his "Stream of anxiety-ness." He published his journal entry on his Times of Israel blog on October 8th, and repeated this practice the next day, as well as the day after that. As the days passed, it became a cathartic habit for him, every day journaling his emotions and how they related to the ongoing nightmare that he and Israelis and Jews around the world were experiencing.

"Many people told me that I was able to articulate what they've been grappling with but unable to express themselves," Rabbi Kirshner said in an interview with the ToI. "I was heartened to learn that a lot of people were looking forward to my daily writings. I kept going each day, and I saw that this thing was getting bigger than me; it was resonating. As bolstering as it was for me, by day 35, I knew I needed to do more."

Rabbi Kirshner decided to continue his daily writing until day 50. He then compiled his 50 entries into a book, *Streams of Shattered Consciousness: A Chronicle of the First 50 Days of the Israel-Hamas War*. His in-the-moment account of the first 50 days following the Hamas October 7th attack reflects on the daily happenings, the flurry of emotions surrounding them, ethical challenges and relevant lessons from history.



The book was published on Dec. 21, 2023, and to date has sold 7,000 copies in just the first three weeks. Many sponsors purchased copies in bulk to send to almost 50 different Hillels on university campuses, Jewish board leadership, community members, rabbinic students and colleagues and congregations of all denominations across the United States.

All the book's profits are going to a new fund created by Rabbi Kirshner's congregation at Temple Emanu-El in New Jersey, focused on supporting victims of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Israel related to the tragedies of October 7th. Rabbi Kirshner has long been an advocate of mental health and well-being and has written extensively on this topic too.

The book has already received high praise from noted Jewish leadership and authors. Noa Tishby, the author of *Israel: A Simple Guide to the Most Misunderstood Country on Earth*, said the book "brings an important voice and perspective from Diaspora Jewry."



Dan Senor, the author of *Start-Up Nation* and *The Genius of Israel* said the book “will serve as a permanent reminder of the tension and feelings the world endured during this unmitigated nightmare.”

Michael Oren, Israel’s former ambassador to the United States and Member of Knesset, said, “Rabbi David-Seth Kirshner has tapped into our wounded Jewish soul. He accessed the pain as well as the strength and faith that has sustained the Jewish people through the worst adversity. Here is a book that every Jew should read and embrace.”

Yossi Klein Halevi, the Senior Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, and author of *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*, said, “Beautifully written, passionately argued, *Streams of Anxious Consciousness* is a love song to Israel. Those seeking to understand the soul of American Jewry at this fateful moment need to read this book.”

Kirshner is the Past President of the New York Board of Rabbis and the NJ Board of Rabbis and was selected among 50 rabbis to participate in the inaugural class of the Kellogg School of Rabbinic Management at Northwestern University. In 2013, Rabbi Kirshner was appointed to the New Jersey-Israel Commission by Governor Chris Christie and was re-appointed in 2018, by Governor Phil Murphy. Additionally, Rabbi Kirshner holds a seat on the Executive Committee of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA). In 2009, Rabbi Kirshner was appointed to the National Council of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and in 2013, he graduated as a Senior Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, Israel. He is an adjunct Faculty Member of the Academy for Jewish Religion.



Rabbi Kirshner is the senior Rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in New Jersey. A passionate Zionist who spends much time in and advocating for Israel, he has long been outspoken for Israel's right to defense and calling out hypocrisy in the United Nations and other forums where Israel is unfairly targeted.

Born as the opening shots of the Yom Kippur War were fired and reaching this milestone birthday on what will forever be associated as a date of infamy and sadness, Kirshner claims "I am intrinsically connected to Israel."

On October 5, 2023, he finished his year of saying Kaddish for his mother, who he says was "his person and who first instilled a fierce sense of Zionism deep in my soul." October 7, 2023, was supposed to be a new beginning for him.

He generally travels to Israel three to six times per year, but he is already on his fourth trip since the October 7th attack.

“I decided to go to Israel when the war broke out, because if God forbid, my brother was going through cancer or my sister was in a car accident, I would jump on a plane and be by their side,” Rabbi Kirshner said. “Israel is going through an unprecedented nightmare, and I needed to go there as a Zionist, as a rabbi, as a friend, and let the country and its citizens know they are not alone.”

The traumatic events that unfolded since the war opened his eyes and challenged many of the beliefs he held close. For example, it made him rethink his position on some politicians he previously disdained, and revealed the true colors of other organizations that he supported that didn't reciprocate during Israel's time of pain.



On Day Five, Rabbi Kirshner delves into his pain at the silence of many organizations that did not condemn the attack nor voice support for Israel.

Rabbi Kirshner noted that over the years he joined the marches against violence toward many minority groups including violence against Muslims after 9/11 or against Asian Americans after COVID broke out, or in support of Black Lives Matter after the murder of George Floyd.

“As tragedy has now befallen my people, I have taken attendance at who is part of the marchers and the chorus. I am hurt by the absence of some. I am heartened by the attendance of many,” Rabbi Kirshner wrote.

“When faced with a moment that I hope never happens again, but most likely will, whether another terrorist attack in America by radical Muslims, white nationalist shooting against a minority group, any attack against Black people or Asian Americans, I assure you I will STILL stand up and join the marchers and the chorus and chant even louder, “Stop. No. We will not tolerate this.”

“My advocacy is not to curry favor or earn chits. My marching and chanting are because of my moral compass and values. I will just be sad knowing now that as some march beside me, their moral compass is not calibrated with mine since I will always remember they sat on the sidelines during our tragedy and trauma.” Rabbi Kirshner wrote.



“It’s not a trauma that has elapsed,” he noted. “It’s an ongoing trauma and writing has given me, and a lot of the readership, a license to grapple with countless feelings and emotions. It has given permission to not know what comes next and how these events will shape Israel and world Jewry. It has granted a license to be angry, to be confused and to feel betrayed. It has permitted us to wrestle with impossible ethical conundrums that are keeping us up at night.”

Writing has been a great comfort to Rabbi Kirshner and has helped him provide comfort to his community. Even after the first 50 days, and the conclusion of this book, Rabbi Kirshner has continued to write. He has since published two strongly argued op-eds called “Books Worth Burning,” and “Optical allusions: Naked in Gaza” that offer perspective on pointed issues that have played out in mainstream international media. Rabbi Kirshner will continue using his pen—or keyboard—as his sword to fight Hamas and antisemitism and to protect Israel.