

The Schmooze

Stories with a Yiddish Twist

LOOK WHO'S "LAYDENSHAFTLEKH" (PASSIONATE)
ABOUT YIDDISH

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe



Syosset, New York

In 1996, Bette David wrote a letter to The New York Times:
"Trendy-looking young couple holding bulging shopping bags in an
up elevator of an Upper East Side apartment house the night before
Hanukkah.

She: Oh dear, we forgot to get the Torah!

He: Oh, you mean the menorah.

She: Well, close enough.

Shown below is a chronology of written material which contains Yiddish
words and expressions:

2015 Maureen Turner wrote about "zamlers" (book collectors) in the
Pakn Treger magazine [of the Yiddish Book Center]:

"Every few months, Eric Ellman of North Bethesda, Maryland,
sends the Yiddish Book Center an email with updates from what
he calls his 'zamlering adventures.' He's particularly proud of one
key statistic: the total weight of the books he's shipped to the Center
over the years. At last count, that number was closing in on a ton.

Cindy Adams, Oct. 27, 2015, wrote: "The SHMATTA industry's
sewed up Hillary. Vogue's Anna Wintour, bridal's Vera Wang,
Marchesa's Georgina Chapman went Dutch on a cocktail fund-
raiser."

Note: A “shmatta” is a rag.

Benjamin Levy (“Remembering Theo Bikel, a Defiant One to the End,” The Forward, 7/31) wrote, “Theodore Bikel, who died on July 21 at the age of 91 in Los Angeles, was a ‘shtarker,’ a tough guy, unlike many showbiz stars who merely play shtarkers on TV or onscreen.”

Jane Eisner (“Obama and the Ultimate Jewish Schmeat Tactic,” The Forward, Sept. 11), wrote about her interview with Obama. “The President pronounced his news ‘shocking.’ He recalled that as a college student, he’d walk all the way down Broadway on weekends to get a bagel from Columbia University, about 40 blocks north.

“And what do you like on that poppy bagel,” Eisner asked.

“Just a schmear,” he replied.

Note: “schmeat” means “to spread.” Leo Rosten says, “With drinks, a caviar shmeer on crackers goes well.” “Smoked fish, cream cheese, sour cream, and chives make a wonderful cocktail shmeer.”

Rob Patronite and Robin Raisfeld (“How To Stock Your Pantry,” New York magazine, Nov. 9 - 15) discusses the exceedingly fresh, sinus-clearing Holy Schmitt’s horseradish (“khreyn”): “Try it in a Bloody Mary, for sure, or at the Passover table, if you’re okay with upstaging BUBBE’S brisket.”

Note: “Bubbe” or “Bobe” means “grandmother.” You knew that!!!

2013 Jordan Friedman (USA Today, 8/6/13) wrote: “Everything’s going digital. Even bar mitzvah preparation.

Some tech-savvy parents are signing up their kids for a more modern brand of bar mitzvah lessons, rather than SCHLEPPING them to the traditional one-on-one lessons in person...She called Glenn Sherman, a cantor based in Delray Beach, FL, who gives bar mitzvah lessons online.

Note: “shlepn” means “to pull or drag.”

2011 Scott Sherman (“Bad For The Jews”), wrote about Bernie Madoff: “Whenever a Jewish person seemingly turns on other Jews, there’s a tendency to label the individual as self-hating, but here we find the ganef.”

Note: A “ganef” is a thief or crook.

2010 Michael Wex published the novel, "The Frumkiss Family Business - A Megilla in 14 Chapters." The dedication page reads:

For Bonnie
who gives ear to a kvetch

2003 Anita Diamant ("Pitching My Tent"), wrote, "I want a mikveh that is as nourishing as the rain, inspiring as the ocean, sweet as childhood swims in the pond. You know that feeling: satisfying, complete, delicious. It is the embrace of a headfirst dive into a perfectly temperate blue pool, into the beginning of all beginnings. And when you surface, the one word on your wet lips is: Ahh. Or, perhaps, Ah-men."

Note: A "mikveh" is an indoor bath or pool for Jewish ritual purification.

The New York Observer (Jan. 27) carried the following headline:
MAYOR GETS BUPKES FROM PATAKI.

The New York Post (July 4) contained an article titled, "Freebie fury."

Simon Doonan hates it when wealthy celebrities demand freebies. The creative director at Barneys, told Gay City News: "Celebrities are always on the take. I am completely appalled...the only people who can afford couture gowns and TCHOTCHKES from Jonathan Adler are the ones who want it for free..."

Note: A "tchotchke" is an inexpensive thing--a trinket.

2002 The Wall Street Journal ran an ad for the long distance carrier, IDT. It read: "Based on the Wall Street Journal, you have to be a SHLAMAZAL to be using AT&T, MCI, Sprint or Verizon."

Note: "Schlamazal"--an alternate spelling--means "an unlucky person"; "n'er do well."

2001 Arnold Fine ("I Remember When," The Jewish Press, 2/23/2001) wrote: "I'll never forget when my sister once put a penny in a machine for a piece of gum and it didn't come out. She complained to the lady in the token booth who told my sister to write away to the gum company for a refund. So tell me, how smart do you have to be? You put a penny in the machine and have to spend money on a three cent stamp and an envelope to get the penny back? My sister was UNGESHPART (insistent) and did it. Now get this, for a three cent

stamp investment they sent her about a dollar's worth of gum!"

Due to security concerns, Miss Israel, Ilanit Levi, an 18-year-old soldier from Haifa, wore a bulletproof ("bulatpruf") dress studded with rhinestones at the Miss Universe Pageant competition in Puerto Rico.

Kosher Today reported on the perceived shortage ("doykher") of kosher brisket for Passover and quoted an average price of \$4 per pound, \$5.29 in the Midwest. Other quotes were as high as \$7.00 a pound. The dramatic increase in prices followed a fire at a Conagra plant that supplies the kosher brisket for Hebrew National.

2004 The NYX obituary column for Jerry Ohrbach, 12/31/04, read, in part: "Ohrbach, Jerry, North Shore Animal League America mourns the passing of our friend, Jerry Ohrbach. He was a champion of all animal causes, a down to earth guy, a real mensch."

WJEW - Channel 18, "TV for your inner Jew," has announced its new season lineup of reality shows. They include: "Schmeer Factor." Contestants vie to see who is the bravest by trying new bagel-and-cream-cheese combinations, such as shiitake mushroom bagels with lemon-sunchoke cream cheese or tortellini bagels with cilantro-pesto cream cheese. :-)

Jeffrey Toobin, (The New Yorker, Dec. 20 & 27) wrote, "The name Bronfman means "whiskey man" in Yiddish.

2005 Michael Wex ("Born To Kvetch") wrote, "Nebekhing at the right place and time is so important as to be almost reflexive among speakers of Yiddish (for years now I've dreamed of opening a pseudo-English pub called The Nebekh and Shrug, which would never have what you wanted. "Got any beer?" "Nebekh."), and it's no accident that the first Slavic word to make its way into all forms of Yiddish should fit so well into a language that has turned complaining into an art form."

Michael Riedel ("On Broadway," NY Post, Sept. 23) wrote, "In response to all the cast replacements at long-running shows, the Tony Awards have added a new category: Best Re-Creation of a Role. Too late for Harvey Fierstein in 'Fiddler' but just in time for Rosie O'Connell, his new GOYISHA Golde!"

2006 Arnold Fine (“I Remember When,” www.jewishpress.com) wrote, “Today’s generation goes to the beach and never gives a second thought about going out into the deep water, because they may not have ever seen the motion picture ‘Jaws.’ See the benefit about being a senior citizen! In our day, most of the old timers stood by the knee-deep water and did the M’CHIA STROKE. Every time a wave came, they would dip and KVELL, ‘OY, A M’CHIA!’”

Cindy Adams (NY Post) wrote, “Barbara [Walters] Friday announcement of Rosie O’Donnell] as replacement YENTA on ‘The View’ was kept even from fellow panel members until Thursday. [She replaces Meredith Vieira.]”

2007 William Safire wrote, “A few months ago, in editorializing about the auto accident that befell Governor John Corzine of New Jersey, The Times concluded, “Whether rich or poor, governor or ordinary SCHLEP like you and me, he would’ve been a lot better off if he had been wearing his seat belt.”

David Hinckley (New York Daily News, Dec. 8) wrote a television review with the following headline:

MITCH ALBOM’S FOR ONE MORE DAY TV movie is full of schmaltz.

2008 Rob Meltzer wrote (April 18), “You can’t teach ‘saychel’ to a candidate. That’s a Yiddish word that has a connotation of both political commonsense and the ability to use it. The entire book “What It Takes” by Richard Ben Cramer pretty much arrives at the same conclusion. Obama is only charismatic when he is not being put on the spot, which is a bad thing. He could learn a lot from Bill [Clinton], but not that.”

2009 Anthony M. Destefano (“Lawyer asks trustee to pity victims of Bernard Madoff,” Newsday, April 30), writes: “When the law seems to be going against Garden City attorney Jerome Reisman, he said he digs deep in his legal arsenal and reminds the court about the case of rakhmones.

Actually, rakhmones is the Yiddish term for pity, and for many victims of swindler Bernard Madoff, compassion is really what they need now from the legal system, said Reisman.

New York Post, Page Six writer, Richard Johnson wrote (May 11): "Sightings - Ruth Madoff in sunglasses schlepping a roller bag (filled with jewelry?) north on Lexington Ave. at 60th."

2010 National Broadside's headline (May 20) read:
Anthony Weiner Is a Shady No Goodnik.

2011 The On Language By Philologos column, Forward, Feb. 18, discussed the word "faynshmeker." "Faynshmeker, it's true, means the same in Israeli slang that it means in Yiddish and in Yinglish or, for that matter, in German, where the word--from the adjective fein and the noun Schmecker, "taster"--is spelled Feinschmecker. The dictionary translate it as "gourmet."... Yiddish faynshmecker, on the other hand, has a whiff of sarcasm or mockery." (There's the implication of a person of OVERLY refined taste.)

2012 Rachel Saltz, reviewed the show, "A Letter to Harvey Milk."
"...Frannie (Cheryl Stern) may herself be a Jewish joke, but she has the funniest bits in 'Harvey Milk.' She's a relief, not just because she gets to rhyme shanda (or shame) with Rwanda in one of the show's better numbers, but also because she's tart and unbridled. ...But the musical, based on a short story by Leslea Newman and directed by David Schechter, is too lugubrious to be really moving. As Frannie would say, enough already."

Note: "Genug iz genug" means, "enough is enough."

The Editor of the Gantseh Megillah, Michael David Hanna-Fein passed away. He provided an online shtetl where we could all meet and share ideas. He was committed to promoting Jewish life and culture.

Note: "Gants" means whole or entire. "Megillah" means a long involved story or account. In police language, we hear, "Get a stenotypist; take down the whole megilla." (Leo Rosten)

Lenore Skenazy ("50 Jewish Things To Do Before You're 13," 6/29, The Forward, wrote:

No. 20. Learn some Yiddish (even curses!) or Ladino.....

No. 23. Try a matzo ball.

Note: The Yiddish words for the “matzo ball” are “dos kneydL.”

Temple Beth Torah in Westbury, New York, hosted the Long Island Kosher BBQ Championship, a festival that includes live music and family-friendly activities. Brandon Unger, 28, was the captain of a team named, “50 Shades of Flayshik.”

Note: “Flayshik” or “fleyshik” means “made of meat.”

- 2014 Ellen Scolnic & Joyce Eisenberg (“It’s Rosh Hashanah: Hey Mister Cantor Put a Record On,” The Forward, Sept. 26), gave 10 reasons why celebrating both Jewish and secular New Years is a win-win situation for the chosen people:
- . Getting all fapitzed...In synagogue, a quick scan of the pews can tell us who bought the latest fall fashions: They are the ones shvitsing in their new tweed suits and knee-high boots.”

R’ Moshe Sherizen (“The Easy-Shmeezy GUIDE TO YIDDISH”), wrote, “Abercrombie mit fitch farkoyft di besteh kleyder,” which means “Abercrombie and Fitch sell the best clothes.”

- 2000 Judy Woodruff, during the 2000 presidential race, said, “We’re waiting for the vote from Florida. That’s the big megillah.”
- Note: The word “megillah” means “the whole works, the complete details, a long meaningless rigamarole.

The Daily News (Nov. 9) reported that Mel Brooks so wanted to help Al Gore’s cause in Florida that, on Election Day, he gave a number of radio interviews in the Sunshine State and spoke Yiddish throughout.

- 1999 Prof. Leo Lieberman, Jewish Times Staff Writer, July 2, wrote about his Mama and Papa: “And when Mama had saved a little extra in the chipped sugar bowl, she bought Papa a white shirt or a tie or new socks for a special occasion. And when he told her, “Better you can buy a new dress for yourself,” she only laughed and said, “I need more to keep the closet company? And besides, a man has to look presentable when he goes to work. You want everyone to think you’re a SHLUMPER and that I don’t take care of you so the neighbors will have something to gossip about? And you couldn’t argue about that.”

Note: A “shlumper” is the same as “shlump.” A “shlumperdik” is someone who is unkempt or sloppy.

The Jupiter Crab Co. on Singer Island (FL), advertised in February their Sunday brunch which includes Snow Crab Legs and a raw bar: “All this for \$19.95 (after the coupon). \$19.95? That’s bupkes fo this feast.”

Note: “bupkes”/”bobkes” means “A meaningless amount.”

Norman Pearlstine, Time Inc., editor-in-chief, insists that if a writer absolutely has to use Yiddish, he or she must understand it, explaining, “If you call someone a Putz, you should know it doesn’t just mean a stupid person. (New York Magazine, 2/1/99)

1998 An e-mail titled, “You Might Just Be A Jewish Redneck If...” contains #18: You belt buckle is bigger than your yarmulke.

Note: A “yarmulke” is the traditional Jewish skull cap. It indicates that someone (God) is above them.

The Daily News, Oct. 22, reported that Sen Alfonse D’Amato used a Yiddish insult to describe his Jewish opponent, Chuck Schumer, and mocked the weight of Rep. Jerold Nadler. D’amato called Schumer a “putz”-- vulgar slang for penis in Yiddish.

Geoff Baum (Forbes ASAP, Aug. 24), wrote about working as an executive recruiter for the Cleveland-based search firm Christian & Timbers. What an odd second job for a rabbi, Bruce Abrams, who recruits mostly for high-tech Israeli startups. Abrams wrote, “When I’m looking for a great executive, I’m looking for a mensch-- someone who is inner-directed, high integrity, word is their bond...”

1997 In a New York Times (Aug. 31) article titled, “Matzoh Brawl,” Abe Asofsy sounded off to Rep. Robert Wexler of Boca Raton, regarding dozens of people who complained about the cost of a five-pound carton of matzoh: \$13.00. The same carton in N. Y. and N. J. sold for just \$3.99. What sticker shock! Asofsky said, “It’s a sacrilege. As my mother would say, “Es past nit”--it’s not fitting.”

Charles W. Bell (“Priest in a class of his own,” Daily News, May 24) wrote about Guy Massie, 47, who was one of the 82 graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He is a Catholic priest, the first

ever to receive a degree from Jewish Theological. Bell writes that during his three years at the seminary, he [Massie] found himself dropping Hebrew and Yiddish expressions into everyday conversations--"very hamish (warm)," he said, when asked to describe the atmosphere at Jewish Theological.

In turn, classmates found Massie a mensch.

- 1996 Robin Newman, author of "How To Meet A Mensch in New York," sees it as her mission "to rescue" as-yet-unwedded New Yorkers. She's reducing the rate on Mensch Finders, her relationship-consulting business for men and women. Her rate normally \$75 for a 1 1/2-hour session, is now \$65.
Note: A "mensch"/"mentsch" is a special man or person. Think Jimmy Stewart in "It's a Wonderful Life."

- 1995 A Wheaties [cereal] ad announced, "Wheaties...It's the whole megillah."

Aileen Jacobson did a theater review of "Too Jewish," starring Avi Hoffman. Appearing in Newsday (March 14), she wrote:

"In one sequence, he promises to sing 'every Yiddish song ever written, with simultaneous translation.' What follows is a lively medley (yup, "Bei Mir Bist Du Shoen" is in there) with English lyrics on large posters. In an inspired section, he imagines Broadway plays in Yinglish: 'My Fair Latke' or that musical in which complainers in a midwestern nursing home sing 'Ooooooo Glaucoma!' (aka "Oklahoma!")..."

Jackie Mason said, "The word 'oy' by itself cannot be considered hateful. If you're hit by a truck, you might say 'oy.' Any time a Jew is in shock, he says 'oy.'"

The New Yorker, The Talk of the Town, July 24, 1995, contained this comment: "Until she died in 1994, at the age of ninety-five, Sayra Lebenthal [Jim Lebenhal's mom] was hoking her son's chainik and ruling the firm that she and her husband, Louis, started in 1925."

Note: "Hak nit keyn tshaynik" means "don't be long winded and boring."

Aviva Patz wrote, "A Map to the New York Mentsh (The Forward, Oct. 27): "Although there are no right or wrong meeting strategies, according to Ms. Newman [Robin Gorman Newman], some have better 'mentsh potential' than others. Break from the club and bar scene in favor of something interest-oriented. Try serving at a soup kitchen."

Michael Elkin ("Reel Weddings Are Made in Tinsel Town," 1993 Winter Wedding Guide) wrote about the 1994 French Film, "A La Mode": Oy, another tailor! Well, actually the hero of this 1994 French film is a young designer--a gentile orphan who becomes Jewish after being adopted by a Jewish tailor. The film's climax is the young man's wedding--highlighted by his self-designed bizarre garb inspired by religious attire. It's a lesson on what not to wear to SHUL on the big day."

Note: "shul" is colloquial Yiddish for synagogue.

The New York Times Metropolitan Diary (Aug. 3) described the following scene: Still, the Metropolitan Museum. This time it's Leonard S. Levine who does the eavesdropping as two middle-aged women try to wend their way into one of the more crowded galleries.

"I think we can skip this section," one of them says. "It looks like the beginning of his Early Mishegoss Period."

Note: "Mishegoss" or "mishegas" is a wacky, irrational, absurd belief; nonsense, hallucinations.

1994 Calvin Trillon wrote a piece for The New Yorker's "Shouts And Murmurs (Aug. 15), titled, "So, Nu, Dr. Freud?" His opening paragraph: "According to a quotation carried recently in the New York Observer, Jorge Luis Borges, the Latin-American fantasist, was asked during a visit he once made to the New York Institute for the Humanities, what he thought of Sigmund Freud. "Never liked him," Borges said. "Too schmutzig."

Note: "shmutzik" means "dirty" or "soiled."

1993 Police Commissioner, Raymond Kelly, said yesterday that he cringed when comedian Jackie Mason called his top uniformed police officer, who is black, a "shvartzer."

Note: "shvarts" means "black."

The Cherry Lane Theatre in Manhattan presents a show titled, "Bubbe Meises - A Granddaughter's Musical Journey. It's funny, it's touching...It's in English!

Note: A "bobe mayse" is an old wive's tale.

When Bruce Funk was driving through a Jewish section of Flushing, Queens (NY), he noticed that, whether by accident or intent, the marquee of the Main Street Cinemas announced:

NOW PLAYING
THE OY LUCK CLUB

The Daily News (May 17) quoted Dustin Hoffman, who told them recently, "I like everything about it [grandparenting] but the word grandfather." He opts instead for the name "grandshtupper."

Aaron Spelling said, "My mom was someone who taught me a lot about Israel. She had a little blue-and-white tin can with a slit on top, which she called her pushke. Every night, when my dad went to sleep, she would go through his trousers and gather up the change and put it in the pushke. And when I got paid for my paper route on Thursday afternoon, I would have to put a dime in the pushke."

Note: From a speech at a 1993 dinner of the American Friends of the Hebrew University.

1992 The April issue of American Heritage discussed "de knippel"--a nest egg that wives put aside in a knotted kerchief, saved from their house money and held for a rainy day. Abe Cahan (the "Bintel Brief") would try to resolve disputes over "de knippel."

Zelda Shluker wrote in Hadassah Magazine (Nov. 1992): "In New York you don't have to be Jewish to eat bagels, blintzes and knishes; to be a maven on the best delicatessen; to use Moishe's, Sabra's or Shleppers moving companies. Where else in the world can you find a frum female trader on the floor of the Stock Exchange?"

Note: "Frum" means "pious," "religious" and "devout."

"Don't sew a button on yourself without putting a piece of thread between your teeth or you'll sew up your brains." This is just one of many pearls of wisdom, or bubbe meises in the one-woman

show, “Bubbe Meise, Bubbe Stories,” in which a woman recalls the tales of her immigrant grandmothers to come to grips with her own life.”

- 1991 Rabbi Joel Y. Zion gave a special lecture at Temple Israel in Lawrence, L. I., titled: “Humor and Irony in the Bible and Talmud: Where Did Woody Allen and Jackie Mason Learn Their Schtick?”
Note: “Schtick” means “a special bit of acting.”

Prominent law professor, Allan Dershowitz published the book titled, “Chutzpah.” “Chutzpah,” says Dershowitz, is “boldness, assertiveness, a willingness to demand what is due, to defy tradition, to challenge authority, to raise eyebrows.”

- 1990 B. L. Ochman, a PR woman serves as head of a Manhattan-based outfit called RENT-A-KVETCH. If you have a grievance, Ochman will find the proper authority to kvetch about it.
Note: “Kvetch” means “to complain.” “Der kvetsh”--an alternate spelling--is the complainer.

- 1985 Leslie Wexner, Chairman of The Limited (“Newsweek, Dec. 30), wrote that he has “terminal shpikes”--that constantly drives him to try something new.
Note: “Shpilkes” means “antsiness.”

Henry Beard and Roy McKie (“Cooking--A Dictionary for those Who Have to Cook, Love to Cook, Or Refuse to Cook”) defined the word “Lentil”: Yiddish word for a dinner guest who comes into the kitchen, takes lids off pots, stirs the contents, adds seasonings, and then complains bitterly about the results.

- 1983 Tim Boxer, Traveling With the Stars (The Jewish Week, Sept. 9), wrote, “Seymour Kleinman, a top New York corporate lawyer, is on a one-man mission to stop people from crying--by keeping them laughing. He says that’s the secret of Jewish survival.

He was born in SBN--South Bronx nishdugedacht. “We were poor,” he says. “But we were independently poor.” “As poor as we were, we kept a pushke for charity.”

Note: A “pushke” or “pushkeh,” was a poor box. Ruth and Bob Grossman wrote in their cookbook, “A pushkeh was the Jewish

Chase Manhattan.”

MARJORIE GOTTLIEB WOLFE is a “logophile”--a lover of words.

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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

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