

# Der Bay

## The International Anglo-Yiddish Newsletter

September 2008

Vol. XVIII No. 7

### The XII IAYC Conference - La Jolla, CA - Oct. 24-27, 2008 3<sup>rd</sup> IAYC Lifetime Yiddish Service Award



"Poland was an island in Jewish history. There will never be anything like it again."

Lilke Majzner was born in Lodz into the Nutkowicz family. Her parents were rooted in the

Bund, the Socialist Jewish party that won a majority of the Jewish vote in Poland between the two world wars. She attended the Medem School of the Tsentrale Yidishe Shul Organizatsie, a day school sponsored by the Bund. Every subject was taught in Yiddish, except a mandatory course in Polish language and literature.

Lilke's memories are filled with impressions of political organizing and school summer camps. The Depression was around the globe, anti-Semitism was rife in Poland, the Spanish Revolution broke out and the Soviets sent their enemies to the gulag and worse. But it was a full, youthful life, lived entirely in Yiddish.

Driven from her family's home when the Nazis invaded in 1939, Lilke her brother Alec and father found refuge in the Piotrkow ghetto. There she met her neighbor, Szlama Majzner, who was also involved in clandestine political organizing. Lilke survived six concentration camps, Bergen Belsen

at the end. She got word to Szlama in Buchenwald that she was still alive. Two days later he was at her side.

They lived in Belgium from 1945-1950—"a wonderful time, also a tragic time," says Lilke. As the Bund reorganized, she worked with children—many orphaned and with Cercle Amicale, a fraternal group. She was arrested after making a speech in Antwerp, and was in a Belgium jail before Prime Minister Spaak, a Socialist with Bund connections, got her out.

Szlama and Lilke came to Detroit where she attended Wayne State Univ. earning an Early Childhood Teaching Certificate. Both joined the Arbeter Ring, and she taught in its shule.

In 1955 they moved to Los Angeles and became active in the Bund and in the Yiddish-speaking Artur Zygelboim Branch of Arbeter Ring. They attended lectures at the LA Yiddish Culture Club, and Lilke began lecturing there. At the same time, she attended the University of Judaism, received her teaching credential, and taught in the Workmen's Circle schools.

She became president of the L. A. Yiddish Culture Club, where she works tirelessly for the furtherance of Yiddish. Her articles are in the *Forverts* and in the *Kultur un leb'n*.

**Conference Registration Form is on page 15.**  
**Conference website: [www.derbay.org/lajolla/](http://www.derbay.org/lajolla/)**  
**Chair: N. Sarkin: [normansarkin@yahoo.com](mailto:normansarkin@yahoo.com)**  
**Co-chair: Bella Suchet: [herbybel@san.rr.com](mailto:herbybel@san.rr.com)**  
**Questions: Fishl: 650-349-6946**

# Sholem Aleichem's Cursing Stepmother

by Louis Fridhandler

Chapter 45 of *Funem Yarid* (From the Fair), Sholem Aleichem's autobiography, is entitled, *A Mayne-Loshn fun a Shtifmame* (Abusive Language of a Stepmother). The title sounds more severe than it should. (Caution: The *mayne* component of *mayneloshn* may be mistakenly confused with *mane* which means farina.)

\*See my index for original Yiddish sources for *Funem Yarid* and for the English translations to be found at:  
<http://yiddish.haifa.ac.il/SholAley/indices.pdf>

Shortly after Sholem Aleichem's bar-mitsve, a cholera epidemic took the life of his mother. The harrowing scenes are described in Chapter 34 of *Funem Yarid, di Kholyere* (Cholera). An epidemic raged in the area. The folk remedy was to apply massage by volunteer *raybers*. Among them was Sholem's father. Sholem's mother, *Khaye Ester* fell very ill with the disease. *Bobe Mindi* pleaded with the doctor to save this mother of six, but to no avail. She died on *shabes*.

As soon as he heard of her death, uncle *Pinye* came running to find the family sobbing uncontrollably. But it was *shabes*. Uncle *Pinye* sternly chided them, "It's *shabes*. You must not cry!" *Pinye* himself, however, soon dissolved in tears as he saw *Khaye Ester* lying there. Through sobs, he softly repeated, "*Khaye Ester, Khaye Ester.*"

In due time, the children heard much talk around them about stepmother, stepmother. It was scary. Young Sholem had to wonder, "Does a stepmother really have horns?" Soon, his father simply disappeared. Adults spoke in whispers, sharing secrets. In *kheyder*, talk from the rabbi and his wife apprised Sholem that father had gone to Berdichev to find a suitable new wife, a stepmother for the six orphans, his equal in prestigious lineage and in money.

After a while, a letter came to Sholem's home with news that father had finally found a suitable wife, and would soon come home with her. As Sholem Aleichem playfully puts it, "To bring home the *skhoyre*, the goods." However, father pleaded that his new wife need not learn right away that he had so many children. Some of them were hidden by packing them off to stay with relatives. The children were miffed. "Why does he have to disown some of us?" And we can imagine the new wife's consternation when she eventually learned of them all.

Was it a habit among women of Berdichev? No matter what the topic, she found a way to include a curse. Below are a few examples.

**Eating** – may worms eat you; drinking – may leeches drink you;

**Sewing** – may a shroud be sewn for you; having – may you have boils.

However, they were uttered in good humor, and ended with a laugh. Many comments to the children were in a cursing style, but apparently without spite.

At first on the sly, out of range of others' eyes, Sholem compiled a lexicon of his stepmother's curses arranged alphabetically, *al-pi alef beyz*. Under *alef* (most start with the silent *alef*): *evyon* (pauper); *idiot*; *ayzl* (donkey). Under *beyz*: *bodyung* bath attendant; *balegole* (drayman); *baytlshnayder* (cutpurse). *Giml*: *goylem* (mythical statue come to life); *ganef* (thief); *gazlen* (bandit); *Daled*: *dover-akher* (culprit). *Hey*: *hintshleger* (dog catcher). *Zayen*: *zumerfoygl* (summer bird); *zitsfleysh* (flesh on which one sits). *Khes*: *kholyere*; *khazer* (pig); *khoyzek* (ridicule). *Tes*: *toter* (Tatar); *terkisher fefer* (Turkish pepper). On through the Yiddish alphabet.

His father noticed that Sholem was very hard at work on something. Once, unknown to Sholem, his father peered over Sholem's shoulder as he labored. Insatiably curious, father picked up the manuscript and began to read. Sholem was terrified, not knowing what might come next. To his surprise, father laughed. He showed it to the stepmother who also laughed, finding the whole matter delightful. So all was well that ended well.

Deuteronomy 28 has been referred to as the chapter of curses. Was Sholem inspired by that? Actually, the first half comprises a list of blessings for those obeying God's commandments. The second half showers curses upon those failing to obey God.

I urge Yiddish readers to see Yehoyesh's revised Yiddish translation of Deuteronomy 28 posted on the website by Prager and Goldenberg. It can be found at:  
<http://yiddish.haifa.ac.il/texts/yehoyesh/rev2004/dvorim.pdf>

Don't miss it. Yehoyesh transformed the lofty biblical language into comfortable, homey, friendly Yiddish. Enjoy.

## Off 2nd Avenue

A New Book Explores Yiddish Theater's Lesser-Known Troupes  
By Jeffrey Veidlinger – (Excerpted from the FORWARD Thu. May 16, 2008)

**Messiahs of 1933: How American Yiddish Theatre Survived Adversity Through Satire** By Joel Schechter  
*Temple University Press, 304 pages, \$39.95.*

In Moishe Nadir's 1928 Yiddish play, "Messiah in America," theater producer Menachem Yosef and his assistant, Jack "the Bluffer," concoct a scheme to present the messiah onstage, dressing up a bearded Jewish immigrant to play the part. Their success in attracting audiences prompts a rival producer to introduce a second messiah — this time, a young English-speaking variant who arrives on a motorcycle. After the competing producers hold a competition to determine which one is the true messiah, they conclude that the competition should take place in the boxing ring. When the match ends with the death of the younger messiah, the producers flee, with their profits, to Florida.

In his book "Messiahs of 1933," Joel Schechter, professor of theater arts at San Francisco State University, uses Nadir's play as a launching pad for his exploration of leftist Yiddish theater in Depression-era America. America's Golden Age of Yiddish theater is usually associated with the sentimental melodramas that once played on New York's Second Avenue stages. Eastern European Jewish immigrants flocked to these theaters and fawned over their stars, while critics condemned them as crass entertainment. These popular theaters, though, competed with lesser-known troupes that sought to use the stage to promote social justice and leftist politics. These theaters shunned the star system and its cult of celebrity in favor of ensemble work and complex literary scripts. The most ambitious leftist theatrical experiments emerged out of the Artef (Arbeter Teater Farband, or Worker's Theatrical Alliance) and the Federal Theatre Project, both of which searched for new secular messiahs to pave the way for the realization of an equitable society.

The Artef used its stage to unmask the false messiahs of capitalist exploitation. This theme was explored not only in its 1933 production of "Messiah in America" but also in its 1930 staging of Avrom Veviorka's "Diamonds," a satire about Soviet speculators who hide contraband diamonds in tefillin. Later the theme is examined in the Artef's 1936 production of Sholom Aleichem's "200,000," about a tailor who is swindled out of his lottery winnings.

Although the theater made its home on Broadway in 1934, where it remained until its 1940 demise, it continued to bring its message to the masses through its mobile repertoire, which it performed on

makeshift stages in worker neighborhoods. These stages allowed for the presentation of more intimate productions, like Nadir's "Rivington Street," in which the theater bewailed the poverty, unemployment and hopelessness of the Jewish working class.

The Federal Theatre Project, by which the federal government funded theater as part of an effort to employ out-of-work artists during the Depression, provided a major impetus to Yiddish theater in America. The Yiddish Unit of the Project, together with the project's Translations Department, ensured that Yiddish-speaking audiences would be able to share in the best that world theater had to offer. The 1936 Yiddish-language adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's novel "It Can't Happen Here" at New York's Biltmore Theatre, for instance, imagined a fascist government coming to power in the United States as its citizens flee to safety in Canada. Yiddish playwright David Pinski's "The Tailor Becomes a Storekeeper," which was also performed as part of the Federal Theatre Project, aroused the interest of the House Un-American Activities Committee for its pro-union message.

Schechter finds the messianic impulse, as well, in his chapters on actor Menasha Skulnik and the Modicut marionette theater, where puppets satirized working-class life. By the end of the book, though, it is unclear how all the diverse elements that draw Schechter's attention connect to each other.

Nevertheless, Schechter's passion for these long-forgotten works of Yiddish radicalism is contagious. Readers will be inspired to find out more about the rich tradition of Yiddish leftist theater, a heritage that reached heights of avant-garde experimentation in Moscow, Warsaw, New York and Buenos Aires. Schechter does not believe that his story should be limited to the realm of history; he repeatedly urges a revival of Yiddish radicalism, both onstage and off. Although he readily admits that a restoration of Yiddish leftist theater is unlikely, Schechter insists that the plays he discusses remain relevant today. Their plea "not to let 'the crooks come in without a protest' in the U.S.," he cautions, "still needs to be heard."

Jeffrey Veidlinger holds the Alvin H. Rosenfeld chair in Jewish studies at Indiana University, where he is the Borns Jewish Studies Program associate director. Indiana University Press is publishing his book, "Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire."

# Twelfth International Association of Yiddish Clubs Conference La Jolla, California, October 24-27, 2008

## FRIDAY

**Fishl Kutner** - Orientation Session

Teacher's Panel I – Teaching Yiddish Through Song

**Archie Barkan** – Moderator, Woodland Hills, CA

**Cookie Blattman** – Tamarac, FL

**Elisheva Edelson** – San Diego, CA

**Cindy Paley** – Sherman Oaks, CA

**Lori Cahan Simon** – Beachwood, OH

Evening Program / Entertainment

**Katz Family of Milwaukee Sponsor**

**Cantor Hale Porter** – Shabes Blessings

**Norman Sarkin** – Conference Chair

**Paul Melrood** – IAYC President

**Archie Barkan** – Raconteur

Yiddish, Yinglish and Borscht

**Second Avenue Klezmer Ensemble - Debby Davis**

Celebration 350 From Seville to Second Avenue

## SATURDAY

**Dr. Ray Fink** – Shabes Services – Hebrew

**Dr. Markle Karlin** – Shabes Services – Yiddish

**Harry Lerner Memorial Lecture**

**Dr. Jonathan Sunshine** – Pres. YGW

**Boris Sandler** – Editor of the Forverts

Di evolutsye fun der yidisher literatur nokh  
der tshernovitser konferents biz haynt.

Session I

**Sabell Bender**

“Oy He Left Me For My Sister” —Melodramas and  
Shund

**Zane Buzby**

Survivor Mitzvah Project

**Adrienne Cooper**

Yiddish Songs of War in Women's Lives

**Troim Handler**

The Songs of Mark M. Warshawsky (1840-1907)

**Ron Robboy**

On the Trail of Der Yidisher Kauboy

Lunch – Main Balroom

Session II

Teacher's Panel II – Curriculum Content

**Hilda Rubin** – Moderator, Rockville, MD

**Frida Cielak** – Mexico City, Mexico

**Ruth Goodman** – Wilmington, DE

**Sheyndl Liberman** – Los Angeles, CA

**Prof. Iosif Vaisman** – Arlington, MD

**Cantor Hale Porter**

Influence of Yiddish Theatre & Music on U.S. Culture

**Prof. Chaim Berman**

Evolution of the Yiddish Schools and  
the Labor and Radical Movements

**Debby Davis**

The Life and Music of Molly Picon

**Vivian Felsen**

Czernowitz and the Early Jewish Immigrants  
in North America

Session III

**Yiddish Club Panel on Programming**

**Roz Baker** – Moderator, Minneapolis, MN

**Prof. Al Feldman** – Scottsdale, AZ

**Joseph Grinberg** – San Francisco, CA

**Varda Grinspan** – Fair Lawn, NJ

**Racquel Leisorek** – San Diego, CA

**Hershl Hartman**

The Yiddish Surge in Current Hollywood Films

**Prof. Joel Schechter**

Yiddish Theater in the 1930s in America

**Prof. Robert Zelickman**

The History of Recorded Klezmer Music 1908-2008

**Miriam Koral**

The Passionate Ones: Yiddish Women Poets

## Workmen's Circle Gala Banquet

Third Yiddish Lifetime Service Award

**Sabell Bender** – Introduction

**Hershl Hartman** – Introduction

**Lilke Majzner** – Recipient

## Workmen's Circle Gala Revue

**Starring Adrienne Cooper & the W.C. All Stars**

Featuring **Heather Klein & Mitch Smolkin**

# Twelfth International Association of Yiddish Clubs Conference La Jolla, California, October 24-27, 2008

## SUNDAY

### Vendors and Exhibitors All Day

#### Dr. Harold Black Memorial Lecture

#### Prof. Iosif Vaisman

"The World Wide Shtetl:  
Yiddish on the Internet"

#### Session IV

Teacher's Third Panel – Pedagogical Methodology

Miriam Koral Moderator Venice, CA

Yakob Basner – Seal Beach, CA

Kolye Borodulin – Staten Island, NY

Alva Dworkin – Southfield, MI

Marcia Gruss Levinsohn – Silver Spring, MD

#### Dr. Sandy Lakoff & Dr. Elie Shneour

The Life and Work of Zalman Shneour

#### Prof. Julius Scherzer

Growing up in Czernowitz

#### Rokhl Zucker

Der yidish radio (haynt) af yidish

#### Dr. Barney Zumoff

My Experience as a Yiddish Translator

## Lunch

#### Session V

#### Kolye Borodulin

Experiments with Culture in Birobidzhan

#### Sabina Brukner

The KlezKamp Experience

#### Frank Handler

Esther Frumkin, Yiddishist, Feminist, Bundist

#### Prof. Meinhard Mayer

The Yiddish and German Poets from Czernowitz

#### Harold Ticktin

The Roots of Jewish Humor

#### Session VI

Teacher's Fourth Panel – Organizational Future

Adrienne Cooper Moderator New York, NY

Prof. Al Feldman – Scottsdale, AZ

Troim Handler – Monroe Township, NJ

Cantor Hale Porter – Los Angeles, CA

Lori Cahan-Simon – Beachwood, OH

#### Dr. Zack V. Chayet

Yidish in Meksike

#### Sonia Pressman Fuentes

Mayne Yidishe Tate-Mame (My Jewish Parents)

#### Peter Louis

The Jews of South Africa

#### Dr. Amelia Glaser

Remembering the Old Country in the Old Country

## Evening Program/Entertainment

### Lawrence Family JCC Program

Jackie Gmach – Program Director

#### Roz Baker

Introduction of Scholarship Recipients

#### Norman Sarkin & Bella Suchet

Introduction of La Jolla Conference Committee

Mayn Sheyne Meydl – (My Fair Lady)

San Diego Yiddish Club

Hot Pstromi Klezmer Group

Yale Strom & Elizabeth Schwartz

## MONDAY

### Vendors and Exhibitors until Noon

Paul Melrood – IAYC President

Introduction of IAYC Officers & Trustees

Yale Strom – Ethnomusicologist

Labushnik Loshn:

The Secret Language of the Klezmers

### Yiddishkayt LA Program

Aaron Paley: Chairman & Founder

Jacob Lewin: Yiddish Actor

Konferentsn – A Satire

Cindy Paley – Recording Artist & Cantorial Soloist

"Zing Along with Cindy"

Group Singing and Dancing

Announcement of the Next IAYC Conference Site

## Lunch & Recognition of Delegates

Socializing (Networking, Networking, Networking)

# Mama's Soups

By Philip "Fishl" Kutner

There was soup almost every day in our New Jersey farmhouse some 60 miles from Brooklyn. That was because we had a chicken farm of Leghorns—the white breed known for its egg-laying ability. Mama said, "Ibergevaremt zup hot a besere tam" (Reheated soup tastes better), but we never had the same soup two days in a row.

Since Papa was "a meat and potatoes man," the soups had to be hearty. Besides the chicken soup and the borsht you did not have enough broth to dip your bread. This was a problem for the hired hand who always ate with us. He was a huge bald man with palms the size of ping-pong paddles. His name was Paul and that was what we boys called him when we spoke to him—otherwise he was the "Polish guy." He always ate hunched over so nothing could fall off the plate or bowl.

Mama made soup from potatoes, beets, cabbages, barley, beans, peas, lentils and the weekly chicken soup. All the grain and vegetable soups had some form of beef in it and were served fiery hot—that's the way Papa liked it. We boys always blew at the soup in the spoon before we could put it in our mouth. The only exception was the summer borsht that was served cold and with a big dollop of sour cream.

Chicken soup was the "no surprise" weekly staple. Mama's secret ingredient was parsnip. She said it made the soup sweet. There were carrots, celery and of course dill and plenty of kosher salt. Those little egg yolks were a rare find, for the only hens that went to the *shoykhet* for chicken soup were the ones who were non-layers. These old birds were tough as cardboard to chew. This was the beginning of my lifelong dislike of the white meat—the chicken breast (beylik). It was like chewing on cardboard and I imagined it tasted like it.

No Clam Chowder or Lobster Bisque ever came to our kosher table. No Cream of Corn, Cream of Asparagus, Cream of Mushroom, French Onion or New Orleans bouillabaisse "soups" were ever on our farm menu.

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At Thanksgiving time we had turkey and there was no soup that day. The gorgl (neck), pupik (gizzard), harts (heart), fis (feet) and fliglekh (wings) were saved for soup the following week. Naturally the huge helzdl was stuffed, but never for Thanksgiving.

I don't remember any time when any of the boys complained about having too much soup.

## A Very Special Lady

By Philip "Fishl" Kutner

Mama, there's a story to tell and the days are few. It is a story about a very special lady who was not special in her lifetime but her story today is very special. She came from, a place that no longer exists, lived a life that no longer exists and did things that are not done anymore.

What seems like hardships today were everyday happenings in *those times*. The war that was to end all wars—never did. The Great Depression is only a memory today, and we are told that safeguards have been put into place so that there will be no more depressions, and the lessons we learned will never let the Great Depression happen again.

We live in a world where:

- change occurs faster and faster.
- people are living longer and longer.
- we are getting fatter and fatter.
- globalization means cultures are blending.
- computers and the Internet give instant information of new and

ongoing events.

- children's knowledge of the computer may far outpace that of their parents.
- family ties are strained with relocation and a high rate of divorce.
- the value of age and respect for elders has diminished.
- traditions are being laid aside and values are being changed.

My children have only a faint glimmer of an idea what it was like on the farm and what her life was like for her toiling and going through the drudgery of a monotonous day with few neighbors, friends or family to share and party and most of all no yidishkayt other than what she was able to retain by her own wits.

My children have only a faint glimmer of an idea what it was like living through WWI in Poland with the Cossacks and Germans alternating in occupying Tiktin where she lived with her mother while her father was in America trying to raise enough money to bring them over.

My children have only a glimmer what it was like coming across the Atlantic in steerage, arriving in a new land, knowing no English, working at a sewing machine, being paid by the piece and then going to night school to learn English and the difficulty in mastering the "TH" sound.

Mama, you were a very special lady.

## Makh zikh nisht visndik

by Philip Fishl Kutner

Mama had advice on everything. We boys never asked her—we always went to papa. As I look back now, her advice was much better than his, but we did not take it.

When we came back from school and said that we were being picked on, papa said, "Fight the bully." The problem was that the bully was too big, and besides, he always had a bunch of friends around. It was not a happy time.

Mama's advice always was, "Makh zikh nisht visndik." She said, "Smile and don't say a word." It was none of the childish sayings about sticks and stones—just smile and makh zikh....

Many years later I read Mahatma Ghandi's saying, "I cannot teach you violence, as I do not myself believe in it. I can only teach you not to bow your heads before any one even at the cost of your life." And Nelson Mandele's book, The Long Walk to Freedom added more to her wise words.

Many of mama's words come back to me now and I wish I had listened to them when I was growing up.

**See the attached PDF for conference registration.**

**Editor: Fishl Kutner: Founded Jan. 1, 1991**

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**Label date is when you LAST**

**contributed.**

Networking is having others help you get what **YOU** want. *Der Bay* is a great networking tool.

## Ale yidn redn yidish

Az zi iz a yidine redt zi yidish. Az zi redt nisht yidish iz zi a shikse. Azoy hot di mame gezogt. Mayn serke hot geredt yidish, un di mame hot gezogt, "Oy, zi iz a kosheres meyd." "

Ven mayne eltern hobn ayngeladn serkes eltern hobn beyde mishpokhes geredt nor yidish. Mir hobn oysgefinen az beyde "kopl's" hobn khasine gehat dem tsveytn oygust. Hobn serke un ikh derkelrt az mir zol oykhet khasine hobn dem tsveytn oygust.

Mame, nisht ale yidn redn yidish. Un s'iz do goyim vos redn yidish. Di velt iz moyshe kapoyer.