

The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

FABULOUS LINES FROM “FIDDLER AOYF DI DAKH”*

*“Fiddler aoyf di dakh” mean “Fiddler on the Roof.” The fiddler is a metaphor of survival in an uncertain world, through tradition and joyful living.

A “shtetl” is a small village.

Anatevka is a fictional shtetl.

Reb is short for Rebbe

“Az Motel iz a mentsh means “Motel is a real man.”

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe



Syosset, New York

The Tradition Returns! The New York Daily News says, Fiddler on the Roof is “One of the greatest musicals in history.”

Broadway previews for “Fiddler” begin on Friday, Nov. 20. When the movie version of Fiddler was released in 1971, Pauline Kael, the New Yorker’s critic, called the movie “the most powerful movie musical ever made.” And Ruth R. Wisse said, “The authors of Fiddler took the stuffing out of the derma.”

Shown below are some fabulous lines from the show. The Yiddish words have been added.

Tevye: As the good book (“bukh”) says, when a poor man eats chicken one of them is sick..
“Az an oreman est a hun, is oder er iz krank, oder di hun iz krank.”

Mendel: Where does the book say that?

Tevey: Well, it doesn't say that exactly ("punkt"), but something ("epes") about a chicken.

Perchik: In this world ("velt") it is the wealthy ("raykh") who are criminals ("kriminalz"). Someday their wealth ("raykhkayt") will be ours.

Tevey: That would be nice. If they would agree ("maskim zayn"), I would agree.

Tzeitel: But Mama, the men she finds, the last one was so old ("alt") and he was bald ("lise"). He had no hair ("hor").

Golde: A poor girl without a dowry ("nadr") can't be so particular. You want hair, marry a monkey ("malpe").

Perchik: Money is the world's curse ("klole").

Tevey: May the Lord smite me with it. And may I never recover ("gezunt vern").

Golde: Grandmother ("bobe") Tzeitel. How did she look?

Tevey: For a woman who has been dead ("toyt") for thirty ("draysik") years she looked pretty well.

Tevey: As the good book says, if you spit ("shpayin") in the air, it lands in your face ("ponim").

Tevey: I know, I know. We are your chosen people. But once in a while, can't you choose someone else?

Rabbi: May God bless and keep the Czar ("keyser")...far away from us!

Tevey: As the good book says 'Each shall seek his own kind.' In other words, a bird ("foygl") may love a fish but where would they build a home ("heyim") together ("tsuzamen")?

Yente: Ah, children ("kinder"), they are a blessing in your old age. My poor Aaron, God rest his soul ("neshome"), couldn't give me

children. Between you and me, Golde, he hardly tried.

Motel and Tevye:

A perfect (“perfekt”) fit. Like a glove (“henthke”). This match was made to measure (“mestn”). Motel, stop talking like a tailor and tell me, who is it?

Motel: Even a poor tailor (“shnayder”) deserves some happiness (“glik”).

Motel: Times are changing, Reb Tevye. The thing is, over a year ago, your daughter (“tokhter”), Tzeitel, and I gave each other our pledge (“havtokhe”) that we would marry.

Tevye: You gave each other apledge?

Tzeitel: Yes, Papa. We gave each other our pledge.

Motel and Tevye:

I think I can help. Certainly. Like a bandage (“bandazh”) can help a corpse (“mes”).

Constable:

You’re an honest (“orntlekh”/”erlekh”), decent person. Even though you’re a Jew.

Tevye: Oh...THANK you (“a dank”), your honor. How often does a man get a compliment (“kompliment”) like that?

Tevye: Arranging a marriage for yourself (“zikh”) What are you? Everything? The bridegroom (“khosn”), matchmaker, and guests in one? I suppose you’ll perform the ceremony (“tseremonye”), too?

Tevye: He loves her. Love, it’s a new starting. On the other hand, our old ways were once new, weren’t they? On the other hand, they decided without the matchmaker (“shadkhn”). On the other hand, did Adam and Eve have a matchmaker? Oh, Yes (“yo”) they did. And it seems these two have the same matchmaker.

Tevye: Either you’re out of your mind or you’re crazy (bist meshuge)? He must be crazy.

Tevey: [to God]: Anyway, Motel and Tzeitel have been married for some time now. They work very hard, and they're as poor as squirrels ("skveralz") in winter ("vinter"). But, they're so happy, they don't know how miserable (tsoredik") they are.

Tevey: Sometimes I wonder, when it gets too quiet ("shtil") up there, if You're thinking, 'What kind of mischief ("shtiferay") can I play on My friend ("fraynd") Tevey'?

Lazar Wolf
Have a drink?

Tevey: I won't insult ("baleydikung") you by saying no ("nit"/"nisht").

Tevey [admiring the lavishness of a butcher's home]
And all this from killing innocent ("umshuldik") animals.

Tevey: [to Lazar Wolf]
I always wanted a son ("zun"), but I wanted one a little younger ("yinger") than myself ("zikh").

Tevey: What do I think? I never really liked him. Why should I? You can have a fine conversation ("konveratyon") with him if you talk about kidneys and livers. On the other hand, not everyone has to be a scholar ("gelernter"). And with a butcher my daughter will surely never know hunger.

Note: To be hungry is to be "hungerik."

Tevey: [to God]
It may sound like I'm complaining ("kampleyning"), but I'm not. After all, with Your help, I'm starving to death.

Note: The words "shtarbn fun hunger" mean "to starve."

Tevey: When I get angry ("broygez") even flies don't dare to fly ("flien").

Tevey: "Traditions, traditions. Without our traditions our lives would be as shaky as...a fiddler on the roof ("dakh").

Tevey: Because of our tradition, we've kept our balance for many, many

years. Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything (“altsding”)...How to sleep (“shlofn”), how to eat (“esn”)...how to work (“arbetn”)...how to wear clothes (“klayder”). For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl (“shal”). This shows our constant devotion (“ibergegebnykeyt”) to God. You may ask, ‘How did this tradition get started? I’ll tell you.

Tevey: And in the circle (“krazz”) of our little village, We’ve always had our special (“spetsyel”) types. For instance, Yente the matchmaker, Reb Nochem the beggar (“betler”/”shnorer”)...And most important of all, our beloved (“balibt”) Rabbi.

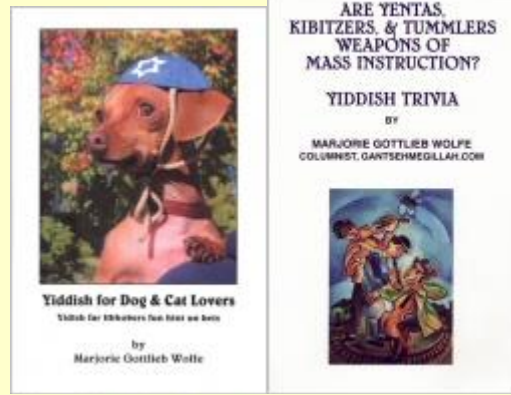
MARJORIE WOLFE shares Maurice Samuel’s description of a “shtetl” (“In Praise of Yiddish”): “The shtetl is remembered by the older generation with affection and tenderness because it represents a marvelous and vanished time of secure personality, a time when there was no sickly problem of identity. But we must not romanticize the shtetl; we must not conjure up populations of scholarly and saintly tailors, shoemakers, peddlers, butchers, coopers, tinsmiths, shopkeepers, living in an otherworldly life. There was poverty, snobbery, exploitation, and sharp social division; there was squalor and injustice, and for the large majority the cultivation of spiritual enjoyment was limited and intermittent. But the wonder of it is that such enjoyment did exist, and in a degree unknown to the surrounding world; and with it existed an awareness seldom encountered elsewhere that there was a higher life to which even ordinary folks could aspire.”

Go see “Fiddler on the Roof.” Take the children! You’ll have a “vunderlekh”(wonderful) time!

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Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:



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