Passover, more than any other holiday on the Jewish calendar, requires us to empathize with the stranger in our midst as we recall our own people's journey. We join together at the Seder to remember slavery in Egypt and recall what it was like to be a people wandering alone, with no one to come to our aid, without knowing where to turn. Moshe named his firstborn son a name very apt for the Jewish experience: Gershom, a name that indicates a stranger, born in a strange land. Thousands of years later, no matter where we live, we Jews never fully managed to shake the notion of being strangers. We have never been totally accepted, and likely never will.

The Jews who left Egypt during the first Passover never got to enter the Promised Land, Hashem delegated that task to their children. Despite being strangers in the land of Egypt, they never got to make it to a country where they could truly be their own people. Those people were born as slaves and retained the slave mentality for the rest of their lives. When you're a slave, anyone who tries to do something kind for you is probably taking advantage of you in some way that you can't yet see. The Jews who left Egypt never fully trusted Moshe or Hashem, and because of that inability, an inability brought on by generations of trauma, they did not merit

to enter the land of Israel. It was their children who got to taste true cultural independence.

It isn't hard for me to imagine what it was like for our ancestors in the desert. Any child of immigrants has heard some version of their parents' story of how they came to America with only a dollar in their pocket and a suitcase to their name, and how with great fortitude they managed to make that dollar grow into ten, and then a hundred, until finally they bought their first house. They bore you with stories about their own childhood, which you file in your adolescent mind under 'tall tales' and ' other things that never happened'.

My parents have always insisted on calling themselves first-generation Americans. They say "we are the first people in this family to become Americans, that is what first-generation means". Of course, a quick search on Google would tell you that their children are first generation, and as of right now the only word that describes the kind of American they are is 'immigrant'. Still, I've never been able to bring myself to correct them. How can anyone call them anything other than Americans? My father regularly travels across this country on his motorcycle, lovingly taking in the landscape. He knows every highway by heart. My mother is a civil servant who has climbed her way through the ranks of the Census

Bureau, making sure that every other American is accounted for. They are the first generation of their family to have contributed directly to this country- thus, they are first generation Americans.

The Passover story tells us that a first-generation is not just the first generation to leave. Generational trauma can stick with us, and hit us in ways we never truly expect. A land-marked study published in 1966 by Psychiatrist Vivian Rakoff coined the term ‘Ancestral trauma’ to describe elevated incidence of mental health disorders in decendents of holocaust survivors. The budding field of Epigenetics has further cemented itself as evidence of Generational trauma.

In a 2018 study, scientists at UMB, raised male mice in difficult environments, mirroring a traumatic childhood. They discovered changes in the mice’s genes that altered how they managed surges of stress hormone.

That change is strongly associated with alterations in how their offspring handle stress: namely, the young mice are numbed, or less reactive, to the hormones compared to control animals leading to increased obesity, CVD, and mortality. Even adopted mice showed similar epigenetic markers as those raised by parents with adverse childhood experiences proving that to some level we are slaves to our genetic chains.

While cleaning for Pesach this year as well as sitting at the seder, I was struck by how similar our traditions are to modern therapy. During the seder we begin with divulging the importance of each item on the seder plate. We begin with pesach sacrifice, then the matzah, ending with the maror. While the sequence may seem arbitrary, it tells the story of our people in the way that our minds are designed to process trauma. First, we begin with the Passover sacrifice because it is what makes us comfortable allowing us to enter the headspace to relive the bitter experiences of matzah (expulsion) and maror (the bitterness of slavery). The sequence of the seder is not unlike the stories of immigration that I grew up hearing from my parents; first beginning with a tale of triumph then giving way to more difficult to swallow stories of the Gulags and the genocide they've experianced. The Hebrews of the Yeẓi'at Miẓrayim never got to enter the Promised Land, not because they didn't deserve it but because Hashem understood that although the Jews had been freed from slavery, the truama from these experiences lived on in their body and their mind. He commanded them to wander the desert not as a punishment for lacking faith but to allow for them to process their grief and pain. If he had only freed our people from slavery it would have been enough, but he also gave us the seder and allowed us to process our truama.

On Passover, we act out the experience of being a refugee. Each year we madly dash together to clean and pack our stuff and try to liquidate our assets as if we are getting ready to suddenly move. We were commanded to eat the Pesach sacrifice while wearing our belt, shoes, and walking stick. We think about every item we own and evaluate what we must destroy or sell and what we cannot possibly survive the next week without. These are actions familiar to anyone who has had to flee another country, like my parents did from Ukraine thirty years ago.

We are an unbreakable DNA chain holding each other by the hand, each person holding on to our past and passing what we have to the next generation to achieve what we could have never dreamed of. This is what has always set our people apart. We don't try and erase our history- we embrace it and make sure our children know what we've gone through, and know what they no longer need to go through. One thousand years of sacrifice are in our veins, and every generation must know its own suffering.