

Der Bay

The International Anglo-Yiddish Newsletter

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Jewish Not for Profit Organizations – Flourishing and Floundering

Yiddish non-profit organizations fall under the umbrella of Jewish non-profit organizations. They, along with Jewish Day Schools, Temples, Synagogues, B'nai B'rith, JWI, Hadassah, Hillel, BBYO, ADL ORT, etc. They all have had two strikes—first the depressed economy and the Madoff Matter.

While every organization is feeling the pinch of “bad times” and layoffs, downsizing and lowering salaries are standard across the board, some are faring better than others. Which ones have drowned, are drowning or weathering the storm?

In a sense the analogy is the same for the broad spectrum of all non-profit organizations. Fiscal responsibility has always been the order of the day. It is no problem to do well when there is a rising economy, and one does not have to be a financial genius.

We have not learned the biblical lesson of the 7 lean years following the 7 fruitful ones. We have forgotten the Great Depression and the lessons it taught.

The Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE) cancelled its 34th conference and closed its doors. The primary push now is to raise funds to pay off its debtors.

CAJE has been the primary organization of and for Hebrew schoolteachers and administrators. Several years ago Fishl did a presentation at the Hofstra conference. Marcia Gruss-Levinsohn has been the chair of the CAJE Yiddish Committee. Marcia and Hilda Rubin are the only ones who have attended every IAYC conference.

Where does our International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC) stand? We are rare in the Yiddish community. There is no executive director, there is no paid secretarial staff, and there is no owned or rented national office with utilities, office equipment, or insurance.

Every one of the 17 members of the Board of Directors and officers attending pays for his or her expenses to and at the IAYC conferences. No member of any IAYC committee receives a salary or reimbursement for time spent, supplies or phone calls.

There are 100 Yiddish clubs that are members of the IAYC including ones in Canada, Israel, Spain and South Africa. The annual dues are only \$25 irrespective of the size of the club membership. Clubs receive 3 mailings a year of program materials costing more than the \$25 membership fee. Clubs wishing to join may do so by sending a \$25 check with the club name, leader's name, address, phone number, and e-mail. Individuals may join for \$10 if there is no Yiddish club in the area.

At the last conference, the 12th at the Marriott Hotel in La Jolla, California, the IAYC reached out to the Yiddish teaching community and facilitated the formation of the International Association of Yiddish Teachers. There were 4 teacher workshops and 3 lectures geared by and for Yiddish teachers.

Lori Cahan-Simon, a teacher at the Cleveland Workmen's Circle shule, moderates an online list of Yiddish teachers around the world. The list has over 200 members. The Forward had an article about Lori and the IAYT organization.

Yiddish - Friend, Friendly and Friendship Yidish – Fraynd, Frayndlekh un Frayndshaft

By Philip *Fishl* Kutner

Jews are warm friendly people.
Jews care about people.
Jews want to help people.

That is why we join organizations.
That is why we are heavily represented among educators, social workers, physicians, psychologists, comedians and lawyers.
That is why we do so well in business.
That is why we are so family conscious.
That is why we are so active in liberal causes.
That is why we are so philanthropic.

GET A YIDDISH FRIEND—OR SEVERAL

If you are young and single, it would be nice if s/he were of the opposite sex.

If you are elderly, it would be nice if s/he were a little younger—of either sex.

If you are sickly, it would be nice if s/he were able to drive around.

If you are a little short of cash, it would be nice if once in a while s/he would take you out for a coffee.

If you are a little weak in your knowledge of Yiddish, it would be nice if s/he knew a little more than you.

HOW TO GET A YIDDISH FRIEND

This is the easiest part. If you attend a Yiddish vinkl, if you participate in a Yiddish chorus, if you belong to a klezmer group or a Yiddish theatrical group or already taking a Yiddish class, then the task is much simpler.

Just walk up to the desirable s/he and say, “Vilstu redn yidish mit mir.”

If s/he says, “Yes.” Thank him or her and go on.

If s/he says, “Yo,” then you have made a Yiddish friend.

If you live in an area where there are no or very few Yiddish speakers, consider a briv fraynd. One source is the *Der Bay* free matching service. Go online and fill out the simple form that asks you to self rate your ability and the ability of your prospective briv fraynd and send it to Fishl. There

are over 460 choices at all levels and from around the world.

HOW TO HANDLE THE FIRST MEETING

If you are a Yiddish maven, the conversation should not be a problem for you.

If you are an *onheyber* or *so-so*, then there needs to be ground rules.

Rule 1. If you don't know how to say a particular word, never ask it in English (or the local language), say, “Vi azoy zogt men af yidish...”

Rule 2. Always have a Yiddish dictionary with you when you meet your Yiddish friend. If your friend also does not know how to say the Yiddish word or phrase, then use the Yiddish dictionary. If you cannot read Yiddish, mit di yidishe oyses have a dictionary that uses transliteration. If you are a computer maven and have a laptop, that is also a good resource.

Rule 3. Have a personal Yiddish resource. There will be times where you may not be able to find what you want in the dictionary. Here is where a Yiddish teacher or other Yiddish maven comes in handy.

Rule 4. Always start the conversation by asking him/her how s/he is feeling and about his/her mishpoke.

Rule 5. Be prepared. Plan a short story an incident or a joke to continue the conversation.

Rule 6. Keep the meetings or letters short. Just as soon as the conversation starts to *lag*, suggest the next possible meeting time and place.

Rule 7. Never lapse into English (or the local language)—especially at the end or during departure.

Rule 8. If you break a rule, apologize and continue.

Editor's note: If you have a new Yiddish friend, of either sex, and want to share your encounters with the readers of *Der Bay*, please send a note to the editor for insertion in *Der internatsyonaler kalendar*. All letters are excerpted to a maximum of 9 lines. If it is particularly noteworthy and longer, it may be included as a full article.

Teaching Yiddish in a Yeshiva High School

by Perl Teitelbaum

Editor's note: this article is excerpted from the March 1994 issue of *Der Bay*,

Since September 1993 I have been teaching Yiddish at Shevach H.S. in Queens, NY. How did I, a product of a secular Yiddish-speaking home wind up in a Yeshiva High School for Girls? By accident—the school needed a Yiddish teacher, and I was ready to return to work. Yugntruf was the shadkhn and I appeared acceptable to the principal. I asked if I would have to cover my head. She told me that since I was teaching a secular subject, the decision was up to me. Not wanting to appear more Orthodox than the Orthodox, I stayed with my bareheaded look.

The Yiddish course was initiated by the principal as an elective. The students take Hebrew as a requirement, but are encouraged to study Spanish or French for enrichment, and now Yiddish, too, fits into that category. I teach Yiddish 4 days a week for 45 minutes each time. To my surprise, I found twenty students in my class on the second day and twenty-two on the third. Some of them had terrible writing skills in English, but were quite capable of doing what I had asked them to do in Yiddish.

I never ask my students why they want to study Yiddish because I might not get to start teaching if I did. I was surprised to learn that some of them had grandparents and family friends who still speak Yiddish, that they voluntarily visit people in nursing homes where the residents speak Yiddish, that one of them is interested in passing Yiddish down to her future children, and that some of them have the feeling that everyone else knows a lot more Yiddish than they do. I did not know that it is now popular in the Orthodox community to record songs in Hebrew with one verse in Yiddish. My students brought in one such cassette with a big, energetic beat and blasting brass section. The Yiddish verse was this: *kum shoyrn shnel arayn / freylekh zol men zayn / in beys hamikdosh geyn / tsu moshiyakh ha tsadkeynu - aheym!* The girls all knew the Yiddish verse and sang it very enthusiastically without knowing what it meant. After I explained it to them, they were thrilled.

How are these students different from those I've met in adult education classes, at the YIVO institute, Columbia University Summer Yiddish Program, or at KlezKamp? They don't know Yiddish, but they have a lot of knowledge one needs in order to learn Yiddish. Dr. Joshua Fishman calls it "Yiddish readiness". For example, I was trying to explain to the class that the reason they hear their families pronounce the numbers 1,2,3 as *ayns, tsvay, dray* in

contrast to my *eyns, tsvey, dray* is that we speak different dialects. When I mentioned Litvish Yiddish, one of the girls called out, "You mean, you're going to teach us Litvish Yiddish and not Hasidish Yiddish?!" I quickly recalled that in the very recent past someone told me about the dichotomy between Litvish Yeshivas and Hassidish Yeshivas. Litvish in that context meant strictly rational, stick-to-the-book type approach to learning, while the Hasidish Yeshivas focused on ethical and life-style issues. I emphasized that I was talking about dialects that originated in specific geographic areas and had nothing to do with philosophy, ideology or the like. I gave a few examples: *kum, gut* and *tog* vs. *kim, git* and *tug*. I knew they had grasped it when one of them said, "Oh, it's like when some people daven, they say *elokeynnu*, and others say *elokayni*." It hadn't occurred to me at all that the different pronunciations appear not only in spoken Yiddish, but in *loshn koydesh*, the language of prayer, as well.

My most amusing incident happened when we were doing a unit on family. I told them about mine, and they had to prepare to talk about theirs. They needed specific occupations vocabulary, so that they could talk about what their parents did for a living. A girl asked how to say accountant, another wanted to know what the word for jeweler was in Yiddish. Finally, a girl asked "What do you call a *sheytl makher* in Yiddish?" I answered, "*a sheytl makher*." "Just like in English?" she asked surprised.

My students' Yiddish readiness comes not just from their direct contact with Yiddish and their familiarity with Jewish traditional life, but also from the English they hear and speak. The way they throw their "maybe" and their "already" around, and the way they use prepositional phrases at the start of sentences strongly recalls Yiddish syntax. In addition, they use a lot of Yiddish terms in their English, as the *sheytl makher* incident proves, without being aware of it, and such Yiddish attitude words as *nebekh* and *kholile* sprinkle the English they hear.

How does a person with my background and with my limited experience with the Orthodox world manage to teach in such an environment? Very carefully. I self-censor my topics and materials. I focus on the family, ordinary life, holidays, and I avoid love songs, theater songs, even holiday songs that focus on the secular aspect of a particular holiday. We sing mostly children songs and lullabies. The students are enthusiastic and genuinely interested.

Perl's husband Adam Whiteman is a computer maven and has produced several Yiddish fonts.

The First Story: About the Passage of Time and About Old People

by Prof. Norman Simms, (Nachman Simnowitz)

Farshteystu, kinderlekh? Maybe you don't understand, and I also don't understand, but I have waited my whole life to be able to tell you these little stories, these mayselekh.

The funny thing, you see, is that I grow older from two directions. How? you ask: Easy. On the one hand, years pile up like always, and I pass the ages when all the people I used to know died, or nearly all, until now I too am an old man, a good old fashioned alter kaker. On the other hand, somehow even stranger, all the years contract, and it becomes easier to be close to all those people now passed away, even the ones I hardly knew because, as a little pisher, what could I know? Now it is clearer, blindingly evident, sort of.

In other words, as it approaches the year 2010, and that is the date my father was born in Brooklyn, New York, it almost seems, gevald, like I was born then too with him. For that reason, when I think about it—and the older I get the more such thoughts come, only not always in the form of rational thoughts, more like visionary images—it is also easier to imagine their parents and grandparents, those who were born and died for the most part in “the old country” in the course of the nineteenth century, so who I never or could have met, but whose lives and decisions decided, nebekh, who and what I would be eventually. You still don't understand?

So the first thing, my children, is to tell you what it seemed like, old people, when I was still a little kid with no memory or much sense (or the other way around, maybe). Old people, women and men together had the following characteristics, based on everyone related to me that I knew, the visitors and strangers who came into the house for this or that, and stories told to me by my friends, who were similarly inclined, so far as I was concerned:

1 Old people are of an indeterminate ancient age, always the same until they die, and probably long before that as well.

2 Old people all come from the Old Country, which is far away, on the other side of the ocean, even further than you can see from Coney Island, if the sun is not shining in your eyes.

3 Old people all speak Yiddish, though not necessarily all of the time, because sometimes they also speak Polish, Romanian, Hungarian or American.

4 Old people are short, especially when they are sick, which is most of the time, and this is because throughout their lives they only ate boiled chicken, herring, pickles and hard boiled eggs.

5 Old people smell. The less said about this, the better. However, there may be some special stories about this later.

6 Old people do not read books. They like the Daily News and don't understand jokes you learn at school.

7 Old people kiss you all the time and pinch your cheeks and say funny things in Yiddish about your hair being too long and the wax in your ears. But they have too much hair in their nostrils and their ears, and not enough on the top of their heads.

8 Old people remember when there were no cars, telephones, radios or cartons of milk.

9 Old people cry when they think about what happened to the mishpokhe during the war.

10 Old people sleep a lot and snore.

End of the first story. Be patient and there will be more and more.

Editor's note: Prof. Norman Simms and his parents were born in Brooklyn, but his four grandparents were born in Europe. Each from a different country—Poland, Romania, Hungary, and the Ukraine. You can't get more Ashkenazi than that--and mix Litvak and Galitsianer.

His schooling was at P.S. 164, JHS 223 and then Stuyvesant High School. His undergraduate work was at Alfred University (B.A.) and he earned his masters and doctorate at Washington University.

Norman moved to Canada in 1966 where he taught at the University of Manitoba. From there he went to New Zealand in 1970 and is teaching there at the University of Waikato (Hamilton) today with several intervening positions. He made *aliyah* in 1995, where he taught in Israel at Ben-Gurion Univ. and he came back to New Zealand in 1996.

Forthcoming is *Marranos on the Moradas: Crypto-Jews and Penitentes in the Southwestern USA 1590-1890* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press). He is editor of Mentalities/Mentalites and author of many books and articles.

Sketch Of The Albuquerque, New Mexico Yiddish Club (1968)

By Maurice M. Rosenthal

I am a third generation American Jew. My parents were born in Boston, Massachusetts, and while they could understand the Yiddish spoken to them by their parents, they raised my brother and me entirely in the spoken English idiom. The last of my grandparents died when I was ten, and with him went my exposure to Yiddish speech. Thereafter, I went through the common, but vexing experience of only hearing a Yiddish phrase when it was the punch-line of a joke, or when my parents didn't want us children to understand the conversation. Thus Yiddish became for me a mystifying series of rhythms, a sort of adult secret language. While the older folks seemed to enjoy it and laugh in it, they always diverted my normal curiosity to Hebrew, or to refining my English or gradeschool French.

When I was 25 years old—I had then moved to New Mexico—I sent to New York for a copy of College Yiddish by Uriel Weinreich. In retrospect my motives were not very clear: I had a vague, perhaps nostalgic thirst for even the remotest sounds of my Jewish past; and I think the mystery of the 'secret language' still haunted me. But when the book came, I immediately set it aside. Much of it was written in Hebrew letters and I hardly remembered a third of the alphabet from my 'kheyder" days.

Nothing further came of that initial, abortive attempt until 6 years later, when my wife, a convert from the Lutheran religion, found it in my library. As oftentimes happens with converts, she threw herself into everything Jewish with uncompromising zeal. She taught herself the "alef beys, " and from there to read, write, and speak Yiddish. It was entirely her own accomplishment, for I could not help her.

My surprise, my amazement, my shame, my pride—it is impossible for me to relate—when I would come home from work at night and be greeted in warm Yiddish phrases, and then to see little notes written in perfect Yiddish script. Her enthusiasm fed on the fact that she had discovered a uniquely Jewish vernacular, so human, so charmingly endearing, that it completed her new identity in a way that the bingo games and fashion shows of the Jewish women's clubs had failed.

It was at this time, too, that she started buying Yiddish records. Our home suddenly sprang forth with the accents of the past. I felt as if a bridge across some deep chasm had appeared, as if I had tapped some profound wellspring.

We agreed to study together, to get more books, to build up our library of the spoken and written word. We bought a dictionary, the works of Sholem Aleichem and Peretz, and read to each other at night. We worked out the grammar lessons in our textbook, and we spoke Yiddish at the supper table. We found pen pals in this country and abroad, and exchanged letters in Yiddish. Sometimes our efforts had the serio-comical appearance of the lame leading the blind, for we had only each other to lean on. But slowly, with many false steps retraced and redirected, we made the correct language a natural part of our home life.

The initial study period took place over a span of six months. We felt, at this point, that it would be good to expose ourselves to the living language and ventured to speak to other Jews in Albuquerque about getting together for an evening of Yiddish conversation. At first the response was cool, with a tinge of amused cynicism. Then we got one other couple, then two. In a month we had ten people, representing three generations.

We had no idea of a program, so we talked a little, played a few records, listened to reminiscences of the old country, and read a few articles from a Yiddish newspaper.

Thus the Yiddish Club of Albuquerque was born. In subsequent months its program grew to include systematic readings of the classics and folklore, building up a select library of the written and spoken Yiddish word, and the custom of inviting guest speakers from the University of New Mexico—there are several who speak fluent Yiddish. Even Jewish art took root and blossomed.

One of our senior members, Fred Veston, from Cracow, Poland, began to implement earlier plans to recreate on canvas the vast panorama of Jewish life in pre-war Europe. Though his hand is untutored, his pictures are today well exhibited in several states. Critics recognize the depth and sincerity of his feelings toward his subjects and his ability to elicit with raw color and form the palpating vigor of a unique Jewish civilization.

In March, 1966—four years after its founding, the club rented space in the Old Town Studio of Albuquerque and presented the first Yiddish drama in the history of New Mexico. The play was *Der Get* (The Divorce) by Sholem Aleichem. The conception and execution were beset with obstacles: there were no actors to choose from—

every club member was made an actor by necessity (not one had been on the stage before); my wife became a director by reading a textbook on play direction a month before opening night; the theater's lighting technician, a Gentile, didn't understand his cues; there were threats of denunciation from the pulpit because the play was to open the week of a Jewish holiday (Purim); and actors alternately got sick and melted in fear. But the play went on and received critical comment that made the cast boggle in disbelief: it was a smash success.

The four scheduled performances were sold out—and this in a town of less than 700 Jewish families. (The newspaper was extremely resourceful in finding a local reviewer: the editor turned up a Europeanborn linguist; amazingly, he was named Weinreich and was a cousin of the author of College Yiddish.)

Emboldened by the initial effort, the next year the club tackled Sholem Aleichem's magnum opus, Tevye Der Milkhiger, a two and a half hour performance, complete with authentic, hand-made costumes, and a Russian dance sequence, which was named by the local newspapers as one of the best plays to appear in Albuquerque in 1967. It was praised not only for its artistic merits, but because it inspired foreign language plays (Lorca and Moliere) by other amateur groups.

Perhaps these activities are the best answer I know to those who fear that the rebirth of Yiddish signals a return to cultural insularity. Exactly the opposite is true. The city itself counts the Yiddish theater as a singular attraction. Its press is extremely generous with free space. Gentiles comprise almost a third of the plays' audiences (each program booklet contains a scene-by-scene synopsis in English). In short, Yiddish is eagerly accepted as another family member in a community where several major cultures have coexisted for many years.

While the accomplishments of the Albuquerque Yiddish Club are satisfying in many respects, it would be a mistake to leave the reader with the impression that a full-blown renaissance is underway. The club has a hard core of only twelve members and a periphery of twenty interested persons who attend from time to time.

The religious establishment of the city has not seen fit to accommodate Yiddish in its curriculum for children, nor as a subject for adult programs. In this respect Yiddish culture fares the same as it does in other parts of the United States, i.e., officially ignored, unofficially tolerated.

The club has a salutary influence on its growing circle of members and friends: we speak Yiddish freely among ourselves in private and in public; it is a normal medium of telephone communication; and most importantly, it is the language we use during Jewish holidays when we wish our celebrations to have the distinctly flavorsome quality of Jewishness. Witnessed in a natural context by the children, it is adopted little by little.

The association of Yiddish with a warm home life and happy friends at Jewish holidays creates in the children the most positive attitude toward the language. Small wonder that when we needed two youngsters to play roles in Tevye Der Milkhiger, two club members' children sprang forth with enthusiasm. The fact that they had to learn to read the Yiddish script, learn what the words meant, and learn to act—along with their normal load at public school—did not deter them. They did it, and they are anxious to play in this year's production.

It appears, then, that the old saw still has teeth: where there's a will, there's a way. The renewed interest in Yiddish all over America is a heartwarming phenomenon. Jewish institutions will respond to the demand for textual and lexical material, as well as the training of teachers and cultural leaders, if there is a demand. Apparently we are on the threshold of that demand.

The next step, restoring Yiddish to its place as the language of Jewish communal life, depends upon our recognition of the fact that a free society is the proper place for cultural affirmation, not assimilation. There is no conflict between devotion to one's cultural heritage and respect for the social mode of one's country.

Editor's note: Maurice M. Rosenthal published this article in "Vegvayser far a yidish klub" (Guidelines of a Yiddish Club) in 1968. It was copyrighted, sold for three dollars a copy and had fifty pages.

This self-published booklet has these sections.

How to Start a Yiddish club
Yiddish Theater
Records, Books, Organizations
Yiddish Folksongs
Folklore
Proverbs
Folksong Anthologies
Yiddish Humor
Jewish Life in Europe
Yiddish Literature
Program Material, Lecturers, Films
Yiddish Schools Camps and Resorts
Publishers, Distributors, Dealers, Schools

"The Jerusalem Conference: A Century of Yiddish"

The Jerusalem Conference will be at the Hebrew University, the Edmond Safra campus (Givat Ram), December 7-10, 2009. For details and registration contact us at 02-5883527 (Jerusalem). Organized groups should register soon in order to meet special needs and arrangements throughout the conference.

This international conference will be on the roles of Yiddish language and culture over the past century. The century of Yiddish to be celebrated is intrinsically bound to a 700-year linguistic and cultural tradition that preceded it. About a hundred years ago, following the rapid rise of a modern Jewish culture that considered Yiddish a national treasure, a group of writers gathered in Czernowitz to plan an effort to acknowledge and deliberate on the meteoric rise of both a folk and a highly sophisticated modern Yiddish culture – literature, press, folklore and theater.

After millions of Yiddish speakers in Europe have been murdered and their institutions destroyed, it is time to assess what Yiddish endured, how it battled (before, during, and after the Second World War) and survived. The foci of the planned conference will range from Yiddish culture as an anchor for the consolidation of a Jewish and self-identity, to Yiddish as an abandoned ship withstanding a struggle for existence following the relocation of millions of Yiddish-speakers and their descendants—in an independent Jewish state and in the Diaspora.

This Conference is being organized by 3 institutes at the Hebrew University: The Dov Sadan Project, the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, and the Jewish History Department of the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies. The conference will be open to the public and those interested in these facets of our large subject:

- 1. Modern Yiddish literature**
- 2. International Yiddish press**
- 3. Yiddish theater**
- 4. Yiddish cultural history and creativity during the Holocaust**
- 5. Postwar revival of Yiddish language & literature**
- 6. Yiddish education in the Diaspora and in Israel**
- 7. Research on Yiddish in institutions such as the Hebrew University and the YIVO Institute**
- 8. The significance of Yiddish and its culture for Jewish Studies**

We have seen a growing interest in Yiddish language and culture despite the sharp decrease in the number of its speakers. This increased interest has developed in a rapidly changing society in which new media—particularly the internet—are powerful forces. Entering the word “Yiddish” in the Google search engine to check the extent of interest in Yiddish, one finds more than ten million “hits.”

The history of teaching Yiddish over the last 100 years will be dealt with at the Conference. Yiddish and its culture are taught in most universities in Israel and all over the world. Summer courses are offered in Vilna (Vil’nius), New York, Tel-Aviv, Birobidzhan, Paris, Oxford, Warsaw, Toronto, California, Strasbourg and elsewhere. Non-Jewish students often constitute a significant percentage of the student body, and Yiddish language and Jewish history are regarded as part of European culture.

Many years ago Yankev Glatshetyn stated that by the end of the 20th century Yiddish would have “a lebediker untergang.” The Jerusalem Conference will examine the Glatshetyn prophecy by reviewing the modern history of Yiddish, the awareness of its unique quality, and the role it plays today as a central resource in Jewish studies.

For information, contact the organizing committee:
carrie@netvision.net.il or
hguys@vms.huji.ac.il or
dovsadaninst@mscc.huji.ac.il

Conference: Projected Sessions or Panels

- Yiddish in Jewish Education in the 20th Century
- Yiddish in Lithuania and the Soviet Union
- The Czernowitz Conference and its Aftermath
- Yiddish and Yiddish Activity among Holocaust Survivors
- Yiddish and Jewish Studies in the 21st Century
- Academic Status of Yiddish in Europe and U.S.
- Yiddish and Consumers of Yiddish in Today’s World
- Research and Teaching of Yiddish Today (2 sessions)
- Yiddish in Social Milieux, in Jewish Literary Life, in Linguistics, and International Discourse
- The Future of Yiddish in Light of the 20th Century Experience
- Jewish Creativity in the Holocaust Era
- Modern Yiddish Language and its Characteristics
- Yiddish in Secondary Education in Israel

The Israeli UNESCO Committee (Dir., Daniel Bar-Eli) will act as a co-sponsor.

Folg Mikh a Gang by Philip Fishl Kutner

When Papa came to Mama with a new idea on how to make more money on the farm—"a brainstorm" he received the same reply, "Folg mikh a gang." To us boys it meant that Mama was not for it and that Papa was talking "pie in the sky."

Mama was a "bottom line" person and not willing to take a chance. Papa was a gambler in business and he would have gone bankrupt much earlier if it had not been for Mama.

One time Papa persuaded Mama to go along with "a sure winner." We did well in selling hatching eggs from our White Leghorns to Paul Kuhl's Hatchery in Copper Hill, New Jersey.

Papa was approached to raise a flock of Rhode Island Red hens and Plymouth Barred Rock Roosters. The cross was supposed to produce the best broilers. Papa's argument was that instead of getting 20 cents a dozen over the market price for the White Leghorn eggs for hatching, the Red-Rock cross would bring a 40-cent premium. I remember Papa throwing his hands up in the air and shouted, "We'll be rich!"

What Papa had neglected to tell Mama was that these brown-egg, producing Rhode Island hens took longer to come into production, ate more feed and laid fewer eggs.

There also was a problem with the Plymouth Barred Rock roosters, for they were larger and ate much more feed.

Still another negative factor was that the ratio of White Leghorn roosters to hens was 1 rooster to 15-20 hens and for the Plymouth Barred Rock roosters it was 12-15. So the Rock roosters ate more and could not service as many hens as the smaller Leghorn roosters as well as taking longer to mature.

According to Uriel Weinreich's English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary, "folg mich a gang" means:

It's a far cry
It's quite a distance
This is no small distance
This is no small task

To Mama it meant, "It's a bad idea—NO WAY!"

I guess Papa was very much like Sholom Aleichem's Menachem-Mendel.

"A Nice Jewish Girl" by Philip Fishl Kutner

As far back as I can remember Mama used this phrase and it had little meaning or importance to us boys until we became teenagers and the hormones began to take over our thoughts—if not our actions. I still remember some of the many questions I asked Mama and her answers.

It always started with, "Mama, what is a nice Jewish girl?" It started not long after being a bar mitsve. In the beginning her replies invariably were, "You know."

As I became older and more persistent, Mama soon realized that she had to be more specific and could no longer give her standard reply.

In general her answers fell in the realm of "not too." There were exceptions—money was one of them. "You can love a rich girl just like you can love a poor one, so why not marry a rich girl?"

Then there was the trait that she used often "a baleboste." Mama's reasoning was that a girl could not be too good a baleboste.

Invariably, it was, "Girls should not be too fat or too skinny. Skinny girls give birth to sick children, and too fat girls can't be good balebostes."

When we teased mom by asking her, "How much is too skinny or too fat?" She always evaded the question with her response, "You know."

One of the areas that fell into the "not too ... or not too ..." was, height. Mama was as tall as Papa, but her answer was, "That's different." This type of answer never stood well with us boys.

Another trait was intelligence. "If a woman corrects a man in public, it is very embarrassing, and not good for the marriage."

The only time Papa was involved was when I was persistent in having Mama be more specific about what she meant by, "a nice Jewish girl."

It was at the dinner table one Friday night and Papa had a little too much wine. He said, "you know, a voydzhin." He soon realized that this was a no, no.

Mama's sing-song response was always, "A shikse may be sweet, but..."

We four Kutner boys married five nice Jewish girls.

Mama's Insurance Policy

by Philip Fishl Kutner

Before moving out to the farm in New Jersey we lived on the 5th floor at 1566 Washington Avenue in the Bronx. My paternal grandfather owned this building, so the rent was reasonable. The candy store downstairs had a telephone that was used for the building. Someone hollered up so that the whole block knew who the caller was and who called.

There was an elderly insurance man that visited us regularly to collect the monthly insurance premiums. Mama always spoke to him in Yiddish and likewise he replied in Yiddish. It has been many years since I have forgotten his name, but his voice and appearance will stay with me to my last days. He had a small, thick, black leather book that had a wide rubber band around it.

Mama had taken out this policy a week after Fishl was born. Mama said that if anything happened to her she wanted to be sure that the \$1,000 would be there for her funeral and to take care of her boys. Papa didn't believe in insurance because, "It only makes the insurance companies richer."

When we moved to the farm in 1937, mom was upset because the insurance man could not come out to collect the premiums. Mama trusted him more than the United States Post Office to see that New York Life Insurance company got her money. When the insurance man wrote it in the book, that was that, and it made no difference what happened to the money as long as it was written in the book. If the envelope was lost in the mail, it meant that the premium wasn't paid and there would be no money to pay her burial or to take care of her boys.

For many years Mama saved the letter that the elderly Jewish New York Life Insurance agent sent. It was written in Yiddish and told Mama that when the check was in the mail it was just as good as when he collected the cash. Mama believed it until her dying day. The letter also assured Mama that the New York Life Insurance Company was good in New Jersey even though the name of the company was New York ____. Mama also had asked if there was a New Jersey Life Insurance Company. The letter assured her that there was no New Jersey Life Insurance Company.

Editor note: It is interesting to note that Fishl's wife Sally was an insurance underwriter and practiced in Fair Lawn, New Jersey where she had a small office; however, in California she worked for other insurance companies and retired from an Allstate office in Millbrae in November of last year—just short of her 80th birthday.

When Mama Ran the Farm

by Philip Fishl Kutner

It was a short time after World War II ended that matters on the farm changed drastically. It was when Papa could no longer do any lifting.

Before Papa moved the family from the Bronx tenement in 1937, Papa got a hernia. He told us about it many times as we boys grew up.

After Papa was discharged from the U. S. Army, he worked in the family shoe store. This was not to his liking, for he always wanted to be his own boss. Since zeyde (that's what we called Mama's father as against Papa's father who was called grandpa) was a house painter, Papa decided all he needed was a few paintbrushes and a ladder.

As Papa told the story, one day he fell off of the ladder and his feet were spread apart tearing his insides. From then on he had to wear a *kile bendl*. In English we call it a truss.

I still can visualize this 2-inch wide, gray, thick band that had a big knob the size of a fist. Papa pushed on the knob that was put over the bulge in his belly. This kept the tear from pushing out and getting larger—it did work for many years.

As the hernia became more pronounced and caused more problems, it was obvious that Papa had to have the operation to mend the tear. At that time there was no mesh to be used or the Canadian Schultice Method where one went to Toronto and came back a short while after.

Papa was told that there would be a period of at least 6 months with no lifting. After moping for a few days, Papa went to New York City and met a Mr. Kane who had contacts with the Jewish Agricultural Society. It was at a time when Jewish survivors of Hitler's Holocaust came to America. Many did not speak English and had little money.

Papa got his real estate salesman's license and would meet the *refugees* at the train in Flemington Junction. Papa showed them chicken farms and the "Society" gave the money for the mortgage. It lasted for a few years until the influx dried up.

Sally and Fishl were married in 1947 (he was 20 and Sally 18). He had just graduated from Rutgers University with a B.S. in Poultry Husbandry. The twins were a year younger and Semele was still in elementary school. It was at this time that Mama was in charge of running the farm—even though Papa still wanted things done his way.

My Mama Had Many "Oys"

by Philip Fishl Kutner

As a child, I remember Mama telling us many stories of the old country and what it was like for her and her family during the war (WWI). This was while her father had come to America to earn enough money to pay for steerage to get them here. In recalling these stories it seems that many of her words started with "oys."

Mama never used *s'iz amol geven* or *once upon a time*. Invariably it started *s'iz geven an umglik* and then proceeded by telling us what the family had *durkhgemakht*. We guessed that an *umglik* was not good and that *durkhgemakht* was something that they encountered or lived through.

Then came Mama's list of "oys." We knew that by the tone of her voice and occasional tear in her eyes that they were not good. It started with *oysgehungert* and then proceeded to *oysgematert* and *oysgemutshet*. Finally she ended with *oysgeshtorbn*.

It was only much later that I began to study Yiddish and had a dictionary that the full impact of Mama's experiences were understood, and thus her use of these words became clearer to me.

Der Bay

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