

# When Our Limitations Become Our Strength



# the elul project

As the President of the ACT Jewish Community, I'm acutely aware that we are a small and isolated community. Many of our community members are away from loved ones in Sydney or Melbourne, and with travel limited due to COVID-19, our sense of being cut off has been acute over these past few months. Strangely, this very isolation has also helped protect us against COVID-19. We have no active cases in Canberra at present, and I am incredibly grateful for the measure of normality that allows us. We're lucky to be able to gather again for synagogue services, youth and adult education classes and even some small-scale social events.

This has led me to think deeply about how we approach our limitations, both as a community and as individuals in our community. Sometimes we have a tendency to focus too much on what we cannot do, rather than on what we can. Especially in a small community like ours, where resources are limited, we often worry about not doing enough particularly when we're used to doing so much! We can become disheartened by the challenges we face.

But when I consider how much we do, this gives me much pride or as we say in Yiddish, nachas! Even when the COVID-19 lockdown was at its strictest, with only 10 people permitted to gather, we adapted our traditional Limmud Shavuot, holding it at three separate locations, with two speakers in each place. For Pesach, we held a Seder over zoom before the holiday began. We moved our Cheder and our adult education classes online, with great success, even though we had never done anything like this before. And we massively scaled up our outreach and support to elderly and vulnerable members of our community, thanks to a network of new, young volunteers. In the middle of it all, we opened the beautiful new wing of the National Jewish Memorial Centre, and though we've had to delay the official opening, the building is already being used and very much appreciated.

Our ability to adapt, and to cope with challenges, inspires me. I feel that these skills are particularly Jewish: throughout history, persecution, displacement and changing circumstances have forced our forefathers and foremothers to be flexible, resourceful and, above all courageous in confronting whatever challenges were faced. I see us doing the same today, as we face the unprecedented challenge of a global pandemic. I think it has made our community stronger: we need each other more than ever, and we value what we have more than we did before. I'll never again take for granted the ability to attend shul, or hug another human being (I sincerely hope this will eventually be allowed again) or to see our youngest members running around the synagogue grounds. It doesn't matter to me any longer that we're small or isolated: we know that we can rely upon each other in our time of need. And so as we welcome the month of Elul, I am thinking about those things that matter the most.



## VERONICA LEYDMAN

Veronica Leydman was born in Buenos Aires and came to Sydney as a child. She has lived with her husband and her three children in the nation's capital since 2003.

Like many people who were not raised in Canberra, her first port of call was the ACT Jewish Community Centre which is located adjacent to Parliament House. She has volunteered in many capacities over the years for the Community, as a Cheder teacher, administrator, events coordinator and caterer and served on and off the Board for a number of years before becoming President of the ACTJC in 2018.

In her work life, Veronica is a government lawyer for the Department of Home Affairs within the immigration and citizenship law branch.

## ABOUT THE ELUL PROJECT

**An initiative aiming to share stories and teachings from Jewish women leaders in our community. Whilst many of us are stuck at home, or isolated from family over Elul and the High Holy Days, we hope this project will serve to inspire, nurture, and uplift during this difficult time.**

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