

The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

COMPETITION

Note: The Yiddish words meaning “the competitor” is “der konkurent.”

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe



Syosset, New York

A flower does not think of competing to the flower next to it. Flowers don't have to compete. It just blooms.

CELINE DION said, “I'm not in competition with anybody but myself. My goal is to beat my last performance.”

NOAM NESNER (“Let's Turn Jewish Practice Into Something Competitive,” 2/20/13, forward.com) discusses social competition. She writes, “People would do things to earn rewards, and then compete with each other. Here's a simple example: if congregations logged their daily minyan attendance and published the data daily, I imagine minyan attendance would go up nationwide. If Daf Yomi, the act of reading a page of Talmud a day were to be combined with a daily quiz on content and people could compare their quiz scores with those of their study partners, they'd surely focus more each day.”

- Q. What do these people have in common?
Steven Spielberg, Matt Damon, James Franco, Michael Bloomberg, and Charles Osgood.
- A. They're all imparting their wisdom (“khokhme”) on new college graduates.

Barack Obama will be honored at Rutgers University as the 250th Anniversary Commencement Speaker. Yeshiva University has invited philanthropist Robert Kraft to deliver the Keynote Address. Looking back, Rabbi Shmuley Boteach gave the Commencement speech at Southern Utah University on May 3, 2013.

His speech just fascinated me. It dealt with the topic of “competition.” He said, in part: (Note: The Yiddish words have been added.)

My friends, as you graduate today, you must know that leaving the confines and the comforts of academia, the world will seek to strip you of that one last article of faith without which you cannot live. It will seek to strip you of the belief (“der gloybn”) that you are special (“spetsyet”), that you are unique, that there is no one like you and that you have a gift to share with the world (“di velt”) that has never preceded you and will never be replaced by any other than you, that if you waste your life comparing your gift to others, if you always live competitively, you will have squandered your potential to make the world a richer place. There is room for competition. There is room for competitiveness in making money. There is room for competition in sports There is room for competition in life, my friends, but only in what you do and never (“keyn mol nit”) in who and what you are. You must never allow that competitiveness to breach your soul (“neshome”)

To the majority of the women who are graduating today--brilliant (“brilyant”) women using their minds to succeed and accomplish--you will sometimes give your heart to a man who appears to be a gallant knight in shining armor, and he will restore it to you in tiny, shattered (“shaterd”) pieces. You will, God willing, grow to be parents and sometimes your kids will pick up the phone from the university (“universitet”) to treat you like an ATM--not that any of the parents here know what I’m talking about. You will at times, feel like you are a commodity (“skhoyre”) and at that moment, you must remember: do not allow the world to pry you from the certainty, the faith, and the conviction (“di ibertsaygung”) that you are special. You may not see your name on the Forbes list or your picture on the cover of Vogue, but it makes no difference because you are unique and you are special.

MARJORIE WOLFE follows the advice of Leo Rosten and never says “Mazel Tov” to a surgeon, dentist, etc. after the successful

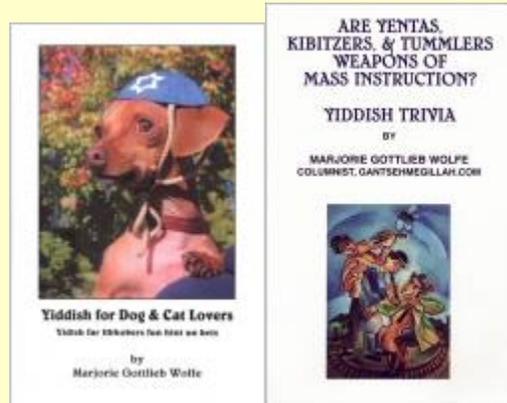
completion of a difficult operation: this congratulates him on his skill in performing what you now admit you knew was a risky business. It is permissible to say "Mazel Tov, you passed the SATs."

Marjorie wishes a "Mazel Tov" all ALL GRADUATES.

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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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