

The Yiddish *tshek* by Philip "Fishl" Kutner

Af eynglish it's also a check. Mama said, "S'iz a modne vort."

In English it has so many meanings.

He or she is someone from a European country.

If you want to be sure it's okay, you ... it out.

My grandson who is an ice hockey referee said, "Zeyde, that's what you do to another hockey player on the ice."

Then there is that mark you make when you want to show that something is right or finished.

It is a small crack.

In chess it's an attack on the opponent's king.

It's a bill in a restaurant.

What you do when deciding not to start the betting in poker.

To hand your coat to someone to hold when you go into a restaurant.

Of course there's that game of checkers.

You can even have a checkered pattern.

Now if you don't live in the U.S, you have to spell it with a "qu".

Aren't you glad you speak Yiddish? It's so simple. Af yidish, a *tshek* iz nor gelt.

Mameloshn* oder *Bobeloshn by Philip "Fishl" Kutner

My Mama was young, beautiful, vibrant, strong, charming, sharp, quick, decisive, and delightful to be around.

My Bobe was elderly, homely, dull, weak, boring, slow, indecisive, and not much fun to be around.

Much of Yiddish today is *bobeloshn*. The dynamism, creativity, youthful vigor and East European charm and culture have slipped away.

We live in a time of extremes. Yiddish was not taught in the great universities as it is today. The Ivy Leaguers can study Yiddish the proper use of tenses, declensions, etc., but have lost the simple beauty of the home, the shul and the marketplace.

On the other hand the vast majority of us belong to groups where Yinglish is the order of the day. Where bawdy jokes and songs take the place of real meaning and dialogue. We are afraid to speak Yiddish because we think others will correct and embarrass us.

Albert Camus said, "Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend."

Fishele, redt yidish tsu mir. Es makht nisht oys az du makhst toesn. Di layt vos makhn khoyzek fun dir zenen nisht dayne fraynd. Du bist azoy vi a kind vos lernt, du bist azoy vi an onheyber. Hob fargenign fun redn mameloshn. Mames zenen getray tsu zeyere kinder un helfn zey tsu vaksn nisht nor mit zeyere yidish ober oykhet tsu zayn an emeser mentsh. Nu, mayne tayere leyeners, vos denkt ir?

The Leksikon fun yidishn teater at the Museum of Family History

by Steven Lasky - Founder and Director - Museum of Family History

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The Museum of Family History (virtual, i.e. it exists only on the Internet) has now transliterated ("romanized") the listings of the names of nearly 2,700 individuals once involved in the Yiddish theatre.

These names can be found within Zalmen Zylbercweig's six-volume "Lexicon of the Yiddish Theatre", the last volume published over forty years ago. There are also over fifty theatrical organizations biographed within this six-volume set.

Not only has the Museum created an Excel spreadsheet listing each surname, given name, and alternate name(s) of the individual, but it has included the individual's date of birth, death and place of birth (all when listed at the beginning of their biography). Another useful aspect of this newly created database is that the number of the page on which each biography begins is listed, i.e. not just the page in the original Yiddish-language Lexicon where the biography begins, but also the page within the online pdf version.

It may surprise you to know that you now can view any of the six volumes of the Lexicon for free online at www.archive.org. Simply search under the words "leksikon fun yidishn", and you will find links to all six volumes. The Lexicon was digitized by the Spielberg Digital Yiddish Library. Actual copies of the books may be purchased at the National Yiddish Book Center at www.yiddishbookcenter.org, though they might just be copies of copies or the digitization; you should check on this with the Book Center if you're interested.

If you would like me to 'look-up' someone you believe would be on my master list, send me the particulars at steve@museumoffamilyhistory.com.

I also have translated (more or less) the captions to the nearly four hundred photographs (this number does not include the individual photographs that sit next to the person's name at the beginning of their biography), but other photographs such as actors in costume, scenes from plays, organizational group photographs, not to mention the many drawings and illustrations that are included aplenty within the six volumes.

YIVO orthographic (name spelling) standards have been used most often in compiling this major database, though this was a daunting task and the spellings at times are imperfect. Sometimes a choice

had to be made as to whether to list an individual according to the YIVO spelling of their name, or the name that they are better known as.

The city (or town) of birth most often mentioned as an individual's town of birth is not unexpectedly Warszawa; the number who were born in Warsaw is 213, double the number of the second most frequent, Lodz; then farther down the list but close behind comes Odessa, Lemberg, Vilna and Iasi.

VOLUNTEERS

The Museum is seeking with some importance and haste volunteers who would be willing to translate individual (or organizational) biographies found within the Lexicon. To date, the few volunteers that have stepped forward have translated **over 100** short biographies for the Museum. Ideally I'd like to have all six volumes translated completely, but I don't think there are enough volunteers to reach anywhere near that goal. I'd like to be presently surprised though, especially when it comes to all those Der Bay subscribers who love Yiddish.

Certainly if you have a working knowledge of Yiddish and would be willing to do some translations, please contact me at the above e-mail address. I will send you a jpeg of the original Yiddish biography, and once you've translated it into English, you will e-mail it back to me.

Help preserve Yiddish history and culture for all of us, more specifically the history of the Yiddish theatre. If we don't do it, then who will do it? Not the next generation, that's for sure.

I am working on having the translations done for those who once appeared in Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre, though in a similar vein I would also like to do the same for all those who once worked in the Yiddish theatres of Warsaw before World War II, trying in some unique and special way to 'recreate' this rich time in Jewish culture and Warsaw Yiddish theatre as a whole.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE LEXICON

Zalman Zylbercweig edited these six volumes which were published in New York City, Warsaw or Mexico City between 1931 and 1969. The six volumes are in Yiddish. The fifth of these volumes

serves as a memorial book to those once involved in the Yiddish theatre who were killed during the Holocaust (as well as many theatrical organizations that became 'defunct' during this time).

Many people volunteered to collect the information for the Lexicon and wrote these biographies about these few thousand individuals. Each author had his or her own style of writing, though the content of each biography often follow a pattern.

Except for the Holocaust edition (where less was mentioned about the individual than in other volumes, especially the date of death which was most often not listed), one would find the following for many of the entries:

--Name of the individual, dates of birth, death and place of birth (all when available).

--What their father did for a living.

--What kind of education the person biographed had during their childhood (public, state, private, 'folk shul', acting, art, dance, etc.).

--How did they get started in "the business"? Where did they find their motivation to get involved in the theatre? Did they become enamored with the Yiddish stage during a performance they attended?

--Did they begin work the theatre in Europe or once they immigrated?

--When did they immigrate and where to?

--Where did they find work? Did someone bring them over to act in their troupe? What troupes did they play with? Years and towns in which they played are often listed.

--What plays by what authors did they act in?

--What were the types of roles they given?

--Did they tour, and if so, where? The United States? Europe?

--Also at times footnotes are created and articles about the individual are mentioned and cited.

This gives you a general idea of what each biography contains. The biographies vary in size from a simple paragraph to many, many pages, and contain more or less information.

Not everyone involved in the Yiddish theatre is mentioned in these volumes, though this is quite a representation. There are also some who are listed in a particular Lexicon's index (some volumes have

a master list of names and some don't), but who actually don't have a biography where it is stated they do. Conversely, there is the occasional biography represented within these tomes that aren't listed in a particular volume's list but are there nevertheless. I have done my best to list everything accurately and without omissions. The Lexicon is indispensable to those interested in Yiddish culture and the history of Yiddish theatre. To have these volumes freely online is a blessing, and the possibility of making translations to many of these biographies available in English to the general public is a wonderful opportunity.

Volume 1 of the Lexicon is, more or less, in alphabetical order by the first letter of the surname, i.e. from alef to khes. Volume 2 begins with the letter tes and ends in ayin. However, as one might expect, omissions did occur, so during subsequent volumes these missing biographies were often inserted with little regard to alphabetical order.

I hope to visit YIVO at soon and see the galleys for the proposed seventh volume of the Lexicon. If I am given access to them, I will add the information gleaned from these galleys to my master database, as I have the already published six volumes.

Please do volunteer to translate. The Museum is always working hard to preserve the history of our Yiddish culture and needs your help to further its aspirations. Please visit the Museum's Yiddish World by using the links found within the Museum's Second Floor interactive floor plan (find link on site's front page) or by clicking on the link to "Yiddish World" on the Museum's main page found at www.museumoffamilyhistory.com.

Here are the links to the Lexicon translations:

Main Biographical index:

www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/yt/lex-biography.htm

Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre:

www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/yt/lex-yat.htm

Please check the aforementioned pages from time to time to check for new translations.

Also visit the Museum's "Greats of the Yiddish Theatre (and the roles in which they played)" exhibition, a representation of actors and actresses in their roles. Go to www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/pl/roles-01.htm and follow the links.

Shayles un Tshuves in "Hilkhes Libe" – "Forverts" – 9/17-23/2010

(Questions and Answers in the Matter of Love) – Fun der khaznte Khane Sleik

[transliterated and annotated by Goldie Adler Gold]

Tayere khaznte,

Mayn khaver un ikh zenen groyse "balaganistn". Mir lebn in eynem kimat 6 yor (mir zenen beyde mener) un veln bald fayern undzer khasene (tsum badoyern [*sadly*], nisht keyn 'koshere' yidishe khasene, nor "stam" [*ordinary*] a tsivile khasene). Mir lebn in a sheyner dire un farmogn a sakh khfeytsim [*things*]. Balibt zenen mir in der gantser mishpokhe un a sakh plimenikes un plimenitses [*nephews/nieces*] farbrenge bay undz, un di kinder in der gegnt [*neighborhood*].

Mayn khaver hot 2 goldene hent un hot shtendik naye aynfaln [*always...ideas*]. Er iz a lerer un shaft keseyder matones far zayne talmidim, bilder farn klatsimer [*classroom*], oder farsheydene shpilekhlekh far di kinder. Ikh bin a kinstler [*artist*] un shaf kolerley verk. Vi ir zet, zenen mir, danken got, gliklekhe mentshn.

Di tsore iz, vos alts in shtub bay undz gefint zikh in der grester umordenung. Mir shtrebn beyde tsu haltn reyn di shtub, ober kenen nisht. In kikh zenen umgevorf shislek; in voyntsimer valgern zikh bikher, a mandolin, halb-geneyte malbushim (mayn 'hobi'), un alte numern "Forverts". Mir freyen zikh ven di dire iz reyn un der tish iz badekt mit a tishtukh un a blumen-vaze. Di 'umordenung' krikht tsurik, es felt undz di tekhnik, vi tsu 'bakemfn' di tsevorfnkeyt.

Mir shteln tsunoyf reshimes [*lists*] un tseteyln undzere flikhtn [*duties*], ver es darf ton vos, ober mir zenen b'emes nit mesugl [*incapable*] zey oystsuhalt. Amol nemt eyner di initsyativ un ramt oyf di kikh, tsi di vane, ober nokh a vayle hersht vider undzer kinstlerisher hidrek-pidrek [*mess*]. Ven di umordenung volt undz nit geshtert volt geven nishkoshe, ober mir viln beyde regulirn mit a mos [*adjust in moderation*] di balebatishkeyt [*household*]. Vos un vi tut men dos?

A frustrirter kinstler

Tayerer frus...kinst...

Ir zent beyde shaferishe kinstler, darft ir makhn dos oyframen far ayer kinstlerisher aktivitet, ir zolt beyde hanoie hobn. Punkt vi ayer khaver trakht oys shpiln [*games*] far di kinder un talmidim, ven zey hobn problemen in klas, kent ir dos bahandlen vi a shpil far ale doynes. Halt fray a gevise tsaytn vokh tsu reynikn di shtub tsuzamen. Oyb ir arbet in eynem, vet eyner fun aykh nisht makhn bazundere plener ergets andersh.

Efsher zenen di 2 sho far shabes a gute tsayt? Ir kent hern muzik beshas ir arbet un mit-zingen.

Koyft gefarbte polites [*painted shelves*], shuflofn, un kestlekh. Bashtimt an ort far ale ayere zakhn – bikher, kunst-proyektn, alte "Forverts" numern. On a bashtimt ort veln di "bebekhes" [*knick-knacks*] zikh vayter onzamlen. Kent ir oysneyen a hengendikn 'organizirer' far di ale zakhn.

Avade vet eyn mol a vokh nisht klekn [*suffice*] oyftsuramen alts un haltn di shtub reyn; to tut dos 10 minut yedn ovnt eyder me leygt zikh shlofn. Der iker iz, ir zolt ramen tsuzamen un hobn hanoie, un hobn a zikher ort far di zakhn. Ikh bin nisht ibertsaygt [*convinced*] az ir zent 'nisht mesugl' di shtub tsu organizirn. Shraybt mir tsurik in etlekhe khadoshim un lozt visn, tsi di shite [*system*] arbet!

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Tayere khaznte,

Yonkiper, vi yedes yor, bakum ikh tsendliker blitspostn in velkhe es iz geshribn: "tayere fraynd – oyb ikh hob aykh baavlt [*wronged you*] dos yor, visndik, tsi nisht visndik, bet ikh mekhile bay aykh in dem zman. Mayn kashe – tsi meg men azoy betn mekhile? Azoyne blitspostn vern tsheshikt tsu hunderter mentshn, un aza brivl leyenen hunderter mentshn. Ikh hob getrakht az tshuve kumt fun der neshome. Tsi iz dos alts vos me darf ton, kedey zikh ibertsubetn inem nayem yor?

Tsemisht

Tayerer tsemisht,

Bederekh-klal [*generally*] bin ikh maskem [*agree*] mit ayer tayne. Es ken zayn az di vos shikn azoyne masn-briv hobn gute kavones [*intentions*], ober zey farbilikn di mekhiles. Di moderne tekhnologie hot farlaykhtert [*eased*] di komunikatsye tsvishn mentshn, ober zi hot oykh shverer gemakht dos farbindn zikh mit fraynd oyf a tifern oyfn. In der tsayt fun yor darf men redn mit mishpokhe un fraynd ponem-el-ponem un zey fregn tsi m'hot gezindikt akegn zey? Vi ken men zayn a beserer khaver oder korev? Oyb me hot baleydikt emetsn durkh a geviser zakh, darf men betn mekhile far der doziker zakh, un menader zayn [*vow*] tsu zikh aleyen, nisht tsu hobn aza toes nokh a mol.

Fun der anderer zayt, oyb me ken nisht dergreykhn [*reach*] eynem tsum tsveytn, zaynen azoyne masn-mekhile-briv nisht geferlek. Oyb ikh hob baavlt oder baleydikt, oder geven tsu sarkastish tsu mayne leyener, zayt mir moykhl [*forgive me*] un shikt vayter ayere frages inem nayem yor.

Shayles un Tshuves in "Hilkhes Libe" - "Forverts" – 11/26-12/2/2010

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

[transliterated and annotated by Goldie Adler Gold]

Tayere khaznte,

Undzer zun geyt itst durkh a shvere tsayt. Er iz 37 yor alt un hot shoyngearbet bay farsheydene melokhes [trades] – er iz zeyer a talantirter yungerman. Di problem bashteyt [consists] in dem, vos er hot azoy fil zakhn geton azoy gut, az er ken zikh in gantsn nisht opgebn keyn eynem [devote himself to any] fun zey. Tsu ersht, hot er shtudirt yurisprudents [studied law] un hot gearbet vi an advokat etlekhe yor. Iz er nisht geven tsufridn. Hot er bashlosn nokhtsugeyn zayn kholem, bine-kunst [theater art]. Fir yor hot er geshpilt vi an aktyor un hot gemakht a nishkoshedike [fair] kariere, ober lesuf [ultimately] nisht gekent zikh aleyn oyshalt [support himself]. Hot er zikh arayngetsoygn tsurik tsu undz aheym mit 2 khadoshim tsurik. Ikh un mayn froy zenen nisht zikher vos tsu ton.

Er iz undzer zun un mir viln im helfn, ober vi lang darf a 37-yoriker man voynen mit zayne tatemame? Vi ken ikh tsum bestn helfn undzer zun vern umophengik [independent]

Tate

Tayerer tate,

Ir un ayer froy darfn zikh avekzetsn mitn zun un zikh oyfrikhtik durkhshmesn vegn dem inyen [sincerely discuss this matter]. Ikh shtel zikh for [I imagine], az punkt [just] vi ir halt nisht az ayer zun darf shoyngearbet mer nisht voynen bay aykh, iz im oykh nisht ayngenem [pleasant] di gantse mayse. Tsuzamen kent ir oysarbetn a tsaytplan un strategye far der tsukunft [future]. Efsher zolt ir im betn az in a khoydesh [month] arum zol er gefinen zayn eygene dire [apt.]. S'iz meglekh [possible] az er ken arbetn vi an advokat un, fun tsayt tsu tsayt, oykh shpiln oyf der bine. Es klingt vi er darf gefinen a balans in zayn lebn. Der doziker kluger un feiker [smart/competent] man volt gedarft kenen zikh aleyn gebn an eytse [figure out], vi azoy dos tsu dergreykh [achieve]. Ober on a liblekhn shtoyts [loving push] aroys fun der tir, vet er zikh tsu laykht tsugevoynen tsu blaybn in der heym.

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Tayere khaznte,

Di tsol toyves [favors] vos mayne "fraynd" betn bay mir iz shoyngearbet nisht oystsuhalt [unreasonable]. Ikh

bin dokh zeyer a farnumene [busy] froy. Bay tog arbet ikh vi a krankn-shvester [nurse], farzorg [take care of] 2 gresere kinder un a man, un kokh vetshere yedn ovnt. Vayl ikh hob a kop far tekhnische zakhn, klingen [phone] mayne fraynd, der iker froyen in di 50er yorn, tsulib di kompyuter-problemen. Dertsu, klingt men ven zey, oder man un kinder nisn, hustn [sneeze/cough], oder se rint bay zey di noz. In an emesn noyt bin ikh gern [willing] tsu helfn, ober far a farkilung [cold] oder boykh-virus darf men mikh nisht hobn. Vi ken ikh opshteln dos klingen, ikh zol nisht oyszen vi a kalte neshome.

Krankn-shvester-tekhnikerin

Es zenen faran etlekhe oyfanim [various means] optsushteln di dozike telefon-klungen. Koydemkol [first of all], entfert nisht teykef oyf zey. Zoln zey vartn a tog, tsvey. Oy b me khapt aykh nisht oyf der heyser minut, muzn zey gefinen an ander refue. Oy b ir zent ale mol di ershte tsu helfn, vet men ale mol klingen tsu aykh.

Tsveytns, kent ir poshet redn mit di fraynd vos klingen tsu oft far di "toyves" un zey zogn az "ir volt gedarft onklingen a kinder-dokter, nisht mir" oder zey zogn az ir hot nisht keyn tsayt tsu farrikhtn [fix] zeyer kompyuter, un me zol vayter nisht klingen. A bisl erlekheyt tsuzamen mit a bisl ordenung [honesty+order], vet farzikhern [ensure] az ayere fraynd veln farshteyn ayere gefiln.

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Tayere khaznte,

Mayn khaver ruft mikh keynmol nisht baym nomen ven mir farbrenge [spend time] mit andere. Er ruft mikh tomid [always] "mayn khaverte" oder "mayn meyd" oder "mayn ziskeyt". Ikh ken nisht bashlisen tsi dos zenen tsertl-verter [endearing words], tsi barimeray [boasting] fun zayn zayt.

"Zayn khaverte"

Tayere khaverte,

Vos iz yo vikhtik, zenen ayere gefiln. Oy b, mit di oysdrukn vos er nitst, filt ir zikh gelibt – iz gut. Oy b ir filt zikh umbakvem, darft ir im zogn vegn dem. Mistame trakht ayer khaver afile nisht, az er ruft aykh oyf aza "khaperishn" oyfn; er iz aponem shtolts vos er hot aykh vi "zayn khaverte".

Yiddish Course - Great Yiddish Literature - (In English Translation)

Arnold H. Leibowitz – Instructor - amoldleibowitz@gmail.com

We will focus on the great writers of Yiddish during the Yiddish renaissance that occurred from approximately 1890-1920 (I.L. Peretz, Sholom Aleichem, and Sholem Asch) and in more recent years (I. Bashevis Singer and Chaim Grade), reading their works against the social history of the time. Our approach will be to read the key short stories. We will discuss Yiddish theater, both from text and from video tapes and in the last lecture we will discuss Yiddish poetry. In some cases to broaden your exposure, I will lecture on a writer's longer works, particularly The Slave by I. B. Singer and The Agunah by Chaim Grade. Although we will not have the time to read the longer works during the course, you may wish to read them subsequently.

The structure of the course follows. Note that in some weeks, after the lecture during the lunch hour, I will show video tapes of key Yiddish plays. Try to make time in your schedule so you can stay for these tapes; it will enrich your experience of the course considerably.

Week 1 - I. The Development of Yiddish as a Language for Ashkenazic Jewry: The Religious and Social Context (Lecture and discussion only)

- A. The Structure of the Language
 - 1. Relation to German
 - 2. Relation to Hebrew
- B. Influences on the Language
 - 1. Orthodox Judaism
 - 2. Socialism and Communism
 - 3. Hasidism
 - 4. The Haskalah movement
 - 5. Zionism

Week 2 - C. The Pale: The World of Russia & Poland

- D. The Theme of the Fool and the Anti-Hero
 - 1. Mendele Mocher Sforim
 - a. Fishke the Lame (Discussion only)
 - b. The Little Man, or the Life Story of Yitsik-Avrom, the Power Broker
 - 2. Recommended Reading
 - a. Woody Allen
 - 1. Mere Anarchy (Excerpt)
- E. The Dissolution of Soviet Jewish Life
 - 1. Sholom Aleichem
 - a. The Tevye Stories
 - 1. Tevye Strikes it Rich (Excerpt)
 - 2. Hodel
 - 3. Chava
 - 4. Tevye Leaves for Palestine
 - 5. Get Thee Out

Week 3 - II. The Social Context

- A. L. Peretz
 - 1. Three Gifts
 - 2. Conversation on a Hilltop
 - 3. The Sacrifice
 - 4. The Fast
- B. Sholom Aleichem
 - 1. On Account of a Hat
 - 2. Dreyfus in Kasrilevke
 - 3. High School
 - 4. Menahem Mendl (Excerpt)

Week 4 - III. Orthodox Jewry

- A. The Orthodox World
 - 1. Chaim Grade
 - a. The Oath
 - b. "The Quarrel" (Video tape)
- B. The Role of Women
 - 1. I. L. Peretz
 - a. A Woman's Rage
 - 2. Dvora Baron
 - a. Kaddish
 - 3. Rachel Korn
 - a. The Sack with Pink Stripes

Week 5 - IV. Hasidism

- A. Martin Buber
 - 1. The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism (1989 reprint) - Excerpts
- B. Elie Wiesel,
 - 1. Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters (1972) - Excerpts
- C. L. Peretz
 - 1. Bontshe Shvayg
 - 2. Between Two Mountains
- D. The Parable of Reb Yisroel
- E. Stories of Levi-Yitzchak of Berdichev
- F. The Boy Who Blew the Shofar
- G. The Prayer Leader
- H. The Tale of the Kugel
- I. Recommended Reading
 - 1. Elie Wiesel
 - a. Testament of a Jew in Saragossa

Week 6 - V. The Cabala

- A. I.B. Singer
 - 1. Gimpel The Fool
- B. Nahman of Bratslav
 - 1. The Loss of the Princess
 - 2. The Seven Beggars (Excerpt)
- C. S. Ansky,
 - 1. The Dybbuk and on (Video tape)
- D. Recommended Reading

1. I.B. Singer
 - a. The Kabalist of East Broadway

Week 7 - VI. Realism

- A. Sholem Asch
 1. Sanctification of the Name
 2. A Jewish Child
 3. God of Vengeance
 4. The Christological Novels
 - a. The Nazarene
 - b. The Apostle Mary (discussion only)
- B. I.B. Singer
 1. Spinoza of Market Street
- C. "Mirele Efros" (Video tape)
- D. Recommended Reading
 1. Peretz Hirschbein
 - a. Green Fields

Week 8 - VII. Yiddish Theatre

- A. Peretz Hirschbein
 1. "Green Fields" (Video tape)
 2. Discussion of "Green Fields"
 3. In the Dark
- B. Dovid Pinsky
 1. The Treasure

Week 9 - VIII. Comparative Jewish Literature

- A. American Jewish Literature
 1. Lamed Shapiro
 - a. The Kiss
 2. Anzia Yezierska
 - a. The Fat of the Land
 3. Tillie Olson
 - a. Tell Me A Riddle
 4. Grace Paley
 - a. Goodbye and Good Luck
- B. Russian Jewish Literature
 1. Isaac Babel
 - a. The Story of My Dovecot
 2. Dovid Bergelson
 - a. When All is Said and Done
- C. Recommended Reading
 1. Israel Zangwell
 - a. The King of the Schmoozers (Excerpt)
 2. Nathan Englander
 - a. "The Gilgul of Park Avenue" in For the Relief of Unbearable Urges
 3. "Second Avenue Yiddish Theater" (Video tape)

Week 10 - IX. Jewish Poetry

- A. Yiddish Poetry
 1. Morris Rosenfeld
 - a. "My Boy"
 2. Abraham Sutzkever
 - a. "On My Wander-Flute"

- b. "1980"
 - c. "My Rescuer"
 - d. "I Am Lying in This Coffin"
3. Jacob Glatstein
 - a. "Like Weary Trees"
 - b. "Without Jews"
 - c. "My Fellow Wanderer"
 - d. "Good Night, World"
 - e. "Memorial Poem"
4. Kadye Molodowsky
 - a. Women's Songs
5. Rachel Korn
 - a. "A New Dress"
 - b. "Lot's Wife"
- B. German Poetry
 1. Paul Celan:
 - a. "Death Fugue"
 - b. "Psalm"
 - c. "There Was Earth Inside Them"
 - d. "Once"
 - e. "Just Think"
 - f. "To Those Who Stood Before the Door"
 2. Nelly Sachs
 - a. "Smoke Stacks" (Excerpts)
- C. Hebrew Poetry
 - I. Chaim Bialik
 - a. "Alone"
 - b. "A Twig Fell"
 - c. "In the City of Slaughter"
 - d. "After My Death"
 2. Yehudah Amichai
 - a. "In the Middle of the Century"
 - b. "Wildpeace"
 - c. "The Way It Was"
 - d. "Instead of Words"
 - e. "Little Ruth"
 - f. "I want to Die in My Own Bed"
 - g. "Not Like a Cypress"

Editor's note: This course is part of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and is scheduled for the Spring 2011 term at the Temple Baptist Church. It will run for ten Friday mornings, 10-11:30am starting March 4, 2011. Knowledge of Yiddish is not a prerequisite.

The above syllabus for the course was created by the instructor, Arnold H. Leibowitz, who is also a practicing attorney. He is a graduate of Yale Law School and Columbia College, where he was Phi Beta Kappa.

Arnold has been active in refugee and immigration matters for over 25 years. For ten years he was Washington Representative for the (HIAS) Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

SIEGELMANIA

by Stanley Siegelman

"ZAY GEZUNT"

In writing letters, Jews are wont
To sign off with a zay gezunt
These two brief words, to our delight,
Are much employed in Yiddishkayt.
They order people to excel
In all respects, at being well.

The phrase reflects affection, too,
A link connecting Jew-to-Jew,
For centuries a vital bridge
Supporting tribal heritage.

It parallels the word, shalom
Transmitted, like a chromosome,
For generations over time,
Hereditarily sublime.

It's utilize like au revoir
As parting-time vernacular,
Quite similar to the refrain
Voiced elsewhere as auf Wiedersehen.
"Be well!" most Yiddish-speakers cry
When bidding other Jews good-bye.

These words affirm the Jewish thrust
Toward the healthful and robust.
This closing line, we hope, comes true:
May zay gezunt apply to you!

THE JEWISH NOSE

The Jewish nose! See how it grows,
The tribal trait Jehovah chose!
Semitic shnozes are de trop,
Just like le nez of Cyrano,
Suggesting in their plethora
The thrust of a peninsula!
By hook or crook or rule divine
This nose veers to the aquiline.

For pleasure it was never meant!
It serves more as an instrument
For pointing out the way to go.
(Remember Rudolph, all aglow?)
It also is unparalleled
When to the grindstone it is held
To tackle tasks and get them done
With no pretense at having fun.
(You can't sneeze at proboscises
That speed up work in times like these.)

Like pinnacles of Poconos,
To great heights the shnozola goes.
The height acts as a Matterhorn

When one looks down ones nose with scorn.
(But noses out of joint can hurt,
Alarm, do harm, and disconcert.)
With ease a Jewish diplomat
Can thumb his nose at this or that.
(He should observe the Golden Mean
And keep his own proboscis clean!)
The Moses-noses we extol
Have proved effective, on the whole.

We recognize it made good sense
To grant the nose such prominence.
The Deity who this path chose
Sure hit it squarely on the nose!

IN PRAISE OF YENTAS

We hereby, with this verse, salute
A personage who's seldom mute.
The yenta is the subject here,
A female wont to domineer
By dint of vocal amplitude,
Who's nasty, vulgar, shallow, rude.

Though negative are all these traits,
Encomiums she also rates.
She's somehow managed the ascent
To topmost rank of termagant,
A status reached by very few
Aspiring to be a shrew.

In Jewish lore, the yenta looms
Portentous, and high rank assumes:
The Yenta Telebende* theme
Persists, enjoying wide esteem.

Life would be dull, weak-spirited,
Without the scandals yentas spread.
As rumor-mongerers, they are
The champions in this art, by far.
Their raileries make little sense,
They can't respect a confidence.
They rant non-stop, they raise a fuss,
As blabbermouths, they're odious.
In realm that's best described as "bitch"
They merit their own special niche.

We hope that they, without dissent,
Accept this rhymed acknowledgment.
But if they do reject our verse,
We trust too loud they will not curse!

*A famous fictitious character created by humorist
B. I'Zovner, writing in the Forverts.

Ikh Farlir Mayn Rie fun Morrie Feller

Lozmikh nemen dayn orem ven mir geyn ariber der gas
Zog mir ven mir dergreykh di tretarshvel.
Velkhe kolir iz a likht, un vu iz di kalushe?
Vu iz der slup, un vu iz di tsvayg?

Vos ze ikh in dem muzey, oder dem matsh?
Vos ze ikh baym parad oder oyfn tee-vi?
Vos ze ikh bay filmen oder bay a forshtelung?
Ken ikh zen mayn eynikl oder di bilder?

Halt mayn hant, vayl ikh ken nit zen.
Kush mayn bak, k'dey ikh zol visn az du bist do.
Zog nit, "Zestu?"
Ven du makhst klor zakhn tsu mir.

Es iz normal tsu farlirn a bisl rie az men vert elter.
Es meg zayn a flek fun a katarekt vi a milkh-haytl zet
oys aribertsugeyn ariber undzer rie.
Es ken zayn der onver fun rie oyf eyner oder der
anderer zayt, oder es ken zayn an onver mamesh inem
tsenter azoy az siz vi men kukt durkh a langn, engn
tunel, un mir ze'en nor di end oder bloyz vos iz
mekhuts dem tunel.
Siz glaykh vi shpatsirn arum dem hoyz bay nakht on a
kleynem nakht-likhtl.
Du shtoyst zikh in zakhn, un der shvartz un bloy simen
iz nit keyn "Royte Emblem fun Kurazh".

Nutsn a kompyuter iz eyn oyfn vi azoy tsu zayn in
kontakt mit der droysendik velt. Far di vos zaynen visuel
kalye, lupes un leyn mashinen zaynen helfn.

Problemen far di blinde, ober nisht far dir – dervayle.
Untershraybn a tshek - vu iz di linye?
Esn fun a teler - du darfst onrirn dos esn.
Du kenst filn di greys fun a matbeye, ober vos far a
denominatzie iz dos papir gelt?

Vi azoy ken ikh gisn dos kave on fargisn zikh?
Vi azoy ken ikh tsunoyfpasn mayne zokn un kleyder?
Vi azoy ken ikh onton mayn kosmetik, oder opgoln zikh?
Vi azoy ken ikh untersheydn ttsvishn a rer tson-pap un a
rer zalb on zey tsu farzukhn?
Vi azoy ken ikh untersheydn tsvishn a flash naft un a
flash flisik loygvarg?
Vi azoy lez ikh a termomiter?
Vi azoy ken ikh aynfedemen a nodl?
Vi azoy ken ikh aynkoyfn in a supermarket?
Vi azoy ken ikh nemen a bild mit a fotografisher aparat?
Vi azoy vestu visn in velkher rey tsu geyn?

Es zaynen zakhn ikh ken ton durkh iberkhazern un naye
mitlen. Es iz do der vayser shtekn, un a firendiker hunt.

I'm Losing My Sight by Philip "Fishl" Kutner

Let me take your arm when we cross the street.
Tell me when we reach the curb.
What color is a light, and where's the puddle?
Where is the pole and where is the branch?

What do I see at the museum, or the ballgame?
What do I see at the parade or on TV?
What do I see at the movies or at a play?
Can I see my grandchild or the pictures?

Hold my hand, for I cannot see.
Kiss my cheek, so I know you're here.
Don't say "Do you see?"
When you're explaining things to me.

It is normal to lose some vision as one ages.
It may be a blurring by a cataract as a milky
film seems to cross our sight.
It could be the loss of vision on either side, or it
could be loss right down the center so it's like
looking down a long narrow tunnel and we
see only the end or only what's outside of the
tunnel.
It's like walking around the house at night
without a small night-light.
You bump into things and the black and blue
mark is no Red Badge of Courage.

The computer is a way to keep in contact with the
outside world. For the visually impaired
magnifying and reading machines do help.

Problems for the blind, but not for you—yet.
Signing a check—where is the line?
Eating from a plate—you need to touch the food.
You can feel the size of a coin, but what
denomination is that paper bill?

How do I pour the coffee without spilling it?
How do I match my socks and clothes?
How can I put my make-up on, or shave?
How do I tell a tube of toothpaste from a tube of
ointment without tasting it?
How do I tell a bottle of oil from a bottle of liquid
detergent?
How do I read a thermometer?
How do I thread a needle?
How do I shop in the supermarket?
How do I take a picture with a camera?
How do you know in which line to go?

There are things I can do with practice and new
devices. There is the white cane and a guide dog.

Leap for Life: A Story of Survival and Reunion

By Rut Wermuth Burak – Review by Philip *Fishl* Kutner

It is a story of survival and reunion by Rut Wermuth Burak who still lives in Poland. The author was a Jewish teenager who survived the ghetto and the frightening period in which she was alone in Nazi Germany. Her experiences and reconnecting with her long-lost brother, half a century, later is the context of this fascinating book published in Poland and Germany.

Starting with a list of demeaning decrees for Jews and Bolsheviks, the book traces her life's journey that started in Kolomyja in Eastern Poland (now located in the Ukraine). She escaped from a cattle truck to the forest and stumbled into a hut where an elderly couple gave her a wrap to cover her bare body.

People who had worked for her parents helped Rut to survive and get back to where her mother worked. Dressing as a "shiksa" Rut returned to Kolomyja where her mother passed as a gentile and became a cook for a wealthy family.

She could not stay there so adding two years to her age (making her 16) she "volunteered" to work in Germany in a shoe factory. After an accident, she was sent to forced labor in Speyer, on the Rhine River. Luckily they were looking for someone who could speak German. Having learned a little, she became a maid in Alsace and ran the household.

When the war turned against the Germans, Rut was sent to a labor camp. It was here that she met Witek who was seven years her senior, and after the War they were married. Repatriation brought them back to Poland to Lower Silesia near the Czech border in the Sudeten Mountains. As part of the Potsdam Agreement this area has been included in the transfer of German territory.

They had two daughters and after her younger daughter went to school Rut went back to finish her education and graduated from college. Later she had a job managing a bookstore. Her husband Witek died in 1980 at the age of 61.

One reason they had gone back to her hometown was to find news of her brother, but none was to be had. In 1992 she visited Rychwald, a retreat of the Lauder Foundation, where she met Israelis and the group known as "Children of the Holocaust". All along she had been an atheist—this was her first Jewish experience.

Here she met a woman from New York who knew people from Kolomyja and that in Israel there was an association of these people. One of these was Prof. Dov Noy in Jerusalem who told her to research a Victor Zorza, and in addition that there would be a 50th reunion of Kolomyja survivors at the edge of the Szeparowce Forest.

This started the long journey of research and contact with a Richard in New York who turned out to be her nephew. He told Rut that his father was living in London and was Victor Zorza, the well-known journalist. After telling Richard about the family 50 years earlier she mentioned that his father's name had been Salek. Richard called his father who was surprised and called his sister whom he thought had perished in the Shoah. They met in London at the airport and had a tearful reunion. The latter part of the book deals with their reunion and sharing the missing 53 years.

Victor had a different experience. Because of his interest in Socialism, he left for Russia just before the Germans invasion and became an expert on Communism. After being disillusioned and many ordeals, he was befriended by a famous Russian writer who advised him to join a branch of the Polish Air Force within the RAF in England.

He learned English well enough to become an interpreter and after the war had become a well-known broadcaster. His life changed when his 25 year-old daughter died of Cancer. Writing a book, A Way to Die, about the Hospice Program and palliative care helped him through his grief. As part of overcoming his grief, he opened a string of hospices in Russia.

Victor had been divorced from his wife after they had gone through the ordeal of their daughter's death. Part of the estrangement came from his being away in India for eight years.

The book ends with a visit by Prof. Dov Noy and his wife Tamar. Dov was the key link in the reunion. Finally, he also brought news of the gentile woman who helped Rut to escape.

Editor's note: Fishl wishes to thank Prof. Karl Maramorosch who sent this marvelous book to be reviewed and to Richard Zorza the nephew mentioned above. The effort is being made to have a new printing so we can have access to this gem.

Azoy vi a shpay afn yam

By Philip "Fishl" Kutner

So, how important is it? "Unless it's a matter of my children's or grandchildren's health, it's no big deal." So said Mama.

To Mama there was a *big deal* and a *really big deal* when it came to our health. For all other matters, "Everything is okay and if it's not okay, it's okay too."

When I have a major issue or problem, I shut my eyes and Mama looms as big as a mountain. "So, Mama, what should I do?"

Invariably I hear, "Erger nisht, s'iz nor vi a shpay afn yam." You know, usually it's no big deal.

So, dear readers, do you have a favorite saying that you remember your mama saying when things got rough? They went through really rough times. There was no Social Security, Medicare, or Unemployment Compensation before FDR.

If something pops into your mind, send it in. Let's share with each other. In fact, maybe it's a good idea for a Yiddish club program.

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