

# The Schmooze

## Stories with a Yiddish Twist

### FASCINATING CONVERSATIONS WITH STRANGERS

Note: The Yiddish word for “stranger” is “fremder.”  
A “flannelmouth” is a smooth talker, a flatterer, or a braggart.

by  
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Do you believe, “Az me redt a sakh, redt men fun zikh”?  
(If you talk a lot, you talk about yourself.)

Minda Zetlin, columnist and co-author of “The Geek Gap,” wrote an article titled, “How To Start a Conversation.” She has seven comments/suggestions: Note: The Yiddish terms have been added by Marjorie Wolfe.

1. Talk about the weather (“der veter”).
2. Talk about where you are. Discuss the hotel...
3. If you’ve read the stranger’s book/speech, compliment them.
4. Compliment them on their clothing (“klayder”). But don’t be a “flannelmouth.”

5. Ask a question such as “Where is the ladies room?”
6. Ask for help. “This is heavy. Can you help me?”
7. Ask, “Are you having a good day?”

Bernard Marr suggests that you ask open-ended questions. And Nicholas Von Hoffman (“Republicans Are From Mars Democrat Are From Venus”; Life Magazine, Nov. 1996), wrote:

“Democrats are a lot more entertaining, but they suffer from a terminal case of flannelmouth. At the conventions last summer, the partying Republicans in San Diego did everything they could to keep the press away from their fun. By contrast, the Democrats in Chicago were dragging reporters in for drinks.”

If you wish to strike up a conversation with a Jewish person—young or “seasoned”—here are some suggestions:

1. “Did you see the show, ‘My Mother’s Italian, My Father’s Jewish, I’m in Therapy’ starring Peter Fogel? The ads say it’s “One part lasagna, one part kreplach & two parts Prozac. and you don’t have to be Jewish or Italian to love this show. All you need to know is what it feels like to leave a family dinner with heartburn (‘harts-brenenish’) and headache (“kopveytik”).”
2. “Do you think that the Jewish rite of passage is rhinoplasty—a nose job? Joel Grey had it done; Barbra Streisand didn’t.”

3. “Would you believe that Gisele Bundchen is still the world’s highest paid model? She raked in \$30.5 million over the past year.” Such a “sheynkayt!”
4. “Is a Ubermensch” a “female Uber driver?”
5. “Do you like your Margaritas with salt or without salt?”
6. “Do you believe in this Yiddish expression, “Mit gelt ken men altsding dergreykhn”—with money you do anything?”
7. Do you agree with the author of “A Child’s First Book of Trump,” by Michael Ian Black:

Trump this and Trump that, and Trump buildings and steaks,

Trump airplanes and clothing, and several Trump mates.

Trump crap everywhere in a Trumpy Trump land.

But I don’t call it crap.

The Trump calls it a “brand.”

8. Did you hear this true story about Joel Grey? When Joel Grey’s mother was giving birth to him, she had terrible difficulties. After 16 hours of excruciating labor,  
the obstetrician entered the waiting room to report to his father and Grandma, Fanny, that the baby’s head was too large to get through the birth canal. It looked like only one of them would survive.

“Who should be save?” the doctor asked. “The mother

or the baby?”

Grey’s father fainted, but Grandma Fanny answered without hesitation.”Save de tree. There’ll be more branches.” (Luckily the doctor’s prognosis turned out to be wrong. They both survived!)

Source: “Master of Ceremonies—A Memoir” by Joel Grey.

9. Do you believe “Alle meiles in ainem iz nita bei kinem? (There is no such thing as a perfect person.)
10. Do you know the Yiddish parody of “Home on the Range?”  
Oy geb a haim  
(oh, give me a home)  
Mit a viabele shain  
(with a pretty wife)  
Vu de sheps und die tziggelach laden  
(where the sheep and the lambs run)  
Oy, geb mir a hois  
(Oh, give me a house)  
Mit gesunde cowboys  
(with healthy cowboys)  
Und a por hundred cattle tzu far kafen  
(and a couple of hundred cattle to sell)
11. Do you agree with writer/columnist, Dave Barry that “If states were characters, on ‘Seinfeld,’ Florida would be Kramer”?
12. Do you agree with the two professors who think that money “managers” from poorer families tend to beat those from more affluent backgrounds?

(Managers born rich are more likely to be promoted, while the born poor are promoted only if they outperform.)

13. [for seniors only] Do you miss the old A&S Dept. stores?
14. What do you think about Jewish people who hold a “B-A-R-K Mitzvah” when their dog turns 13?
13. Can you understand why the last hurricane was named “Hermine?” Do you think that the name has anything to do with Hermione Granger, one of the lead characters from the “Harry Potter” series?
14. [for female seniors only] Have you ever tried on clothing at Lohmann’s “communal dressing room”? If so, did you perform the “communal dressing room dance”?
15. Do you agree with Dan Ariely [Ask Ariely, WSJ] that if human beings were tools, the Swiss Army knife is the best analogy for describing human nature?
16. Did you see Zero Mostel in “Fiddler on the Roof”?
17. Do you agree with Barbara Isenberg (“Tradition!”) that “Brides, grooms, and wedding planners would be bereft without “Sunrise, Sunset”?
18. Are you aware that a month before Joan Rivers died

she agreed to contribute to a book about Jewish food? She contemplated the menu for an imagined last meal, starting with ‘a good piece of gefilte fish with some fantastic freshly grated horse-radish (“khreyn”) on it. Or perhaps noodle kugel. Definitely, kreplach. Just don’t go out for Chinese.

19. Did you know that Roseanne Barr studied Kabbalah?
20. Do you think that businessman, Nelson Pelz, went a bit overboard in holding a Bar Mitzvah for his twin sons? He invited hundreds of guests to the 5/14/16 bash for Zackery and Gregory at the Pierre, a luxury hotel on 5th Avenue in New York. Among the activities are stilt walkers, two bands, five singers, a hockey rink, a basketball (“koyshbol”) hoop and video games.
21. Do you know the difference between a “shmir” (an open-handed smack on the face), a “barne (a closed-fisted hit on the head with the knuckle of the middle finger raised (AKA a “noogie”), and “der gubernator/ the governor” (a move that entails jamming your thumb under your opponent’s ribcage)? And then there’s the “knakn,” meaning “to crack or to snap.”
22. [for mothers only] When your daughter gets married, will you give her a “knipl”—a “nest egg”?
23. Have you ever called anyone a “kishkila”—the Fran Drescher term for someone who really enjoys their food?

24. When you were a kid, did you buy a frankfurter and tell the guy, "Put on all the hazarai"?
25. When Alfred Molina played Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof," did you say, "Goy Vey Iz Mir"?
26. Are you aware that Ben Brantley (NY Times) referred to the 2004 "Fiddler on the Roof" as "Goyem on the Roof"?
26. Have you ever used the derogatory term "frummock" to mean that somebody is perceived as being observant beyond the appreciation of the speaker? (Source: David Grossman)
27. Are you aware that Mississippi is the lowest cost state in the nation? You can get \$100 worth of goods for only \$87.60, according to the Business of Economic Analysis. The most expensive ("tayer") state is the District of Columbia, where \$100 of goods will cost you \$116.80.
28. Did you know that the role of Pseudolus in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," was originally offered to Phil Silvers, who declined it, saying he did not want to do this "old shtick." Milton Berle also passed on the role. Zero Mostel did not originally want to do the role either, which he thought below his capabilities, but was convinced by his wife and agent. The reviews were excellent and the show became a great commercial success, running 964 performances.

29. Has anyone in your family ever called you a “faynshmeker”—Yiddish for a person of refined taste? (“On Language,” by Philologos, 2/18/2011)

**MARJORIE WOLFE’S FAVORITE QUOTE:**

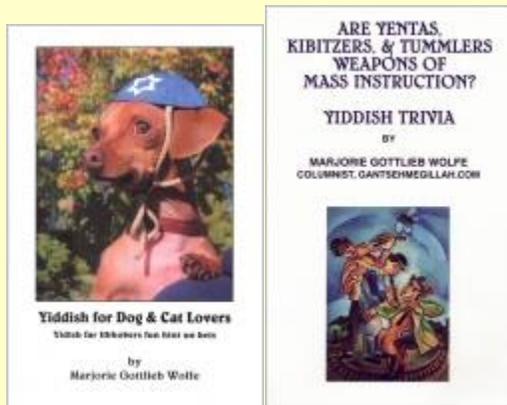
“I cherish genuine conversation, where people actually care what someone else has to say.”

Charles F. Glassman, Brain Drain - “The Breakthrough That Will Change Your Life.”

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<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>M</u>
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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: [MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com](http://MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com)**

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