

We Need a New Yiddish Yellow Pages

The questions are received more than weekly. Where can I find a Yiddish teacher, translator or Yiddish club.

Eventually this should be a worldwide project. Starting with the US will be a good beginning. Perhaps some group will pick up this idea for their own country.

While *Der Bay* has many lists, more comprehensive listings that also would cover Yiddish course offerings, books, storytellers, vendors, etc. need to be published.

A wonderful little booklet entitled "Yiddish in Israel Directory 1992" was published by Hemshech Dor – Libhobers fun Yiddish. I believe it never has been updated.

Fishl made an attempt with Phil Givens o'h to work on this project for Canada, but Phil soon left us and it never was followed up. Today, the Canadian Yiddish community is fragmented with the major centers not integrated. By utilizing the Internet, it would not be difficult to network the Yiddish groups.

A Google Search

A Google search of "Yiddish Yellow Pages" brings up the New York City Yellow Pages. This was not I had in mind, but I can't blame Google.

An excellent start is the Yellow Pages publication by Judy Kunofsky's KlezCalifornia. It is comprehensive for Northern California and contains all the information for this area. We need the entire US.

By far the most comprehensive listing of Yiddish musical groups is Klezmer Shack. Ari Davidow covers klezmer and Jewish music in far greater detail than can be found on *Der Bay's* website. Putting this list together with the other resources in a publication like that of Kanefsky would be very useful. Below is only a start and not meant to be complete. Please send in additions

Arbeter Ring
 CIYCL
 Congress for Jewish Culture
 Folksbiene
 Forverts
 Holocaust Museums
 International Association of Yiddish Clubs
 League for Yiddish
 Living Traditions
 National Center for Jewish Film
 Yiddish Artists and Friends New York City
 Yiddish Book Center
 Yiddish Departments at Universities
 Yiddish of Greater Washington
 Yiddishkayt LA
 YIVO
 Yugntruf

On the Internet

Der Bay
 Mendele
 Refoyls yidish veb-bletl
 Virtual Shtetl
 Yiddish Lives
 Yiddishnet

Organizations

Teacher of the Month: Rita Ratson

"Everything in my heart and soul is real yiddishkayt," says Rita Ratson, with a passion so compelling it is almost palpable. This passion for Yiddish language and culture electrifies Rita's classes at Gratz College, where she is both a popular teacher and coordinator of the Yiddish program. Gratz, the oldest college of Jewish studies in North America, is a vibrant academic institution in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania that offers a full spectrum of on-campus and online programs.

Rita's position at Gratz is the perfect capstone to her life experience. Yiddish was Rita's first and primary language – even though she had already lived in Poland, Israel, and Germany upon arriving in the United States, just two weeks shy of her eighth birthday. In her new country, Rita went on to learn English and to receive a secular education, ultimately culminating in an associate's degree from Pierce College.

When her father, a Holocaust survivor, pronounced, "Hitler did not win; Yiddish will not be dead," there was no question that his daughter would also pursue a Yiddish education in America. As a young girl, Rita attended Folkshul. Later, in the Workmen's Circle's Yiddish higher education system, Rita flourished, soaking up Yiddish literature and music, excelling in writing and ultimately graduating with honors.

In the late 1970's, Rita returned briefly to the Workmen's Circle as co-founder of one of its schools for young children, and served as both director and teacher until the school closed for financial reasons. After Rita had stopped pursuing Yiddish professionally, a friend bluntly remarked, "You cannot die without passing on what you know."

In 1999, with these words repeating like a mantra in her mind, Rita contacted Gratz College and was hired to teach a Yiddish class for adults. A year later, one class had become several, and Rita had become coordinator of Gratz's Yiddish department.

Currently, Rita teaches all levels of Yiddish, including a conversation class, which incorporates Yiddish literature and folk songs as well as news articles from *The Forward*. Although her passion

keeps her students constantly engaged, Rita believes that learning Yiddish cannot be relegated solely to the classroom because "Yiddish is a whole entire landscape of a life." As a result, she has arranged Klezmer concerts and classic Yiddish film presentations at Gratz, and twice a year, she also leads popular trips to the Folksbiene Yiddish Theater in New York.

In addition to teaching, Rita is a professional Yiddish translator, appearing on the translator lists of *Der Bay* and of the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. Rita brings the same passion, integrity, and sense of responsibility to her translation work that she brings to her teaching. "I need to translate the family's emotion and bring it forward. It's a great responsibility, and I take it very seriously," she says.

When not teaching Yiddish or translating, Rita can be found fulfilling her role as a vice president of the very dynamic Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors Association (www.cjhsa.org). "This organization," she explains, "has the obligation and profound commitment to honor our parents and relatives, preserve our unique heritage and culture, educate our community on Holocaust issues, fight bigotry and hatred and encourage tolerance and equality."

Gratz College assumes this responsibility as well through its on-campus and online certificate programs in Holocaust and Genocide Studies and through its proposed master's degree program in this area. For more information, go to the website that is located at: www.gratzcollege.edu/holocauststudies.

As a Yiddish teacher, translator and daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Gratz's Rita Ratson's major interest and effort is all about connecting people to their past. "My greatest passion is to try and make people aware of who they are and of their heritage," she says. "The greatest thing is to honor where we come from. I want to celebrate our heritage and make it available to the next generation."

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Sergei Ivanovich: The Feldsher©

by Chaim Kamelmacher aka Harry Kamel

Grunch Mazar (Name of the town)
Sovkhoz Savoy (Name of collective farm)
Uzbekistan 1941 USSR

One day after work (collecting cotton), I didn't feel well. I was advised to see the feldsher, Sergei Ivanovich, whose office was across from the building where I had my room. His office was in a building where higher officials lived.

A feldsher in the Soviet Union was a position somewhere between a doctor and a nurse. Sergei gave me a note to rest for two days. The note said that he would evaluate and watch my condition after the two days. It also mentioned that I might need some medications and only a doctor could prescribe them.

When Sergei found out that I was born in Poland, he invited me for dinner. I put on my suit, which I had brought from home, and a nice shirt, and headed to Sergei Ivanovich's place. He invited me to the dining room. The last time I had seen a set up table with so many goodies was at home on a special occasion. Sergei locked the door and invited me to sit down.

The large table was covered with a white tablecloth. It had motifs of the Greek Orthodox Catholic church, with a cross that had an additional horizontal piece of wood. The image of the double-headed eagle adorned each corner of it. I sat down near Sergei on one of the six red-velvet-upholstered chairs. The plates and utensils sparkled, reflecting the rays from the electric bulbs hanging above the tables.

In the very center of the table were a plate with a chicken and another plate that had meat and also vegetables. On a long bread-plate, there was nicely displayed pumpnickel pita bread, white bread, and "leposhka", a Moslem kind of pita bread. Near the bread was a fancy bottle of Stolichnaya vodka. Ana Petrovna, Sergei's wife, kept fixing the contents on the table. She said, "Sergei, have a drink with Jefem" (Chaim, in Russian). We raised the goblet...Sergei said, "*na zdarovie*, good health, and a free capitalist Russia". Ana brought in a cut-up herring and said, "It is very good after a drink." She continued... "Eat, eat, help yourself."

Ana wore a white dress with a red apron. Her gray hair was combed back and held in place with two small, black combs. She wore low rubber boots, which were very popular in Russia, with heavy socks. You could see two golden teeth, almost symmetrical, on her lower jaw. Two black earrings, which resembled the shape of a cross, adorned her small ears on her small round face.

Through her glasses (which were on the dark side), you could barely see her blue eyes and part of her eyebrows. Ana's apron had a big picture of a workman with a big hammer and a lady farmer with a sickle. They were quite big. I am not sure why she made it her business to tell me that a member of the communist party gave it to her. Maybe she wanted to emphasize that she wouldn't have bought it.

A young lady who joined us at the table turned out to be their granddaughter, Katia. Ana explained that her father, a pilot in the Red Air Force, had died when his plane was shot down on the Western Front. Her mother, the hostess' daughter, was a registered nurse on the Front, helping the injured. Katia was twelve years old. We had a great time eating and drinking. For a while I thought I was not in the Soviet Union. How many working people lived like Sergei Ivanovich? Many people died in the October revolution in 1917 in order to achieve equality, which did not happen.

While Ana cleaned the table, Sergei invited me to the living room and asked me to join him on the velvet ottoman. He asked all kinds of questions. "What kind of government ruled Poland before the war? Was Poland a republic with a capitalist system?" When I said yes, he opened up. He told me that he still admired Czar Nicholas and was proud of the Cossacks. He praised the pre-revolution ruble known worldwide for its high gold content.

He complained that the present paper money was not worth anything because the "magazines" (Russian supermarkets) were empty and you could not buy anything. In the Czar's time, people preferred paper money because the gold coins were too heavy to carry. Unfortunately, after the revolution in 1917, paper money became a museum

item, but Sergei believed that the Bolsheviks would not last long, and that's why he kept the paper money.

Sergei arose and went to his study. He came back with an old bag that had some writing on it and a Czarist double-headed eagle. He reached inside and came up with crisp 50 and 100 ruble notes. Sergei said, "Look at the sharp colors." He took out one of the Soviet paper rubles and continued, "Look at it...no comparison."

Sergei's father was a medical doctor. Sergei himself, had attended the first Quardia (Russian medical school) in St. Petersburg, but the October revolution had interrupted his studies. His father, Piotr Nikolaevich, was mobilized into the Czarist army and served on the Western Front. Shortages of ammunition and food demoralized the Czar's army.

The soldiers simply refused to fight or listen to their superiors. They got rid of their rifles and returned to St. Petersburg to fight for the revolution. After the war was over and the Bolsheviks took over the government, they sent Sergei's father to Siberia; he was considered a capitalist and exploiter—how else was he able to get real estate in St. Petersburg and Moscow? Sergei never saw his father again.

Sergei decided to move to Central Asia, Uzbekistan, to start a new life. He married Ana Petrovna. They had two daughters, three granddaughters, and two grandsons. He had been in the Savoy, (the Soviet Farm) for the past 14 years. As time went on, I was treated like a member of the family and became their tailor, fixing pants, and sewing shirts and jackets. I even made coats for the grandchildren and was able to use their old Singer sewing machine, which dated back to the Czar. I remained a part of Sergei and Ana's family until my best Jewish friend from Warsaw convinced me to leave the Sovkhoz to go to Samarkand, a trip that almost cost me my life...

Sergei had a nice personality. He must have been in his late fifties and combed back his graying hair. He had a small, square beard and a mustache that was turning pepper-and-salt. He had dark brown eyes with heavy eyebrows, and his lips and cheeks had a reddish tint. Sergei always wore long black

boots, the upper part of which resembled a harmonica. His black pants were tucked in his boots. His black Russian blouse had a stand-up collar and buttons on the left side; he wore it with a wide belt outside the pants. The collar and the opening with the buttons on the left side and the bottom of his blouse had images of flowers sewn by hand, with cross-stitches of different colored threads.

Sergei was getting paid by the Sovkhoz. He also had additional income. It was widely accepted that whenever someone came to him to complain about his health he always needed to bring Sergei a present: rice, flour, vegetables, or poultry. Sergei would always say, "Oh, it is not necessary," but at the end, he always accepted it, and said, "Thank you."

The note, that Sergei used to give the sick people to be excused from work for a day or two, was accepted by the Sovkhoz authorities. Many "sick people" used the day to work on their small parcel of land near their house.

Quite often I was invited for dinner. Every time Sergei would invite me to his study to talk, the conversation always turned out to be the same. He praised the capitalist system and private initiative. According to Sergei, it gave the people an incentive to work because they could always buy what they wanted. He said that was not the case in the Soviet Union where everything was planned by the government.

I wanted to warn Sergei that he should stop telling people how he still admired Czar Nicholas and the capitalist system. If someone had told the KGB about him, he and his family would have wound up somewhere else, like Vorkuta (known for its gulags) in Northern Siberia. But somehow, I couldn't do it. He enjoyed so much talking about the previous system. Maybe he divulged his outlook to me because he trusted me.

Sergei's prediction came true: the Soviet Union did fall apart and was dissolved. Sergei would have had to work in the Sovkhoz another 45 years to have witnessed it. His other prediction did not materialize: the Czarist paper money never circulated again; it remained, and will always remain, a museum item.

Shayles un Tshuves in "Hilkhes Libe"

"Forverts" – October 1-7, 2010

(Questions and Answers in the Matter of Love) - Fun der khaznte Khane Slek

[transliterated and annotated by Goldie Adler Gold]

Tayere khaznte,

Vi vel ikh kenen iberlebn dem khoydesh [*survive... month (Sept.)*]? Ikh hob getseylt [*counted*] di teg – bemeshekh [*during*] fun di draysik teg faln oys elf teg oder shabes oder yontef. Ikh hob hanoë fun shabes eyn mol a vokh, ober dray vokhn mit dray yontoyvim? Ikh hob a khshad [*suspicion*], az undzer religye hot nisht badarft azoy zayn [*it didn't have to be this way*].

Ikh voyn aley n un hob nisht keyn hanoë bemeshekh [*during*] fun di teg on a vayb un a khopte [*bunch*] kinder. Ikh ver in kaas [*I get angry*] ven ikh blayb in shtub dem gantsn tog, vu ikh leyn a bukh oder khap a driml [*take a nap*] nokhn davenen in shil in der fri. Agev [*incidentally*], in der fri in shil ver ikh azoy oyfgeregt [*so angry*], az ikh blayb [*remain*] in der shtimung [*mood*] dem gantsn tog.

Ikh veys nisht farvos, ober ikh veys yo az ikh volt nisht gedarft hobn azoyne gefiln. Kent ir epes forleygn [*propose*] a dervaksenem [*mature*] man, eyner aley n, er zol mer hanoë [*pleasure*] hobn funem yontef?

Tayerer eyner aley n

Ikh leyg for [*propose*], ir zolt nisht esn aley n di yontefdike sudes [*feasts*]. Farbet mishpokhe, fraynd, shkheynim [*neighbors*] tsu ayer shtub far a moltsayt oder tsvey. Me ken aroysgeyn oyf a piknik, oder a shpatsir [*stroll*] mit a fraynd. Blaybt nisht in der heym dem gantsn tog.

Efsher ken ayer shil aykh zogn, tsi se zenen faran eltere layt [*if there are older folks*] oder kranke vos voltn gevolt me zol zey mevaker-khoyle zayn [*visit...(sick)*]. Dos vos me arbet nisht iz nisht keyn terets optsupatarn [*no excuse to waste*] a tog ligndik in bet [*lying in bed*!] Ikh vintsh aykh a khoydesh [*month*] fun ruekh-hakoydesh [*inspiration*].

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Tayere khaznte,

Ikh bin 84 yor alt un an almen [*widower*]. Ikh hob itst a khaverte vos iz finf-un-zekhtsik yor alt un a yefeyfe (zeyer sheyne froy). Dray mol hot zi zikh shoy n geget [*divorced*]. Nisht zi un nisht ikh trakhtn veg n khasene hobn, ober mir zenen getray [*loyal*] eyner dem andern [*one another*] un farbrengen a sakh tsayt tsuzamen, un viln oyf vayter farbrengen.

Ikh hob gemakht a pruv [*attempted*] tsu bafraynd n mayn khavertes 2 dervaksene tekhter, ober zey lozn zikh nisht. Ikh hob zey geshikt matones, geboyrn-tog kartlekh un afile matones far zeyere kinder.

Tomid [*always*] bakum ikh tsurik a kalt n dankbriv. Ikh hob gebet n bay mayn khaverte, zi zol mir derlangen dem telefon ven zi redt tsu zey, ober zi vil nisht.

Farvos fir n zey zikh oyf azoy legabe [*towards*] mir? Vi ken ikh farbesern di batsiungen [*relationships*] tsvish n undz?

A Guter Mentsh

Tayerer gut...mentsh,

S'iz zeyer sheyn fun ayer zayt tsu shik n ayer khavertes tekhter un eyniklekh kartlekh un matones [*cards and gifts*]. Ikh bin zikher [*certain*] az zey farshteyen dos vi a simen [*sign*] fun gutskeyt. Ikh shtel zikh for [*imagine*] az zey zenen tsufrid n vos zeyer mame hot aza zis n khaver.

Ikh ken nisht zogn oyf zikher [*for sure*] farvos zey fir n zikh oyf azoy. Ikh shtel zikh for [*imagine*] az di tekhter zenen farnumen mit zeyere eygene lebns, un darfn nisht a noente batsiung [*close relationship*] mit aykh.

Nokh dray get n [*divorces*] hobn di tekhter shoy n gehat genug "tates" in zeyere lebns; mistame [*probably*] vil n zey nisht nokh eynem. Varft zikh nisht aroyf oyf zey [*don't be pushy*]; abi ir zent gut tsu zeyer mamen, derkherets [*respect*] far aykh vet kumen mit der tsayt.

Shayles un Tshuves in “Hilkhes Libe”
“Forverts” – March 11-17, 2011
Fun der khaznte Khane Slek
[transliterated and annotated by Goldie Adler Gold]

Tayere khaznte,

Mayn tate treft zikh mit a froy velkhe iz nor mit dray yor elter fun mir. Vos zol ikh ton? Ikh halt az s'iz a khoyzek [I feel it is ridiculous]! Er un mayn mame hobn zikh geget [divorced] mit a sakh yorn tsurik. Er meynt, az er hot zikh farlibt in der froy. Mir vert nisht gut ven ikh trakht, az emetsn in mayn elter kon gefeln vern mayn foter vi a mansparshoyn [man], un, farkert [on the other hand], az mayn foter tsit tsu [attracts] a froy fun mayn elter.

Di geboyrn-tog simkhe [the birthday party] fun mayn eyn-yorik zundl vet bald forkumen [will soon come up], un mayn tate vil mitbrenge dos meyd l tsu der simkhe. Ikh halt az es past nisht [not proper] zi zol dortn zayn. Zey zeen zikh bloyz tsvey khadoshim, un ikh vel zikh filn umbakvem [uncomfortable]. S'iz dokh [after all] mayn hoyz un mayn simkhe. Ikh halt az er darf kumen aley n; farbetung far eynem [invitation for one]; anit [if not], zol er nisht kumen bikhlal [altogether]. Vi halt ir [What do you think]?

Ayngeshparte [stubborn] tokhter

Tayere ayng...tokh...,

Bay der gelegenheit fun ayer zuns ershter geboyrn-tog-simkhe in ayer heym, bin ikh in gantsn maskem [agree] mit aykh. Me darf zikh nisht filn umbakvem [uncomfortable] in der eygener shtub, un ir darft hanoe hobn fun ayer zuns yontef. Tsvey khadoshim iz take nisht keyn lange tsayt far an ernster batsiung [serious relationship] tsvishn a man un a froy.

Ober, vi umgelumpert [awkward] es zol nisht zayn, vet ir muzn onnemen [accept] dem tatns noentkeyt [closeness] tsu der froy, oyb zeyer libe geyt vayter on. In a khoydesh, tsvey, oyb ayer tate hot nokh a noente batsiung tsu der froy, volt ikh aykh geeytset, az nisht gekukt oyf ayer shtolts [regardless of pride] un umbakvemlekhkeyt [discomfort], zolt ir zikh bakenen mit ir perzenlekh.

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Tayere khaznte,

Sholem [peace]! Ikh hob nokh keynmol frier nisht geshribn in a tsaytung [I have never previously written to a newspaper]. Ikh hof az ir vet mayn briv drukn [print]. Mayn basmitsve vet forkumen [will be coming up] iber a yor [next year].

Ikh shrek zikh abisl [I'm somewhat afraid]. Di basmitsve klasn veln zikh onheybn in tsvey khadoshim arum. Mayne tate-mame viln az ikh zol leyenen di gantse parshe [Pentateuch section].

Mayn zeyde vil, az ikh zol zayn der bal-tvile far shakhres [khazn for a.m. prayers] oykh. Ikh zorg zikh az ikh vel dos alts nisht kenen bavayzn [won't be able to do all this]. Ober ikh vil zey zogn, az ikh ken dos alts yo bavayzn [I can...], ikh zol zey nisht antoyshn [disappoint]. Vos zol ikh ton? Nerveze basmitsve meyd l

Tayere bas...meydl

Mazltov! Ir vet itst onheybn a vunderlekhe nesiye [trip] in ayer lebn! Zorgt zikh nisht vegn di farlangen un vuntshn [desires/wishes] fun yedn eynem. Dos iz a gelegenheit [opportunity] ir zolt vaksn vi a mentsh un zikh lernen, un vern a gelernter mitglid [learned member] in der yidisher kehile [community].

Oyb ir filt zikh nerveze, umruik [If you feel nervous, troubled], darft ir redn mit ayer khazn oder basmitsve lerer, tsi ir kent bakumen materyaln, ir zolt kenen onheybn di tsugreytung [begin preparation] vos frier [as soon as possible].

Ven ir heybt on di basmitsve klasn, halt fray yedn tog a bisl tsayt tsu praktitsirn un shtudirn. Ikh garantir aykh, az oyb ir git zikh op dermit tsvantsig minut yedn tog, vet ir alts kenen oyslernen vos ir darft — un nokh!

S'iz nisht neytik tsu bashlisn [It is unnecessary to decide] vifl me darf ton bay der basmitsve; ir darft zikh bamien [you need to strive] tsu ton dos beste vos ir kent un ayer mishpokhe vet zayn shtolts [proud] mit aykh.

Secular Jewishness—Why and How - Part II

Dr. Barney Zumoff

The demographic balance is shifting toward the Haredim, who have four or five times the birthrate of the secular Jews; if the Haredim should become the majority, which could well happen within the next twenty-five years or so, Israeli culture could well change to an unrecognizable pattern.

In the Diaspora, the very same conflict about the nature of Jewish culture has been playing itself out, with some important nuances of difference, for two centuries, starting with the beginnings of the Haskalah movement (movement lasted ~1770-1880). The slogan of the adherents of Haskalah came to be: “Be a Jew at home, but a man in the street,” meaning that they should fully practice the secular culture of the non-Jewish majority population while retaining their Jewishness in their homes and family lives.

This, of course, begged the question of what the Jewishness of home life was to consist of—was it to be religious Jewishness or what we would these days call cultural Jewishness: language, history, customs, literature, music, foods, etc? In point of fact, one of the disquieting features of the Haskalah movement is that many of its adherents eventually drifted far away from Jewishness, to complete assimilation or even to conversion (e.g., the Mendelssohns and the Disraelis).

This history has left a lingering doubt and concern in the minds of those Jews for whom -assimilation and conversion are catastrophes to be avoided. Is it possible, they wonder, to avoid these catastrophes without remaining fully within the confines of religious Judaism? This question is the central one that faces the proponents of secular Jewishness. (Once again, however, the experience of Israel provides a partial answer: millions of Israelis are secular Jews, and conversion is essentially non-existent.)

A hundred years after the second secular movement began, militant secularism, the actively anti-religionist approach, is, or should be passé. In the Workmen’s Circle, for example, that attitude lingers in only a handful of the oldest members; the younger ones are often either more or less observant themselves, or, if not, are at least completely comfortable with and tolerant of those

who are. The secular Jews of today do not oppose religion—it simply is not for them. They do, however, have an intense commitment to remaining Jews and to transmitting that commitment to their descendants.

How to do that is not clear. Obviously, just saying: “I’m Jewish” is not enough; one’s children will and do ask: “What makes you Jewish, and why should I bother being Jewish?” For non-Israeli secular Jews, the usual ingredients of Jewish identification are missing: no common Jewish language, no common land, no access to Jewish literature in Yiddish or Hebrew, etc.—the only thing that remains is celebration of holidays and tradition. The apparent alternative is full religious observance.

But before accepting this dichotomy, it is worth examining the problem in detail: are the common language, the common land, and the access to Jewish literature in Yiddish or Hebrew absolutely essential to remaining secularly Jewish? Though we Yiddishists have a strong emotional/intellectual commitment to the preservation of Yiddish and think of it as a major tool for preserving the Jewish secular community, we should remember that Jewish communities of the past have lived in many different common language cultures: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Arabic, Ladino, etc. Why not English, the principal language of the principal Diaspora community, the United States?

As for a common land, that has not been a feature of Jewish life during all of its history except the most recent 60 years, and yet Jews the world over have remained a cohesive people. Finally, access to Jewish literature in Yiddish or Hebrew—I do believe that Jewish literature is indeed a major factor in holding the Jewish community together, and I believe that the literature in Yiddish or Hebrew is the principal component, but is it the only possible component?

One alternative is translation. I have been devoted to the task of translating Yiddish literature for many years, and I consider my 21 published books in that area to represent “holy work” (perhaps a strange expression for a non-believer, but an apt one nevertheless.) Another, though perhaps controversial, alternative is “Jewish literature” in

the vernacular of whatever land the Jewish community inhabits. One can engage in a lively controversy about whether the work of such authors as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, etc. is distinctively Jewish literature, but many critics and readers think so.

These points aside, there is universal agreement that a knowledge of Jewish history and a knowledge of and celebration of Jewish holidays and traditions are essential to maintaining Jewishness. That knowledge must be taught and learned. When the teaching function of the homes weakens, as it clearly has in recent times, some type of formal education should supplement it. That was the function of the secular Yiddish schools referred to earlier in this article, and they performed that task very well, as witness the tens of thousands of Jews of my generation who remain actively committed secular Jews.

The secular Jewish organizations, now principally The Workmen's Circle, should continue and even redouble their efforts to support and expand the secular shule movement. Secular Yiddish day-schools were advocated by Yiddishists for many years, but were consistently (I think mistakenly) rejected by many politically progressive secularists on the grounds that they would injure the public school system. I think the idea should be revisited—its time may have come.

The relationships of different groups of Jews to the secular aspects of Jewishness can be described as a spectrum. At one end are the various ultra-Orthodox groups, who are usually conceived as strongly rejecting all aspects of secular Jewishness that do not directly advance their religious purposes. That this is not strictly true can be seen from the occasional presence of such Jews at "secular" Yiddish theater performances and their occasional reading of "treyf" secular Yiddish writers such as Sholem Aleichem.

Next in the spectrum come the Modern Orthodox, who clearly admit secular interests to their lives, as manifested not least by their great secular universities: Bar-Ilan in Israel and Yeshiva in the United States. Conservative Jews fit here in the spectrum, too.

Reform Jews are farther along the spectrum. Though they participate in the worship of God, one gets the impression that they don't take it too

seriously, and they often reject many of the tenets of Jewish religious tradition, notably the dietary laws and the prohibition against travel or work on the Sabbath. Their Jewishness contains major secular elements and emphasizes the Jewish community and Jewish peoplehood.

Still farther along are the Reconstructionist Jews. Mordecai Kaplan, the founder and developer of Reconstructionism, loved Judaism but couldn't believe in a personal God. The type of Judaism he advocated was more of a culture than a religion, a civilization, rather than a faith predicated on observing the dictates of a divine lawgiver. In my view, Reconstructionism is clearly a type of secular Jewishness, with emphasis on Jewish peoplehood (a concept that Kaplan was instrumental in developing); it actually represents a conceptual bridge between the realms of religious and secular Jewishness.

Next in the spectrum are the self-proclaimed secular Jews, who are strongly committed to all aspects of Jewishness, even including some semireligious traditions, but do not leave any room for the existence, let alone the worship, of God. This position is and has long been the traditional organizational position of the Workmen's Circle and its kindred organizations, but not necessarily that of all of their members.

There are two variants of this position: the first is that of the organized Secular Humanist groups, as nurtured by Yehuda Bauer and Sherwin Wine, who create putatively nonreligious secular synagogues that seem to the outsider to make a religion out of being nonreligious; the second is that of a majority of Israeli Jews, who avow themselves nonreligious and nonbelievers but consider it un-Jewish not to observe holidays and traditions, and often attend synagogues more or less frequently, especially on major holidays.

Finally, at the far end of the spectrum, are the militant secularists, who may also be very committed Jews but who bridle and gag, indeed become apoplectic, at any mention of God, and who feel that observance of Jewish traditions such as Sabbath and holidays is hypocritical and empty if one is not a believer.

At this point, I think it is appropriate to examine the concept of "religious Jew" in general. To my mind, being a religious Jew absolutely requires

belief in and worship of a real God, not a vague personification of natural forces or ethical principles nor an impersonal deity immanent in all of Nature (cf. Spinoza) nor a Deist's God who gave the universe its starting push (the Big Bang, in today's terms) and has had nothing to do with it ever since, but a real, personal God who has always been involved in Jewish history and continues to be available for personal interaction with individual Jews through prayer. Judged by that criterion, the great majority of religious or observant Jews, including some rabbis, are not really religious at all. They observe the traditional religious rituals but do not feel the commanding presence of an omnipotent Being.

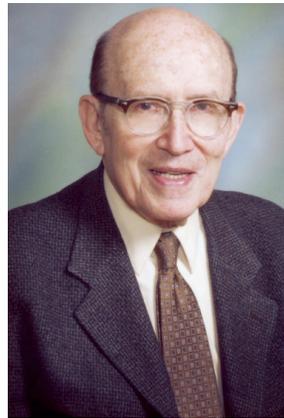
It is ironic, therefore, that such a sharp dichotomy has developed between religious and secular Jews and there is so much conflict between them. Both groups share a common need to be deeply involved in secular Jewish culture—secular Jews because it is the way for them to maintain their Jewish identity if they don't want to or cannot bring themselves to express that identity through Torah/Talmud observance, and religious Jews because they need to understand the breadth and depth of the total Jewish culture.

It is my feeling that the Jews' relationship to secular Jewishness is undergoing a Hegelian process of thesis – antithesis – synthesis. The extremes of the spectrum, ultra-Orthodox total rejection of secular matters and militant secularists' total rejection of Jewish traditional observance, and certainly of God, are both disappearing and giving way to a consensus that Jewish peoplehood and secular Jewishness are central to remaining a committed Jew in this era.

This does not mean that Jews at one end of the spectrum will not remain deeply religious and God-fearing or that those at the other end of the spectrum will not remain firmly atheistic, only that all Jews will coalesce around a central core of peoplehood and the elements of secular Jewishness: history, language, literature, traditions, the struggle for social and economic justice, music, theater, food, etc.

It is to be hoped that this will lead to a sharp decrease in the heat and virulence of present-day internecine battles between various groups of Jews. There is a warm, comfortable, homey tent that is big enough to accommodate us all.

Dr. Barnett Zumoff



Dr. Barnett Zumoff is an internationally renowned Endocrinology teacher and researcher who has published over 250 papers in the field of medicine. He is Professor of Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. In addition, he has had a long career in Yiddish cultural activity.

He is Past President and current VP of the Forward Association, publisher of the Yiddish Forverts and the English Forward, and he is the co-President of the Congress for Jewish Culture. He is also vice-President of the Folksbiene, the oldest Yiddish theater in the world, and vice-President of the Atran Foundation, one of the largest American charitable foundations that make grants to Yiddish cultural organizations.

For many years he was President of the Workmen's Circle/ Arbeter Ring—the only major fraternal organization that supports Yiddish language and culture and Yiddish schools in the United States.

He is a prolific translator of Yiddish literature: he has published 21 books of translation and a number of individual pieces that have been published in the Forward, Jewish Currents, Midstream, and Bitter Root; his translation of "Stars Are Now Dying," by Peretz Hirshbeyn, in Bitter Root, won a prize in their contest.

Dr Zumoff is a popular lecturer on Yiddish poetry in translation, and has made presentations to YIVO, the Congress for Jewish Culture, and the Workmen's Circle, and to lay community groups.

As a key member of the IAYC Board of Directors, his wise counsel has directed us in creative ways that have helped to make the organization one of the key Yiddish organizations world-wide.

"Secular Jewishness—Why and How" was the title of his presentation at the last IAYC conference in Novi, Michigan, on August 28, 2011.

His book, The Waterfall: Rhymed Yiddish Couplets will be in the packet sent to all IAYC member clubs.

My Melanie's Mayse – The Mystery of the Magic Menorah

By Philip *Fishl* Kutner – circa 1988

One Khanike while visiting Lakeland, Florida, I told a bedtime story to Melanie and her brother Jeff. Each night it was a different story. It was what I had done for Melanie's mommy and Melanie's mommy's brother and sister many years earlier.

It was the first night of Khanuke. I was lying with Melanie and Jeffrey—the bedroom door was ajar. We saw through the crack in the door the shadow of the dining room table and the Menorah. Two candles were lit—a lowly one and the majestic shamus. The candles long should have been burned out, but there was an eerie glow. Melanie said, "Zeyde tell me a mayse". It was The Mystery of the Magic Menorah. This story was told, by my zeyde when I was a little boy.

Chapter 1

Sometime after the oil burned for eight days and eight nights, they decided to commemorate the event by adding an extra candle in a nine-armed candelabra to celebrate the miracle That menorah has long disappeared and its magic with it.

Legend has it that every 100 years the miracle reappears. Whoever lights the candles that night has a wish come true. According to legend you cannot make your wish until everyone else is asleep and not tell even after a wish comes true. If you do, it disappears. Since no one tells, we don't know when it is the night of the 100 years. Make a wish every night, you will not have two chances to make it come true. Several made wishes on the right night, but they did not come true because everyone was not asleep, or they told their wish.

That night Melanie said, "Zeyde I lit the candles tonight. Does that mean I get to make the wish tonight." I responded, "Yes, and if you wait until everyone is asleep and if this really is the Magic Menorah, and if you don't tell anyone, it will come true, but don't tell me if you make a wish."

"But Zeyde," Melanie said, "if you asked me did I make a wish, and I tell the truth, the wish will go away. If I don't tell the truth then I'll be lying."

"You're right Melanie" said I, "but if you don't answer, you're not lying and I'll know."

Chapter 2

When I was a little boy we lived in an old farmhouse with with a dirt floor in the basement. My twin brothers and I loved to go down there in the summer, for it was cool and we hid from our parents to play make believe games.

One August day my brother Bobby said "let's play make believe Khanuke. Let's make believe that we are lighting the Magic Menorah and that our wishes all came true. Fishl, what would you wish for."

"We can't play Magic Menorah because we don't have a menorah to light" I answered.

"That's no problem" said my other twin brother, Sol. "I'll get dad's searchlight. We'll make believe it's the Magic Menorah." Little did we know what was to happen before my brother Sol came back.

A moment after Sol closed the basement door, Bobby said, "Why don't we close the light while we wait?" I reached over to close the light and as I did we heard noises as if tiny feet were running around nearby. I reached to turn on the light when I felt a cool hand push me away. A squeaky voice said, "Don't scream. I'm Mickey Man, from the Magic Menorah" My brother Dizzy Izzy from Israel is waiting to play."

Mickey looked at the wall of the basement, lo and behold a doorway appeared and he motioned us to walk through. On the other side was a long hallway and at the end was a gate. We opened the gate and walked to the house. As we looked through the window, we saw a terrible sight. There was a fight going on between Dizzy Izzy and the Evil Doers.

Mickey Man told us to quickly run home and not dare to turn around or tell anyone about what happened. We quickly ran to the gate opened it, and ran down the path. When we got to our house the doorway to the basement was open and we ran through to safety. Instantly the door disappeared as if it had never been there.

All of a sudden a searchlight went on and Sol said, "OK I'm here we can now play make believe with the Magic Menorah."

Gelegnhayt

By Philip "Fishl" Kutner

These Yiddish words come back as if Mama were talking to me. It happens in that twilight moment when I first awake. This morning, "*gelegnhayt*" came back loud and clear.

When Mama asked, "Vi azoy zogt men dos af english?" I told her that I would look it up in the dictionary.

She said, "Do you mean you'll ask Mr. Weinstein, or Mr. Weintraub?"

Then she left and went back to baking those flaky kikhelakh in the sky.

So I looked it up in Weinreich, and he said it is *gelegnhey*t not *gelegnhayt*. Yes, it means chance, occasion, or opportunity.

For Mama it was, "Me darf hobn di *gelegnhayt*."

Mama, maybe you'll see me tomorrow?

Der Bay

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