

# The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

## SMALL TALK

by

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NOTE: The Yiddish words for “chattering” : “Reden on a moss;  
Yaataata”

Chat: “shmu’es”

To chat : “shmuessen”

To chatter: “plaplen”

A gossip: “yenteh”/“yenta”

A “yenta” is a gabby, talkative woman; female blabbermouth

A “Yente Talabende” was the name of a character and a play  
in the Yiddish Theatre--presented in N. Y. by the legendary Boris  
Thomashevsky.

“yentavent” means “to spread gossip.”

(Stewart J. Lustgarten term)

Laurence Lowe wrote a piece for Details magazine (May 2015) titled,  
“The Big Problem With Small Talk.” He says, “The more things change,  
the more we sound the same. It’s as if we’re talking about the weather  
even when we aren’t.”

Lowe says to beware of “The pedant who cites Tolstoy when talking about  
The Wire.” And “beware of teenagers, pregnant women, and your boss.”

Re: “Yentavent”: Don’t gossip. Think of the plumage-packed pillow story. In this  
parable, a man has a lashon hara (i.e., gossip) habit. He regularly talks about people  
behind their backs.

The Rabbi summons this man and explains that gossip, even true gossip, is tantamount to murder because by gossiping you kill a person's reputation. Horrified, the man begs the Rabbi to tell him how he can undo what he has done to his fellow townspeople.

The Rabbi simply instructs the man to bring him a feather pillow ("kishn"), cut it open, and shake out all of its feathers. The man does what he's told. When he finishes, he and the Rabbi watch as "der vint" (the wind) scatters the hundreds of feathers near ("noent") and far ("vayt"). The Rabbi then instructs the man to collect every single feather and place them back inside the pillow.

The man protests, saying such a feat is impossible ("ummiglekh"). The Rabbi explains that gossiping works the same way. Once the words have been spoken, you cannot control how far they travel, nor their destinations, nor can you ever take them back.

(Source: "A Pillow Full of Feathers")

Shown below are some stories/expressions which DON'T fall into one of the PREFAB CONVERSATIONS of the day, a term used by Lowe.

Have (a) "bisl fraylakhs"--a bit of fun.

- . Two women are sitting on a park bench ("bank). The conversation:  
"Have you heard? Sonya's got a new fella. She moves downtown and the next thing you know, she's involved with IRWIN RENEWAL."  
(Source: Tuba Loons Greeting Cards)
- . Itzhak Perlman said, "In a small town in Russia, there are three brothers-- Beryl, Cheryl, and Schmeryl. Beryl says, 'I'm going to America, and I'm gonna change my name from Beryl to Buck.' Cheryl says, 'I'm going to America, and I'm gonna change my name from Cheryl to Chuck.' And Schmeryl says, 'I'm not going.'"
- . "Have you been to Pastrami Queen in Boca Raton?"  
"Yes, it feels like the Martha Stewart of delis. No laminated plastic booths. No plastic plates. ZAFITIG MATZO BALL SOUP (\$4.95) is served in a simple square white ceramic bowl. How many stars? 3 1/2 of 4 stars," according to John Tanasychuk of the Sun Sentinel) "ESS GEZUNTERHEIT." EAT IN GOOD HEALTH.
- . "Where did you get that 'dresske"--that little dress?"  
"It comes off the rack, and is hardly haute couture."  
Didn't Leo Rosten says that it may have been "Marked Down Drastically?"  
"It surely didn't come from Nordstrom!"

. “A New York panhandler really had chutzpah.

“What happened?”

“I was walking up Madison Avenue with my gorgeous (“sheyn”) wife when a character asked me for \$5.”

“So?”

“I was in a good mood and I gave it to him. Then he asked my wife if she’d join him for a drink.”

. Nat Chandler shared this story with the readers of “Metropolitan Diary,”  
The New York Times, May 10, 2010:

Dear Diary:

I was searching for a parking space near my apartment in Yorkville a few weeks ago. I spied an adequate, if tight, spot. With some skill and luck, I executed a textbook three-point parallel-parking job, touching neither the car in front nor the one behind me.

An old lady with a cane, passing on the sidewalk, leaned over to my passenger’s-side window and said, “Your mother would be very proud!”

. Morris walks into a bar and asks for the Wexian (Michael Wex) drink called “Alter Kaker.” It consists of an ounce and a half of Old Granddad whiskey and a half ounce of prune juice--on the rocks, of course.” He says “It’s the ideal cocktail with which to toast the suffocation, shooting, stabbing, choking or boiling of one’s enemies. L’chaim.”

The man tells the bartender: “Me ken lekn di finger!” (It’s delicious! Literally, you can lick the finger.)

. A “krankn-shvester” (nurse) at North Shore Hospital in Syosset, told the story of two immigrants who meet at Katz’s Deli.

“How’s by you?” asks one.

“Could be worse. And you?”

“Surviving.

(looking at the menu)

“Oy! The pastrami sandwich price just increased to \$19.75. Almost twenty bucks for one sandwich.

“So, what else is new?”

“I’ve been ‘krank’ (sick) a lot in 2015 and it’s costing me a fortune.

In the past 5 months I’ve spent over \$3,000 on doctors and

‘medisin’ (medicine/drugs).”

“Ach! Back home on that kind of money you could be sick for two years.”

As they say in Yiddish, “Beser a gazunter oremen eyder a kranker oyshe.”

(Better poor and healthy than sick and wealthy.)

. The word “tarante” (tah-RAHN-teh) is alive and well In Israel. It refers to any car, or jalopy. Mr. Stephen Fisher of Missouri, remembers it from his childhood, as any piece of old junk, and could even be used ad hominem, as in a sentence such as, “Her husband is such an old tarante that I don’t know how she puts up with him.” Today, the word applies pretty much exclusively to vehicles. One Yiddish dictionary lists “tarante” as a synonym for shmatte. (Source: Philologos, The Jewish Daily Forward)

And, finally, DO MAKE SMALL TALK; share this short adaptation from Paul Harvey titled, “Don’t Forget What Really Matters”:

Carl Coleman was driving to work one morning when he bumped fenders with another motorist.

Both cars stopped. It was her fault, she admitted, and hers was a new car, less than two days from the showroom. She dreaded facing her husband.

Colman was sympathetic, but he had to pursue the exchange of license and registration data.

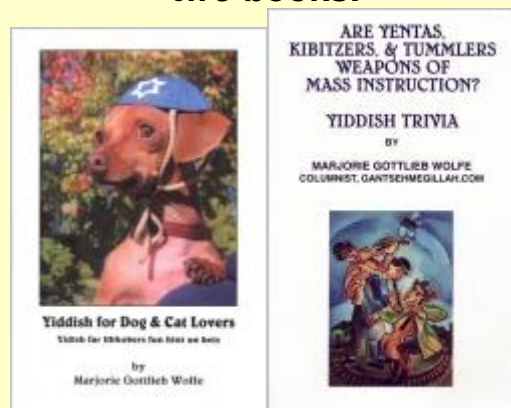
She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve documents in an envelope.

On the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband’s distinctive hand, were these words:

“IN CASE OF ACCIDENT, REMEMBER, HONEY,  
IT’S YOU I LOVE, NOT THE CAR.”

Source: “More Stories for the Heart--Over 100 Stories to Warm Your Heart,” compiled by Alice Gray.

**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**

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