

The Schmooze **Stories with a Yiddish Twist**

THEODORE BIHEL TRIVIA QUIZ

by
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Theodore Bikel, actor, activist, singer, and writer, has passed away at the age of 91. In the Foreword to his book, “Theo - The Autobiography of Theodore Bikel,” he wrote, “Most people lead two distinct lives--a private life and a public one. Others lead multiple lives; I am one of those. Professionally I can count three or four separate existences, politically three or four more. Add the personal aspects and altogether they add up to a cat’s count of nine.”

Bikel said of “Fiddler” in a 2008 interview, “It’s a charming show. It’s a nice show. But it is what my wife calls ‘SHTETL LITE.’”

Grab a #2 pencil and let’s see how well you fare on this not-so-serious Theodore Bikel Trivia Quiz.

1. While performing the role of Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof,” the following story took place:

A new arrival to this country had never in his life seen a stage play. On his first day of leisure (“fraye tsayt”), he walked up to the ticket window (“fentster”) and asked the price of admission.

“Downstairs, the tickets are \$4.80,” explained the ticket clerk. “Upstairs, the price is \$2.20.”

“Is that so?” said the surprised immigrant? “Tell me, what’s playing upstairs?”

- A) True
- B) False

2. Which Yiddishist celebrated Bikel’s 85th birthday, which was held at Carnegie Hall?

- A) Michael Wex
- B) Ruth R. Wisse
- C) Uriel Weinreich
- D) Leo Rosten
- E) Miriam Weinstein

3. “Iz nisht gut tsu zayn aleyn” means, It’s not good to be alone. How many times was Theodore Bikel married?

- A) Once
- B) Twice
- C) Four times
- D) “Zol ikh azoy visn fun tsores.” (I’m not the least bit interested. I should know as much about troubles as I want to know about this.)

4. Theodore Bikel was once asked, “How come you do everything so well?” What was his reply?

- A) “I’m Jewish!”
- B) “Next question.”
- C) “What I don’t do well, I don’t do!”

5. Approximately how many times did Theodore Bikel portray Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof”?

- A) 1,000
- B) 2,000
- C) “Vos makht dos oys?” (What difference does it make?) He’s ‘vunderlekh’--wonderful.”

6. One year Theodore Bikel invited Zero Mostel to his midnight seder and was disappointed when he didn’t show up. A few days later,

while walking on Fifth Avenue, he heard a roar that came from the other side of the avenue (“evenyu”). It was Zero. “Theo,” he yelled,

- A) “I couldn’t come to your seder. I had matzo poisoning!”
- B) “Freg mir nit ken kashes.” (Don’t ask me any questions.)
- C) “I had tickets to hear Minnie Tonka and Darlinda Just Darlinda perform burlesque together as “The Schlep Sisters.”

7. Liviu Ciulei asked Bikel to play the role of Mack the Knife in Brecht’s “Threepenny Opera” in Minneapolis. Bikel thought it was crazy (“meshuge”) for him to play Mackie, bumming around in whorehouses... but he accepts the role. What actor did Bikel think would have been more appropriate?

- A) Kevin Kline
- B) Warren Beatty
- C) Mel Gibson
- D) Paul Newman

8. Bikel played what instrument?

- A) “gitare” (guitar)
- B) “pyane” (piano)
- C) “fleyt” (flute)
- D) All of the above

9. Two other Tevyes followed Zero in the role before Bikel was asked to take the lead in the national company in 1967. Both came from families of Yiddish actors. Who were they?

10. “Der kishef” (The magic) of “Fiddler on the Roof” even worked well in Las Vegas (AKA “Sin City”/“Zind City”). In 1967, Bikel appeared in Caesar’s Palace. What a contrast between Las Vegas and Anatevka! What amenities did the hotel offer their guests and performers?

- A) the Noshorium (a 24-hour coffee shop)
- B) two shows a night, each lasting 100 minutes
- C) slot machines, reckless gambling, one-armed bandits, etc.
- D) Dolores Wilson (Golde) and Baruch Lumet (Rabbi)
- E) All of the above

11. Gregory Peck once attended a performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" when Bikel was starring as Tevye. Peck said,

- A) "I probably told you this before, but I must tell you you again. I have seen Fiddler on the Roof about five times with different Tevyes. Yours was far and away the best."
- B) "Zolst lebn un zayn gezunt." (You should live and be well.)
- C) "I'll see you in two years when you perform the play again in another unusual place: Honolulu, Hawaii."

12. Bikel was the first American Tevye to play the role of Tevye at theatres-in-the-round.

- A) True
- B) False

13. Theodore Bikel was named after which of the following people?

- A) Theodore Roosevelt
- B) Theodore Roethke (poet, educator)
- C) Theodore H. White (journalist)
- D) Theodor Herzl (father of Modern Zionism)
- E) Theodore Rousseau (artist)

14. Is the following story true?

Theodore Bikel hops a cab. A B'klyn-born cabbie says:
"You look like that Bike guy--except...naaaahh...he's got more hair."

Theo: "No, no. It's really me. Listen, we all get older."

Cabbie: "Older? You mean OLD!"

- A) True
- B) Untrue

15. The day JFK was shot, Bikel arrived in Boston, preparing to do a concert that evening. The local promoter consulted with Bikel about his decision on whether or not to perform, and he

- A) refused to perform in respect to JFK

- B) Went through with the concert and turned over all the proceeds to the civil rights movement
- C) Performed at the concert and quoted President Kennedy: "If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him. I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft."
- D) Performed. He told the audience that it was his way of saying kaddish.

16. Bikel loves to tell Yiddish stories. Is this story true?

A Jew who had been in the name registry office came out beaming: "I've got my name. It cost of five hundred roubles but I've got my name!"

"What name did they give you?" asked his friends.

"Shnit," he replied.

"Shnit? You paid five hundred roubles for 'Schnit'?"

"No," said the man, "just for the 'n.'"

- A) True
- B) False

17. Did Theodore Bikel actually tell this story?

While in England, I heard the story of an old Shakespearean actor who was walking down the street, wearing his cape and carrying his cane. A lady of the evening accosted him, inquiring whether he might be interested in spending the night with her. He looked at her for a long moment with sadness ("umet") in his eyes ("oygn"), shook his head, and said with a voice full of grief, "Look at you and look at me. I--an actor--you--a prostitute ("zoyne"). The two oldest professions in the world--both spoiled by amateurs!"

- A) Yes
- B) No

18. Did Bikel share this story about Joan Baez, the darling of the folk world?

When Joan Baez arrived at the Newport Folk Festival with her parents, her sister and brother-in-law Mimi and Richard Farina, and two other people, Joan did not know how she would get all these people down from Boston to Newport in one small automobile. A friend suggested that she rent a “Hertz.” And so they all arrived in a HEARSE.

- A) True
- B) False

19. In the first half of 1968 Bikel was in Las Vegas performing “Fiddler on the Roof.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s death made the world and national news. In downtown Las Vegas the casinos carried on, oblivious of the national “tragedye” (tragedy). What happened next?

- A) There was a compulsory two-hour closure of all businesses.
- B) Las Vegas complied.
- C) All shops and casinos were ordered closed from 4:00 to 6:00 A.M., the slowest time.
- D) All of the above

20. What roles did Bikel play?

- A) a ruthless murderer (“merder”) in Hawaii 5-0)
- B) a kindly (“frayndlekh”) Armenian merchant in Ironside
- C) a Polish “profesor” in Charlie’s Angels
- D) an Italian opera star a la Pavarotti in Murder She Wrote
- E) All of the above

21. In the spring of 1984, Zubin Mehta urged the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) to have Bikel appear at a Purim concert in Tel Aviv. At the end of the program, Mehta and Bikel took the customary bows before leaving the stage. With the crowd still applauding, Zubin motioned for Bikel to return to the stage for their encore, saying that he would be right behind him. Bikel made his entrance and was met by a big laugh from the audience. Bikel’s first impulse was to check whether his pants were properly zipped up. What caused the audience to act as they did?

- A) Bikel’s pants were NOT zipped up.
- B) The maestro mounted the conductor’s podium wearing a bright blue wig
- C) “ver vaist?” (Who knows?)
- D) “Freg mich becherim!” (Ask me something else.)

22. Bikel described Zero Mostel’s performance in “Fiddler.” Three months

into the role, Bikel says that there was a “pronounced change in Mostel’s performance, the second time, one that probably stemmed from the fact that he tended to get bored rather quickly...Self-discipline was not one of Zero’s strong suits.” Specifically, which of the following were actual actions by Mostel?

- A) Mostel managed to shake his derriere on stage; this defied any notion of shtetl authenticity.
- B) Mostel, while playing the show at a theatre-in-the-round, actually sat on a patron’s lap in the audience.
- C) Mostel, while singing the duet “Do You Love Me?” with Golde (Thelma Lee), pats Golde’s hand and then ran up the aisle in the dark and shouted from the back of the auditorium, “And that night Tevye had Golde!”
- D) All of the above

23. Is this a true event shared by Theodore Bikel?

When Bikel worked in Manhattan, he was booked into a hotel at 58th and 6th Avenue. He was particularly pleased to find that one could buy tomorrow’s newspaper (“tsaytung”) on the previous evening. When his former roommate, Freddie Granville, came to visit he shared this feeling of getting a jump on time by buying The New York Times the night (“nakht”) before.

So, Freddie went on Monday and every single weeknight to buy a paper. On Saturday night, he bought Sunday’s paper and buckled a bit under its weight (“vog”). He said, “I just want ONE paper.” The vendor told him that he holding just only one (eyns”) paper. Freddie became worried (“bazorgt”) about the state of the world, and said, “What could have happened since yesterday?”

- A) Yes
- B) No

24. Who blasted into rehearsals of “Fiddler” after the second week and started ridiculing Jerome Robbins by saying, “A couple of weddings in Williamsburg and that ‘putz’ thinks he understands Orthodox Jews!?”

- A) Zero Mostel
- B) Theodore Bikel
- C) Alfred Molina (While Molina, a Gentile, starred in “Fiddler” in 2004, one reviewer referred to the show as “Goyim on the Roof.”

ANSWERS:

- 1. B (Source: “Joys of Jewish Humor” by Henry D. Spalding
- 2. A Wex first met Theo at UCLA when Theo attended one of Michael’s

lectures. They then worked together at Klezkanada.

3. C
4. C
5. B
6. A
7. A
8. A
9. Herschel Bernardi and Luther Adler
10. E
11. A
12. A
13. D
14. A
15. B and D
16. A
17. A
18. A
19. D
20. E
21. B
22. D
23. A
24. A

Sources: "Theo - The Autobiography of Theodore Bikel," Copyright 1994, by Theodore Bikel

"On Jewishness, as the Fiddle Played," by Alisa Solomon, The New York Times, Oct. 20, 2013

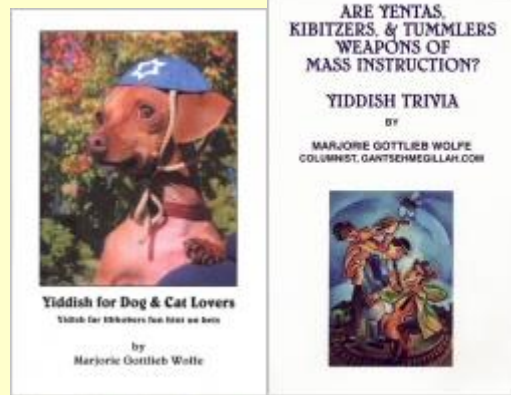
MARJORIE WOLFE'S FAVORITE THEODORE BIKEL QUOTE:

"But there is a difference here: When Jewish children are murdered, Arabs celebrate the deed. The death of an Arab child is no cause for celebration in Israel."

Search for Stories Beginning with the Letter

<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>
<u>N</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>W</u>		<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>

**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of
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