



Changing Who Writes History

BY **NOMI KALTMANN** - JUNE 2, 2022



Jewish people are obsessed with recording our history. We recall the stories of our past and we record the details of our tradition in minute details. Jewish history is told through books and folios, that are carefully stored and passed on from generation to generation. If you open the Talmud, the discussions that are recorded delve into the tiniest details and provide clarity around the most niche situations.

Writing is a powerful tool. When you transcribe something, you codify it with a sense of permanence. It is for this reason that lawyers love having terms and conditions set out in writing and it is the reason why people don't consider most contracts to be binding unless they are written and signed.

Despite Jewish people writing down our history and traditions, there is a void within the writing in our tradition: the voices of women. While the Talmud delves into thousands of scenarios that concern women and women's bodies, the voices of how women feel about these discussions is largely absent.

However, one only has to meet a few Jewish women to know that in the 21st century Jewish women are vibrant, have plenty of opinions and are weighing into the tradition like never before. The education Jewish women are receiving in the modern era far surpasses the education that any generation prior received. Jewish women can read the foundational texts of Judaism, understand them, and add their own opinions and voices to a cannon of 2000 years of history that has largely exempted their voices.

It is for this very reason that my organisation, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance Australia (JOFA) has dedicated itself to promoting the voices of women by offering a new scholarship program that focuses on writing down the thoughts, opinions, and musings of Australian Jewish women. In partnership with the OpEd Project, an American based organisation, JOFA Australia will be offering 30 women the chance to gain a scholarship that provides training on how to write an opinion editorial piece that would be suitable for print in a newspaper.

This platform, the Jewish Women of Words, is supportive of the program and will look at the submissions of women in the program favourably, with a view to print their pieces wherever possible.

The OpEd Project's mission is to change who writes history. They do this by accelerating the ideas and impact of underrepresented thinkers, including women of all backgrounds. The women trained by the OpEd Project's professionals have produced tens of

thousands of published ideas (op-eds and much more), reaching hundreds of millions of viewers, readers and listeners.

JOFA is thrilled to be able to offer such a stellar course to Australian Jewish women. JOFA Australia has an aim to foster local community leadership and talent to ensure that orthodox women in Australia have access to the highest quality training. If you never see the voices of women in print, you don't consider their opinions, thoughts and influence.

Women don't publish their opinions and thoughts for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they lack confidence. Other times they lack opportunity to publish. And sometimes, they need encouragement to participate in community discussions where their voices have been largely absent.

JOFA Australia intends to change up the status quo. We think the voices of women are extremely important to all areas of the Australian Jewish community. JOFA Australia, seeks to expand the spiritual, ritual and intellectual opportunities for women within the framework of halakha (Jewish law), by advocating meaningful participation for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning and Jewish communal organisations to the fullest extent possible.

I can't wait to see what the talented women of Australia produce via the JOFA Australia training program. Their pieces will reflect a wide range of experiences, but the common thread is that they will showcase the stunning breadth of talent and creativity from the women of Australia, who are just waiting for the opportunity to shine.

To apply:

<https://www.facebook.com/JOFAAustralia/photos/a.295220275397355/545656133687100/>

Nomi Kaltmann

Nomi Kaltmann is a lawyer and the Australian correspondent at Tablet Magazine. She is also the inaugural president and founder of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance Australia (JOFA).

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