

'Perspectives of those most marginalized offer unique and important insights otherwise not possible but also that we are all insiders and outsiders at different times, places, and contexts.'

When looking for inspiration for this article I went searching through my 'notes' application on my computer and found this quote. It's probably 'copy-and-pasted' from a university reading that I liked. It further reminded me of an interview RuPaul did, where he explained that he was always in the outsider growing up, until he realised it was all a 'hoax.' He wanted to fit in very badly, and tried to find an entry into the insiders club, but came to realise it was all made up. He realised we live in a world where some have more social status than others; where some seem innately more important than others; that there feels like there is a secret and an unspoken handbook of how to fit in; but that ultimately this is all made up, it simply does not exist. Therefore, following on from the original quote, the idea that one is consistently an insider or an outsider is a fallacy. At some point we will all experience life from both perspectives.

That is why when Jews talk about refugees, the point of 'don't forget, after the Holocaust Jews were also refugees,' will be made. In many ways, though, we have in terms of citizenship transposed over time from outsider, to become the insider.

Growing up I never felt like an insider. I was a 12 year old with an unusually deep obsession with Queen music and, as my teachers described me, 'an active participant' in class. However, being an irreverent outsider gave me those 'important insights otherwise not possible.' Subconsciously, my role models were also outsiders - Freddie Mercury, and Miriam (from the Bible), among others. I learned that being an outsider didn't mean I had to work towards being an insider; being an outsider gave me the opportunity to embrace and learn who I was because everyone thought I was unique anyway, so I might as well really go for it. In saying that, in other contexts I am the insider. I don't know what it's like to be judged by the colour of my skin or to be uncertain where my next meal is coming from. Thus, it is my responsibility to recognise my privilege and not invalidate those who experience life from a different perspective.

COVID in combination with the lead up to the Yomim Noraim, results in an unparalleled time to gain perspective. A time where we can take our past experiences of being both insiders and outsiders and use that to contemplate who we want to be, instead of where we want to be - seeing as the future feels so unpredictable right now. And then after the pandemic, we can take those moments when we are insiders and invite those on the outside to speak; because it's not that people don't have a voice but rather are not given the opportunity to share their 'unique and important insights.' If the pandemic has imparted anything it is that life is not to be lived in singularity but rather that community is important, and that we all have our own unique role to play.



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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.