

In the early 20th century, the leaders of the Haskalah movement were proud to call themselves “*Maskilim*”. Not so today. Those who in yesteryear would have identified themselves with *Haskalah* today call themselves a variety of names such as Modern Orthodox, Open Orthodox and Feminist. As it was with the *Haskalah* so many years ago, these groups are not happy to keep their “newfound” Judaism to themselves. Instead, they seek to share and impose their secular worldview upon us as well. They very well know that titling themselves with anything other than “Orthodox” will hamper their ability to spread their message, so instead they keep that label and claim they simply seek to advocate, empower, or educate us in areas that we are, in their opinion, so sorely lacking.

Enter the **Jewish Orthodox** Women’s Medical Association (JOWMA). This Organization was ostensibly founded in 2019 by a then 24-year-old¹, Eliana Fine-Feld, “to support and advance the careers of religious Jewish female physicians”². In a blog post on their site explaining the need of the organization, they write, “It is difficult to consider how the long journey through pre-med, medical school, residency and fellowship training, and the eventual medical career can fit into the framework of the Orthodox Jewish community’s glorification of women exclusively in domesticated roles”.³ In a nutshell, this organization was created to break the proverbial glass ceiling “to support, empower, promote, and advance Orthodox Jewish female physicians, both current and future.”⁴

From the get-go, however, it seemed like the intent was about perpetuating themselves and their feminist doctrine more than mentoring and collaboration. Shortly after their inception, they began to issue “halachic” rulings about vaccines⁵ and even more concerning about inhibiting mikva usage⁶, without having a single Rabbi on their board.

In an online forum, JOWMA hosted a panel sponsored by Shalom Task Force since their goals “are very much aligned.”⁷ The talk opened with Miriam Andrusier, a proud and openly “queer” medical student (the Q of LGBTQ), the Vice Chair of the Women’s Health Committee Executive Board of JOWMA.⁸ The first segment was delivered by Shoshana Frydman, The Director of Shalom Task Force. In this segment, she focused on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and its prevalence in the Jewish community. She claims that probably 1 in 3 women within the *frum* community have experienced IPV within their marriages, but she is following up with a study with Jewish Women International (JWI - a reform organization) to better quantify the statistics in frum homes.

¹ <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/eliana-fine-24/>

² https://www.charitiesnys.com/RegistrySearch/show_details.jsp?id={D0786C6C-0000-C51C-A6C9-CBDF416E1EAC}

³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200927061425/https://www.jowma.org/post/jewish-orthodox-women-s-medical-association-our-why>

⁴ <http://www.5tjt.com/jowma-supporting-careers-of-frum-female-physicians/>

⁵ <https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/general/1703614/jewish-orthodox-womens-medical-association-statement-on-vaccination.html>

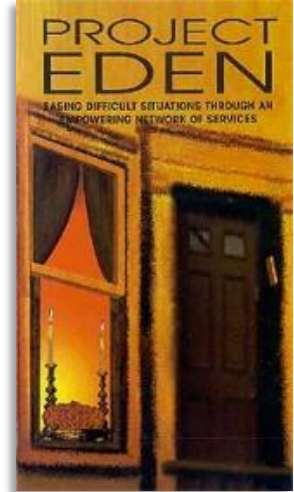
⁶

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fedf68a8500a82fe9d3c0e4/t/604f8b13f272bd3c8ce16985/1615825683173/C-OVID+MIKVA+JOWMA+FINAL.pdf>

⁷ Sexual Health - JOWMA Women's Health Webinar @ 2:47

⁸ This part was subsequently edited out when posting the video online but remains in our personal archives.

But here's where things really start to get ugly. In 2002, a Lawyer by the name of Kim Susser, the director of the Matrimonial & Family Law unit at a large law firm called New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) created what was known as Project Eden⁹. Project Eden was created to "enhance a multidisciplinary approach to deliver holistic, collaborative services"¹⁰ by coordinating with various organizations to help abused women within the frum community. This was sold to Rabbanim as a "religious venture" to refer those in need of educational training and social services, however, nothing could be further from the truth. This "project" was part of and housed by the Kings County District Attorney's office and the primary focus was to provide "access to the legal system" and to prosecute abusers through the criminal court system. In one grant to Project Eden from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, the intention was stated outright: to "increase the number of arrests and orders of protection against white Orthodox Jewish males in Brooklyn." In an article about the success of the system, Shoshana Frydman and Chana Widawsky (an employee of Project Eden in the DA's office) explain that "the criminal justice system, a traditional approach, is often considered an unwelcome entity in the Orthodox community. This resistance, rooted in the notion of *mesirah* and the fear of *Shonda*, often dissuades women from calling the police and using the justice system to gain safety."¹¹



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A Marriage of Jewish Family Services and the Criminal Justice System

Innovation and Collaboration in Addressing Domestic Violence in the Orthodox Community

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In the field of family therapy it is widely accepted that not every relationship is *bashert* (meant to be). This notion certainly holds true for organizational partnerships as well. Competition for limited funding opportunities, coupled with the unique nuances in mission, expertise, and style of each organization, can often create an environment in which agencies work individually rather than in concert. This article explores Project Eden, an innovative and successful partnership in Brooklyn, New York, which brings multiple Jewish family service agencies together with the criminal justice system to address domestic violence in the Orthodox community. As more than 450 abused women have been served by Project Eden and its partners, many would likely consider this union of multidisciplinary services to be *bashert*.

While they don't explain how they halachically address the problem of *mesirah*, they do explain that packaging it as a *heimisha* organization made penetration into the community easier.

One access point to the community was to carefully study and convalesce community stakeholders and gatekeepers. Mikvah attendants, kallah teachers and wives of rabbanim were offered educational programs which, as intended, resulted in numerous referrals as a result.

It may or may not come as a surprise that the legal genius behind Project Eden seamlessly joined Shalom Task force as the Managing Director of their legal project. Kim Susser, a non-practicing Jew who does not share our values¹², who created a project in the DA's office to arrest

⁹ https://web.archive.org/web/20090209233854/http://www.brooklynda.org/project_eden/project_eden.htm

¹⁰ https://www.marybyronproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NYLAG_2015_Roth_winner_info_for_website-2.pdf

¹¹ https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/59_p/59.pdf

¹² i.e. <https://herjustice.org/court-appeals-recognizes-new-frontiers-parenting/>



from males, was recruited to help represent “abused women”. A proud example of services provided was to help deny visitation rights to a father who wouldn’t social distance with the children.¹³

What is more curious, however, is that this past November the Center for Safety and Change hosted a three-part educational event starring the primary movers and shakers of Shalom Task Force and Footsteps! With representation of Shoshana Frydman, Kim Susser and Erin Bistricher (senior member of Sarah’s Voice, a department within Shalom Task Force), it would be hard to disregard it as a fluke. A 41-page legal guide produced by Footsteps in 2020 gives legal advice on divorcing while going off the derech. Examples of advice supplied is to steal all passports and important documents, copy the spouse’s bank accounts, take pictures of oneself playing and doing homework with the kids, maintaining some level of religiosity until the divorce is final (to keep custody), and convincing the court to

allow exposing the kids to shmad.¹⁴ Featured prominently in the additional resources section is Shalom Task Force with a special shoutout to Kim Susser of Shalom Task Force who read and reviewed the entire manual.

The collaboration with Footsteps isn’t just semantics. Project Eden, Kim Susser’s brainchild, boasts “NYLAG has also forged new partnerships to broaden its reach into the Orthodox Jewish community that Project Eden serves. One such partnership is with **Footsteps**, a non-profit organization that provides social services to individuals seeking to leave the Orthodox community in which they were raised and who face tremendous obstacles accessing legal services. NYLAG’s family law attorneys, including Project Eden staff, will be providing training to Footsteps’ staff on legal matters their clients may face, and already are conducting education sessions for their clients about family law matters and accepting referrals from the organization.”¹⁵

But interfacing with Footsteps on one end and Kallah Teachers on the other was simply not enough. In a lengthy dissertation, Shoshana Frydman, the self-identifying modern-orthodox leader of Shalom Task Force¹⁶, takes 220 pages to make the argument why Kallah Teaching must be regulated. If Ms. Frydman would be able to somehow find deficiencies and subvert the Kallah Teaching market, then she and her ilk would get to regulate what is taught. She quotes

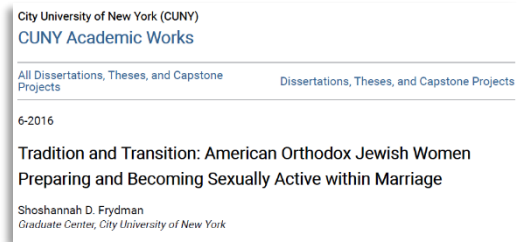
¹³ The author does not profess that abuse is a non-occurrence, as כל המשיא בתו תניא היה רבי מאיר אומר, לעם הארץ כאילו כופתה ומניחה לפני אריץ מה ארי דורס ואוכל ואין לו בושת פנים, אף עם הארץ מכה ובוועל ואין לו בושת פנים. (פסחים מט:). ודו"ק.

¹⁴ https://footstepsorg.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Footsteps_LegalManual_November-2020.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.marybyronproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NYLAG_2015_Roth_winner_info_for_website-2.pdf

¹⁶ Who apparently does not cover her hair.

that if premarital education does not include discussion about sexual health, it is “an oversight with possibly terminal repercussion, as what is unknown about sexual health may be fatal”. Mentioned many times throughout, is that there is no central institution that regulates and coordinates Kallah teaching courses. She reminds us of the importance of Social Workers (such as herself) supporting Kallah Teachers in increasing their education. With the above she lays the groundwork as an alibi to sabotage the Kallah Teaching market.¹⁷



Quite curiously, on the JOWMA recording, there is mention that Shoshana Frydman recently trained¹⁸ in something, but the video cuts out what exactly she got trained in. However, in the raw footage we obtained, she says that she just finished getting trained as a Kallah teacher. Why would she want to get trained as a Kallah teacher is one question, but more intriguing is why would she want to hide it?

In a newfangled feigned religious fervor, young women are now seeking to become Poskim of sorts. Fully aware that this would not be accepted, they are renamed as Yoatzot. They found their niche answering questions that women would feel more comfortable asking other women but are zealously seeking to expand their sphere. In creating a new Kallah teaching course¹⁹ to incorporate many of the above deficiencies, they drafted none other than Keshet Starr, the former director of Shalom Task force, currently the CEO of ORA (The Organization for the Resolution of Agunot), and another speaker on the JOWMA call and Rachel Hercman, who collaborated with Shalom Task Force for years²⁰ and who “is passionate about kallah teacher enrichment as a vehicle to systemic change in community attitudes towards relationships, and looks forward to learning and collaborating another great course.”²¹ With mentors like these, it’s quite clear where Shoshana Frydman received her Kallah Teaching degree from.

So where does JOWMA come in?

Unlike the narrative that JOWMA was a result of happenstance post of a group of hyphenated-last-name activists²², JOWMA has been around since at least 2011 when Mrs. Fine was a mere 16 years old! It was only that it was sought to be renewed as an outreach tool, that it was rejuvenated in 2019. Young, Professional, and Authoritative, were some of the features that it wanted to exemplify, and to that end JOWMA was recreated. The lure of Shalom Task Force has petered out, so JOWMA was set to the task of infiltrating the *frum* community.

By spearheading and jumping on the vaccine bandwagon, a populist cause, it gained much support from all mainstream organizations²³. Thus, when Torah U’mesorah wanted to give to yeshivos a referral to well-

¹⁷ I am not proposing that some of her points are not salient, but we don’t need her Footsteps backed legal team to fix our problems.

¹⁸ Sexual Health - JOWMA Women's Health Webinar @ 3:47

¹⁹ <http://kallahteacher.yoatzot.org/category/faculty/>

²⁰ <https://www.rachelhercman.com>

²¹ During the call she suggests reading and watching erotica, expressly stating that “sexually active” is independent of marriage and that “porn works for some people”.

²² <https://jewishlink.news/monthly-sections/health-link-new/34853-jowma-empowers-orthodox-female-medical-professionals>

²³ A livestream Event that they helped put together regarding vaccines was done in collaboration with: Achiezer, Ami Magazine, Amudim, Ateres Avigail, Baltimore Jewish Life, Bikur Cholim Baltimore, Bikur Cholim LA, Bikur Cholim Lakewood, Bikur Cholim Cleveland, Bikur Cholim of Passaic/Clifton, Bikur Cholim Rockland County, BJL, Bon Secours, BP

informed medical professionals to dictate school Policy, they chose non other than JOWMA! Mission Accomplished.

The scheme of using vaccines as a springboard to gain acceptance is a smart one, because, after all, which self-respecting, politically correct organization would not support vaccination. Now, with public opinion behind them, they now move on to attempt infiltrating on matters which affect the very essence of *Klal Yisroel*.

Following the true and tried playbook used by their peers, JOWMA wasted no time after their newfangled jump to fame in creating a livestream town hall for Kallah Teachers, Doulas, and Mikva Attendants. Advertising in mainstream frum media outlets, they promise to “answer questions regarding COVID-19 Vaccines, fertility and pregnancy; as well as an update to mikva guidelines.” Interestingly, on the panel are only doctors, not halachic authorities, so it’s unclear who would provide the mikva guidelines.

Featured as a panelist is Dr. Elisa Hellman, the founder of “The Confident Kallah.”²⁴ Through her years as a clinician, she noticed a gap in women’s health awareness and education. This developed into special interest in patient education and being a resource for the Jewish community in relation to body awareness and women’s preventative health starting from *a young age*.²⁵ Indeed she peddles to frum schools in out-of-town communities infusing children with Sexual Education. JOWMA’s position regarding Sex Ed doesn’t surprise as a letter penned by Dr. Mira Hellmann-Ostrov, on behalf of JOWMA states that 12.3% of chareidi women are promiscuous and 11% of yeshiva boys engage in intimate activity.²⁶ In the aforementioned webinar carried out by JOWMA, a pre and post webinar survey asks “Are you sexually active? The choices given are: 1) yes, with men only, 2) yes, with women only, 3) yes, with both men and women, and 4) No. In another survey question, domestic partner was given as an option regarding relationship status. Remember, this is from an Association that calls itself “Jewish **Orthodox**”.

What emerges from this messy picture is a rap sheet of depravity that is hard to compete with. Until now we were able to blame naivete on *frum* newspapers that took advertising dollars to perpetuate this decadence. But that time is no longer. It’s time to internalize the words of Rabbi Mordechai Gifter who spoke in a drasha about Modernism and Yeshiva University in 1988.

“We are not Orthodox Jews, we are Torah Jews.”

The flyer is for a JOWMA event titled "COVID-19 Vaccines and You". It is a "Livestream Town Hall for Kallah Teachers, Doulas, and Mikvah Attendants". The speakers are Dani Lent Halpern, MD (Mud Peds Hospitalist, Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital) and Elissa Hellman, MD (OB/GYN, Founder of The Confident Kallah). The moderator is Denise Moses, MD-OB/GYN, Healthcare for All Women. The event is on Sunday, April 18, 2021 at 11am. Registration is at vaxfacts.live, and questions can be submitted at vaxfacts.live or vaxfacts@jowma.org. The flyer also includes a disclaimer and logos for co-hosts Bikur Cholim and POAH.

JCC, Chai Lifeline, Chaim Medical, Chazaq, Chemed, Chesed 24/7, Community Outreach Center, Echo Canada, EG Productions, Ezra Medical, Ezras Choilim, FJCC, Gedaliah Society, Hatzolah Baltimore, Hatzolah Michigan, Healing Hearts Bikur Cholim, Misaskim Baltimore, Mishpacha Magazine, Nachum Segal Network, ODA, Ohel, Oizrim, Orthodox Jewish Nurses Association, Orthodox Union, Puah, QJL, Rambam Medical Center, RambamCare, Refuah 311, Refuah Health and Sefardic Bikur Holim.

²⁴ <https://www.theconfidentkallah.com/>

²⁵ JOWMA podcast; The Confident Kallah: Fostering Healthy Sexuality in Our Daughters with Dr. Elissa Hellman @ 0:38

²⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20201026213106/https://www.jowma.org/post/the-truth-about-hpv-vaccines>