

Der Bay

The International Anglo-Yiddish Newsletter

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Overview of the 11th IAYC Conference

This is the second in a series of reports on the IAYC XI Conference August 3-6, 2007 at the Marriott Cleveland East Hotel. Each month there will be an update and a report on another phase of this great Yiddish Conference.

Both exhibitors and vendors will have tables in the main lobby around the large, beautiful, spraying water fountain.

There will be five plenary sessions (ones where the entire conference attendees are in the main ballroom listening to a featured program). The IAYC pattern is to start each morning off with a featured lecture presentation. On both Sunday and Monday the second morning will be entertaining ones.

Each evening after the banquet there will be awards and a full program of top-flight Yiddish entertainers.

There will be 5 sessions with 5 concurrent presentations/workshops each. These will be scheduled so that they will range from all-Yiddish to English/Yiddish and all English. All phases of Yiddish interest will be covered.

August 3, 2007

Registration, and orientation session by Fishl. Introductions and greetings, dinner, election of 2007-8 IAYC Board of Directors, entertainment.

August 4, 2007

Early Saturday morning services in Hebrew and Yiddish. Lerner Memorial lecture followed

by a pre-lunch session and 2 post lunch sessions. The evening program will be The Workmen's Circle Gala Banquet with Adrienne Cooper and her troupe. The 2nd IAYC Lifetime Yiddish Service Award will be announced.

August 5, 2007

Featured lecture in plenary session followed by the People's Yiddish Stage with 5 acts. Following lunch there will be 2 sessions with 5 presentations each. After dinner the entire conference attendees will be bused to the 29th Annual Concert in the Park (Cain Park). After the performance the performers will be coming back to our Marriott Hotel where we shall all have dessert and a chance to shmues.

August 6, 2007

There will be a featured lecture in plenary session followed by a great closing act including group singing and dancing. Special effort is being made to have a very strong closing experience followed by lunch. An excellent time to share ideas with newly found friends and old acquaintances.

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Yiddish: Fight, Flight or by Philip Fishl Kutner

Before launching into “fight, flight or”, let us examine our alternatives. There is an analogy with prehistoric humans whose earliest methods of survival were “fight or flight.” To this end in the evolutionary process the adrenal gland developed along with its production of the hormone adrenaline.

When confronted with a threatening situation, the additional release of this hormone increased the energy available. Our early ancestors were able to run faster or fight harder when the adrenaline level was increased.

What are our choices today for survival of our beloved *mame-loshn*? Fighting against the ever-present cultural assimilation, and the trend to have our children put in an either-or adversarial position with Hebrew, has been a losing battle ever since Israel’s decision to use Hebrew as the national language. More important was the Hebrew schools decision to not teach Yiddish.

Likewise running away from confrontation and playing the least-effort game has resulted in a constantly eroding pool of native-born Yiddish speakers. So now we have been dealing with an ever-decreasing number of fluent Yiddish speakers, Yiddish readers, Yiddish writers and Yiddish teachers. This “bleeding” of our resource pool has been taking its toll.

“Leave it to the Khasidim,” is another battle cry. “They multiply like rabbits, are extremely loyal and are using Yiddish. In a few generations they will populate the Jewish community and bring their brand of Yiddish along.” Thus, there is nothing to worry about.

This sounds like a good argument. Any help Yiddish can get should be admired, fostered, welcomed and appreciated. However, if it is at the price of losing our rich Yiddish literature theater, music and poetry—the price is too high.

Another Viable Alternative

Is there another possible path to “fight or flight”? The philosophy of Lateral Thinking is, “If you can’t pass by them by confrontational encounters, go around, go under or go over them.” In other words if you can’t beat them—join them.

In martial arts one is taught to augment the opponent’s force in a direction away from you.

When the opponent is rushing toward you, step aside, and pull her along in the direction she is going.

In Israel there already are signs of Yiddish words creeping into the Hebrew language. Likewise there has been a movement in Yiddish to replace words of Germanic origin with Hebrew words.

The key in lateral thinking is getting your foot into the door. You cannot get her to listen until you get her attention. The story that dad told about his experience in the US Army in WWI was about his first experience with a mule.

It seems that the proverbial stubbornness of the mule was what dad encountered. The Sergeant came over and hit the mule over the head with a baseball bat. My dad was shocked until he was told that you cannot expect a mule to listen to you until you get his attention.

We cannot hit others over the head, but we can get in the back door by giving them what they want. If we remember that Yiddish is the Language AND culture of the Askenazic Jews of Eastern Europe, let’s place more emphasis on the cultural portion of Yiddish.

The first area in which we can achieve results is music. Especially among the young there is an interest in music—klezmer music (KlezKamp, KlezKanada, Ashkenaz). Books like the *Mlotek* songbooks have the lyrics in Yiddish, English and transliteration. We can help the singers with pronunciation. There are Yiddish choruses from New York to San Francisco and from Florida to Los Angeles in addition to Canada, e tc.

A second area is genealogy. Tracing one’s heritage is a fascinating way of learning about your ancestors. JewishGen is the major Jewish genealogical website on the Internet. Avotaynu is the major Jewish genealogical journal. Jewish historical societies are another rich source of original materials.

The third area pertains to a smaller group—the theater. With the blossoming of the *Folksbiene* and the West Coast Jewish Theatre there is much hope. With the many wonderful scripts on stage and in the films the possibility can be increased in future years. We also can add the over 50 Jewish theaters in the U.S. There are 8 in New York and 4 in California.

Tsu gast baym zeyde mendele

By Gerry Kane

To sit at Mendele Mokher Sforim's table...to sit beside the man who said "Come what may! I will fight above all for this Jargon and serve my people" ... is an honour. It's true the Yiddish table is meager these days, the menu is thin, but it was just as thin when Mendele set out to defend his jargon—his mame-loshn, and he encouraged an army of defenders to follow his banner. And, the literature we built in defense of the Jargon....

So, here I am, in my 73rd year, Gerry Kane, sitting at Mendele's table. Sitting surrounded by his books, both in Yiddish and in English, and enjoying his description of ne'er-do-wells and knaves, his sharp eye for the dirt and poverty of the Russian Shtetlakh, his pictures of the natural world and his social criticism both of Yiddish society and the larger world and know that when I sit at his table, read about Fishke der Krumer, (Fishke the Lame) or Di Klatshe (the Nag) I know that I'm reading about the disparities and inequities and foolishness that invest the human condition, and especially the Jewish condition biz haynt tsu tog.

Gerry Kane is a child of veltlikhe yidn...a mame un tate vos hobn gehorevet in Toronto's sweat shops. Oreme shnayders, who instilled in their children the love of Yiddish, our traditions and literature. I grew up listening to my mother and her friends, once a week, after working in the shops, come together in a leyen-krayz, a reading circle and educate each other reading, Mendele, Sholem Aleykhem, even Don Quixote in Yiddish.

I also grew up in the Morris Winchevsky shule...the Toronto branch of Itche Goldberg's veltlikhe shule movement. Wonderful teachers! Inspiring teachers! To have played Tevye while still a kid...who needed Broadway.

And, then you think you grow up...you go into the world and you leave your mame-loshn mit der mamen. English is the language of your career as a broadcaster, a copywriter, a communications advisor to business and government and a journalist, ...except when you communicate with your mother.

She refused to read the letters I wrote her in English. "Yidish, Yankele, Yidish." Oh, yes, mayn nomen is Yankele. So, I wrote to her in Yiddish. And, was comfortable doing so. Every time I came home, from wherever, I took her copies of Yidishe Kultur and found that I was more and more drawn to that Jargon that Mendele said he would fight for.

And, then one day, standing on a street corner, I'm met by Sam Lipshitz and Label Basman, one the former editor of the Jewish weekly the Vochebnlat and the other my shule teacher who put me on stage as Tevye. And they told me the meeting was at eight o'clock that night, and I was expected to be there. What meeting—the meeting of the Committee for Yiddish of the Canadian Jewish Congress. As, it happens I had a free evening. So, I went. How could you refuse your shule teacher? The meeting changed my life.

Sitting around the table of the Committee for Yiddish was a group of older men and women... who twenty, thirty, even forty years earlier fought each other mightily. They were old Communists, Socialist, Anarchists, Left Poale Zion, Right Poale Zion, they had a world to win. They were the people behind the Forverts, the Freiheit, the Vokhenblat, Yidishe Kultur, Tsukumft. They were di veltlikhe bavegung.

But, Hitler and Stalin had destroyed that world and the one thing that united them and overcame any lasting political animosities was their love for mame-loshn. They were determined that there would be a place for Yiddish in a community that had become overtly middle class and was, like all North American communities shucking off the "old."

They inspired me. And, I came to a second meeting. And, then I became chair of the Toronto Committee, and then I got involved in raising money for the Yiddish courses at the University of Toronto, and then I started lecturing in Yiddish and English on Yiddish literature and would you believe it twenty-five years have gone by, and Toronto is home of the Friends of Yiddish, the Ashkenaz Festival, the Jewish Folk Choir and an inspired group of younger people finding reason to sit by Mendele's table and remember his words, "I will fight above all for this Jargon and serve my people."

Editor's note: Mr. Kane will be a feature speaker at the IAYC Cleveland Conference next August. He is a vibrant and dynamic lecturer. His presentations in his native Toronto have been very well attended.

His experience in the media and as a journalist have sharpened his public speaking and he will have you enthralled as he weaves stories of and about Mendele—the grandfather of modern Yiddish literature. 2007 is Mendele's 90th yortsayt.

The Yiddish Folk Chorus of South Florida

by Mel Greenblatt

The Yiddish Folk Chorus of South Florida stands today as the leading performer of classic Yiddish folk and choral music in Palm Beach County. Led by the talented Shelley Tenzer, the chorus sings of life in the European shtetl, of the immigrant experience and of the music of a spirited young Israel. We sing the music drawn from a rich history of composers, poets and arrangers: Itzik Manger, Morris Jacob Schaefer Rosenfeld, and Maurice Rauch. The repertoire ranges from Goldfaden to Guthrie; from a Yiddish lullaby to a song describing the American landscape.

Today's chorus had its origins in the original Jewish Folk Chorus, organized in 1990 by Harvey Schreiberman and Philip (Fishl) Loeb. By the time he retired in 1988, Schreiberman had already earned numerous awards and had achieved national recognition as a conductor of Jewish choruses all across the United States. Fishl Loeb, a lifelong activist in Yiddish organizations, served as the driving force behind the new chorus. As a result of their combined efforts, rehearsal space was secured in the Holocaust Library at Florida Atlantic University.

Membership in the chorus was open to all who wished to join. Word of the new Jewish Folk Chorus spread quickly and the news attracted people from across the spectrum of the Jewish community; from all affiliations and all backgrounds: Yiddish speaking and non-Yiddish speaking, both secular and religious. "You don't have to be a great singer to be in the chorus", Harvey would say, "You just have to want to sing".

Harvey would also often repeat the axiom, "A folk vus zingt vet kaynmol nit untergayn" (A people who sing will never perish). Those words still hold great meaning for the 40 men and women who comprise the membership of today's Folk Chorus. They are brought together not simply by their love of music but by their love of Yiddish, the language of their parents and grandparents.

For those of us who had grown up with the music, every rehearsal was a homecoming of sorts. The melodies and the lyrics were etched in our memories from Mittleshule, from summer camp and from having heard them from our parents, many of whom sang with the Freiheit Gezangs Farein. This was our music. The Thursday afternoon rehearsals became a popular stop for visitors from up north wanting to see old friends.

Following Harvey Schreiberman's untimely passing in 1997 a new conductor, a cantor, was hired. In spite of understandings reached about repertoire it soon became apparent that the new cantor/conductor was more intent in pressing his interest in liturgical music than he was in the Yiddish folk music selected by Harvey Schreiberman.

The chorus membership split. One faction opted to remain with the Cantor. The other faction opted to reorganize as The Yiddish Folk Chorus of South Florida. Shelley Tenzer and Dudl Bernstein agreed to serve as co-conductors. Thus, the chorus was able to continue the tradition of bringing this unique form of Yiddish folk music to a wider audience. Both Dudl and Shelley brought their own freshness of style, skill and humor to the task and before long a disparate group of amateur singers were organized into a group of polished, near-professional performers.

In March of 2003 the Yiddish Folk Chorus suffered another devastating loss with the passing of Dudl Bernstein. Dudl had put his heart and soul into The Yiddish Folk Chorus and he would be sorely missed.

If there were trepidations about the following Fall 2003/04 season, they were quickly dispelled by Shelley Tenzer, who with her enthusiasm and quiet determination, pulled the chorus together again. And for the past three years the chorus has continued to flourish under Shelley's direction.

The chorus meets and rehearses every Thursday afternoon from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM at Temple Sinai, Atlantic Ave, Delray Beach. This season the first rehearsal took place on Thursday December 7th. The season will end on March 29th 2007. New members are welcome. There are no auditions; there is no requirement to read music nor does one need to speak or understand Yiddish. As Harvey used to say "you just have to want to sing"

We look forward to the challenges of the 2006/07 season, and hope to expand our ranks and our performance schedule.

For information about membership or for a performance for your club or organization contact Hy Perlstein by phone at 561-451-0236 or e-mail Hy at Hymimi01@aol.com. Or you may contact Mel Greenblatt by phone at 561-733-2680 or e-mail at Eemel@aol.com.

Yiddish Dynasties—The Katz/Blacker Family

Troin Katz-Handler

When I think of Yiddish literary "dynasties" (more than one generation) in the United States, certain families come to mind, such as Opatoshu, Kerler, Schaechter/Gottesman, Goldberg, Weinreich, Mlotek, and Novershtern/Niborski. While Avrom Novershtern and Yitskhok Niborski are step-brothers, one in Israel and the other in France, both visit the U.S. so often that they have become part of the American scene. (The non-secular family list is long and includes the Jacobsons of the *Algemeiner Journal*.) I include my Katz/Blacker family.

My father, Menke Katz, a major Yiddish/English lyric poet, wrote 20 books, 10 in Yiddish, 10 in English. The book *MENKE, The Complete Yiddish Poems of Menke Katz*, 2005, was translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav. It has a 70-page introduction by Dovid Katz and is the most comprehensive analysis of Menke's life and work.

My mother, Chaske Blacker (1905-1944), was a sweatshop worker who left the equivalent of two volumes of Yiddish short stories, which were serialized in the Yiddish press but never appeared as bound books. I am translating her novella, "Katsovim" (butchers) which was serialized 62 years ago in *The Frayhayt* for 33 double-column days. The was missing last chapter in he scrap book. This missing last chapter was miraculously tracked down by the local librarian in Monroe Township, NJ; and so now I can proceed.

In 1998, my professional-singer daughter Sheh-Sheh (Shelley) produced an album of Yiddish songs, *Lider Fun Mayn Zeydn*, mostly folk songs which she had learned from Menke. During one song, she harmonized with my daughter Chaske (Claudia), who has set two of my poems to music. The Yiddish chorus of *Century Village*, West Palm Beach, Florida has performed both.

Dovid Katz, my brother, has written many books in both Yiddish and English. His latest book is *Words On Fire, The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*. He is now working on the paperback edition, which will contain extensive footnotes. Dovid is professor of Yiddish Language and Literature at Vilnius University, Lithuania, where he has relocated the former Oxford Yiddish program. He and I are American-born, and despite our geographic and age differences, are close friends, keep in touch by email, and see each other when he visits Florida.

From the ages of 9-15, I attended the Passaic Workmen's Circle shule. My professional Yiddish

career began after graduation from Passaic, N.J. high school when I became secretary to Itche Goldberg, editor of *Yiddishe Kultur*. He sent me to learn Yiddish shorthand and typing. I learned Yiddish grammar on the job by taking dictation from him and other Yiddish writers. (I attended NYU while studying to be an English teacher.)

After 5 years with Itche, I left to raise a family, become a Long Island shule teacher and completed a 30-year career as a teacher of English/journalism in a secondary school.

After retiring, I returned to Yiddish. I volunteered at Itche's while studying Yiddish at Columbia, the YIVO, and the Workmen's Circle in NY. Thanks to a "shidekh" (match) arranged by Dr. Simon Prussin of Los Angeles with Prof. Kazuo Uedo of Fukuoka University, Japan, I co-wrote two books which appeared in Japan: *Tri-Lingual Guide To Japan in Japanese/Yiddish/English* (1966) and *Dialogues for Japanese Students of Yiddish*. (2000).

I began writing Yiddish poetry the night after my father died. I learned a year later that Dovid had begun to write Yiddish fiction at the same time. He was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship for Yiddish fiction. Dr. Mordecai Schaechter, my teacher, invited me to join the *Shraybkrayz* after I turned in poems along with my homework.

My husband Frank and I share our Yiddish/Jewish work. At the Teaneck IAYC conference, he aroused much interest with his talk, "The Amazing Rescue of the 6th Lubovitcher Rebbe by Nazi Soldiers and Its Effect on Yiddish in the U.S." We performed bilingual humor programs hundreds of times as a team for Elderhostels and other organizations.

I lead 2 *leyenkrayzn* (reading circles), one in West Palm Beach, FL and the other in Monroe Township, N.J. I am a seasonal member of the Avrom Kahn *Leyenkayz* in NYC and chair the IAYC selection committee that sends materials to the IAYC clubs.

In 2002, the late Dr. Harold Black, IAYC president, invited me to prepare a book, to be published by the Clubs and distributed to all the clubs. The book *SIMKHE* has 73 of my 561 poems, mostly love poems between the characters Teme and Simkhe, is presented in 3 columns: Yiddish, transliteration, and English translation by Shimon Beyles. The introduction is by Dovid Katz.

On the next page is my poem #311 on page 66.

Reflections on the Suppression of Yiddish in Israel

by Samuel W. Levy Ph.D.

(Excerpt from the Sept-Oct, 2006 issue of the Canadian Jewish Magazine "Outlook")

I can still hear my father's voice, and see his face break into a smile, as he taught us to play his favourite game of Pinochle. "Nu? A koort, a bayn, a shtick holtz, a shtayn?" he would ask, urging us to play the next card. The year was about 1930, and to this day I wonder if his question could be asked so charmingly in any other language.

How could I know that even as he spoke, Zionist leaders in Palestine were doing their utmost to stifle Yiddish in order to make Hebrew the primary language of the nation. Or that twenty years later, our people in Europe would suffer annihilation at the hands of Hitler and the Nazis—followed by the murder of Yiddish writers and poets by a paranoid Josef Stalin.

The language of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust was Yiddish as well as the language of their country of origin—Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Romanian and others. The majority of middle-aged or elderly survivors had grown up with some knowledge of the stories, poems and plays of their beloved Yiddish writers: Sholem Aleichem, I.L. Peretz, Mendele Moykher Sforim, Sholem Asch, Abraham Goldfaden and many more. Indeed, the tragedy of six million deaths was compounded by the murder at the hands of the Nazis of countless artists, musicians, scientists and creative spirits whose gifts were forever lost to mankind.

Following the defeat of Germany in 1945, and the liberation of Jews from concentration and refugee camps throughout Europe, tens of thousands found refuge and were welcomed to Israel, where the Jewish population climbed from 653,000 to 1,203,000 between 1948 and 1950.* Their troubles were not over as more lives were lost evading the British blockade and being caught in the midst of an ongoing war with Arab countries and the Palestinian people.

They also met with hostility from an unexpected source, for their language and culture were deemed unwelcome in their new home. Israel had no room for Yiddish "shnayders", said David Ben-Gurion. The language was banned from classrooms and publishing houses. And so it came to pass that *mameloshn*, that colourful language of Yiddishkeit, and its great culture of literature, drama, beauty and charm, died in the only country in which it might have survived.

In *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*, by the Yiddish scholar Dovid Katz the section dealing with events in Palestine/Israel is profoundly

disturbing. Ben-Gurion's government passed laws preventing the publication of Yiddish newspapers. Years before the State of Israel was established, the antipathy of Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders toward Yiddish manifested itself in the violent actions of an anti-Yiddish gang calling itself the "Battalion of the Defenders of the [Hebrew] Language." These thugs beat up Yiddish writers, firebombed kiosks carrying Yiddish newspapers, and disrupted Yiddish literary and cultural events. According to Katz, "although this group's dedication to hooligan tactics was widely known, it was enthusiastically embraced by the Zionist establishment in Palestine."

An attempt in the late 1920's to create an academic chair in Yiddish literature (a gift from American Jews) for the new Hebrew University in Jerusalem was prevented by the "Battalion." As Katz recounts, they incited riots, "roughed up professors and members of the relevant committees, and pasted the city with posters condemning the plan to put an abomination in the sanctuary of Hebrew purity."

Renowned Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem deplored this violence: "It is completely wrong to give in to or fear the threat of terror and fascistic methods." Not until 1951 was a chair in Yiddish, with instruction in Hebrew, introduced in Israel.

Katz also tells a story in which Ben-Gurion attended a reception for the first anti-Nazi resistance fighter to reach Palestine after the war. Rozka Korczak (1921-1988) escaped from the Vilna Ghetto and organized partisan units in the forests. Ben-Gurion listened to her for a while, then stormed out with the memorable phrase, "Ha-safe tsorem et li ba-ozen" (the language grates on my ears). This heroic lady, who deserved the highest honour the Jewish state could bestow, was speaking in Yiddish!

The noted journalist Mordke Tsanin used the term "slaughtered," noting that even the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem - designed primarily to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust - omitted Yiddish from its displays, as if the six million had been a people without a voice. Katz rejects the view that the suppression of Yiddish was needed to help unify Israel, since Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews had no strong opinions on the matter and Hebrew could have been retained as the official language even if Yiddish had been preserved.

In this regard it is noteworthy that by the late 1920's Yiddish had attained philological recognition following the first international conference of YIVO. As Katz points out, Yiddish had "won the respect of some of the most prestigious Jews in Europe - its founder, Max Weinreich, brought it to a new and unprecedented international status in academia."

My appreciation for the warmth and humour of the Yiddish language came from my parents using it in our home, and later from learning more about the literature which evolved from it. For me, Yiddish has special qualities that go far beyond being merely a basic means of communication. I am charmed by this unique, wise and colourful language.

Where else do you find a language which seldom displays hate or aggression, and seldom advocates violence for solving human problems? Where curses are filled with philosophy and fun? Where people (Tevya) argue with God? Where the village of Chelm is peopled with mythical, naive yet lovable characters performing a myriad of amusing deeds--while in fact the author is laughing at us in the real world, for believing ourselves smarter while doing far more foolish and harmful things?

The self-deprecating humour of Yiddish became the fount of material for the best American comedy-writers and comics of our time. The language is rich in expressing thoughts and feelings on philosophical, psychological and sociological themes, without pretension or snobbery.

Its intrinsic compassion helped to mould many Ashkenazi Jews into a people who cared for their young and elderly in special ways, and who often joined causes and fought on behalf of downtrodden people in our own and other lands.

Jews supported causes such as the defense of the Scottsboro boys, joined the MacPap Battalion in 1936 to fight against Franco's fascists in Loyalist Spain, and lost two martyrs to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. I believe that in part it was their culture and language which helped to make many Jews into decent, progressive, peace-loving people.

The directive to suppress Yiddish in Israel was taken up by Zionist leaders in the Diaspora, and I remember well the heated arguments around me over abandoning Yiddish in favour of Hebrew in schools and council meetings.

Our esteemed chairperson of the Montreal Outlook Collective, one-time "Lehrer" and Principal Dovid Kunigis, recalls the distress in the communities of

Winnipeg and Hamilton as successful Yiddish programs were replaced by Hebrew under the influence of ardent Zionist activists.

In the autobiography of the late Manya Lipshitz (Time Remembered), this much-loved Yiddish teacher mourned the decline of Yiddish teaching in Canada, calling it a "grievous loss to the entire Jewish educational system" and describing Yiddish as "the national treasure of Jewish people."

Is it any wonder that so many of us find it hard to accept its decline? That we applaud Aaron Lansky (Outwitting History, 2004) for rescuing thousands upon thousands of priceless Yiddish books from the dumpsters of North America; join local Mameloshn groups; attend annual musical and educational programs such as KlezKanada in the Laurentians, and the Toronto Ashkenaz Festival; continue to enjoy productions of the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre group in Montreal (albeit with the help of simultaneous translation); and take pride in repeated invitations for them to perform in European cities - this year in Vienna with 2 Yiddish plays. Other programs are at YIVO, Paris, Vilnius, Tel Aviv, Bar Ilan, KlezKamp and the Calif. Institute for Yiddish Culture & Language

The remarkable rise of Hebrew as a popular, universal language in Israel was successful. It is a tribute to the determination of the people of Israel that they made the new language work in so short a time. However, the suppression of Yiddish was unnecessary as it deprived young Israeli Jews of knowledge about their Jewish heritage. The absence of Sholem Aleichem in Israeli schools was the equivalent of banning Mark Twain, Robert Burns or William Shakespeare from our schools.

There is no turning back it seems - either in Canada, or elsewhere, where assimilation has taken its toll, or in Israel, where foolish leaders once prohibited the teaching of Yiddish and the publication of newspapers in the language. But perhaps a coming generation of Israeli Jews and its more enlightened leaders will rediscover the treasure they have lost, and encourage a greater revival of their beautiful heritage.

*Atlas of Jewish History - Martin Gilbert (1985)

SAMUEL LEVY, PhD is a retired biochemist, living in Montreal, has written previously on topics of special interest to him: "The Assault on Public Health Care in Canada". "Rosalind Franklin: Great Lady of DNA", "Why the Silence?" - on the suppression of information about the Holocaust by the Canadian Jewish Congress, and now, "Yiddish", a subject close to his heart.