

# **The Schmooze** **Stories with a Yiddish Twist**

## **SENSITIVITY RULES FOR COPS\***

\*The Yiddish word for “cops” is “kaps.”

The Yiddish word for “sensitivity” is “sensitiviti.”

A bad person-- someone capable of evil- is a “vos-in-der-kort” (lit., represents every bad card in the deck.)

A “gazlen” is a criminal, thief or racketeer.

“Crooked actions” are “ganaivisheh shtiklech”).

“Mit honik ken men chapen mer fligen vi mit essik.”

(With honey you can catch more flies than with vinegar.)

*by*  
**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe**



**Syosset, New York**

Jewish police officers? Cops wearing a yarmulke?

There are about 3,000 or so Jews in the New York Police Department. Rabbi Alvin Kass says that “Jews are serving in the force and have had to combat general prejudice (“forurtl”) and stereotypes about typical ‘Jewish professions,’ sometimes from within their own families. The stereotype of Jews is that they’re doctors, lawyers or businessmen, or accountants,” says Kass.

New York Shomrim Society is the oldest and largest fraternal organization for Jewish law enforcement in the country.

Source: “Inside the Heads, Hearts and Yarmulkes of Jewish Cops” by Sam Kestenbaum, Forward, 1/18/15.

The word “sensitivity” means an ability to understand what other people need, and be helpful (“nutsik”) and kind (“frayndlekhkayt”) to them. There’s

an expression that says, “Ahfen goniff brent dos hittel” (A guilty person is always sensitive). Literally, it means “on a thief burns his hat.”)

New York cops (“kaps”) are now required to use calming phrases rather than resort to violence (“gvald”) when they have to subdue dangerous (“geferlekh”) disturbed people. Commissioner Bill Bratton suggests the following conversation:

“I am [name] and I’m here to help,” is what officers should tell an emotionally disturbed person on the street (“di gas”).

Yes, there are 16 pages of instructions to be followed when it is obvious that someone is out of control (“aoyes fun kontrol”). This includes individuals who are screaming, cursing, balling his or her hands into fists and sweating profusely.

Another change: cops must fill out a new “Threat, Resistance or Injury (“vund”) Incident Worksheet” every time they fight with a suspect or use a Taser. New rules explicitly prohibit cops from using force to keep suspects from swallowing illegal drugs.

Police officers must participate in active listening (80% listen/20% talk). They are told to use brief phrases to show they are listening and allow the other person to continue talking: “I see”; “OK”, “Yes”; head nod.

Remember Leo Rosten’s “nebech”/“nit parken” (no parking) story:

A “nebech” began to park on a busy street in the garment district. Along comes a cop.

“Officer,” asked the nebech, “is it okay to park here?”

“Absolutely not!”

“B--but, how about all those cars that are already parked?”

“They didn’t ask.”

Shown below are some suggested Yiddish expressions that a police officer can use when dealing with an emotionally disturbed person or a suspected criminal (“farbrekher”):

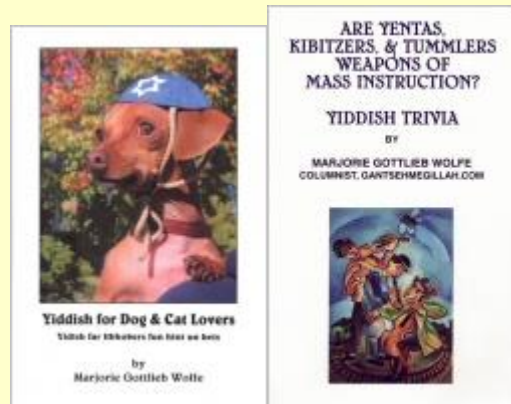
1. “Ich hais...” (My name is .....)
1. “Eier nomen? Vi haist ir?” (Your name?)
2. “Vos macht ir?” (How are you?)

3. "Vos zogt ir"? (What are you saying?)
  4. "Nu?" So what's the hurry?
  5. "Vos tut zich?" (What is going on?)
  6. "Ret ir english?" (Do you speak English?)
  7. "Tsi farshtait ir?" (Do you understand?)
  8. "Let's shmooz." (Let's talk.)
  9. "Ir gefelt mir zaier." (You please me a great deal.)
  10. "Es frait mich eich tsu kenen." (I am delighted to meet you.)
  11. "Macht zich bakvem." (Make yourself comfortable.)
  12. [what you did is] "nisht geferlekh"--no big deal/not so terrible.
  13. "Can I take you to the 'hekdesht'--homeless shelter?"
  14. "Let's not 'makhen a tzimmes' (make a big deal) out of this."
  15. "Zorg nich nit" (Don't worry.)
  16. "Alts vet zich oysglaykhn." (Everything will smooth itself out.)
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MARJORIE WOLFE agrees with Therese Fowler: "Some rules are nothing but old habits that people are afraid to change."

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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of  
two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and  
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