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YIDDISH AIN'T DEAD

By Sidney Peilte

Among the innovations introduced at Temple Beth Shalom by Rabbi Gold was the Adult Education Program which has been accepted with unexpected enthusiasm and success. Included in the curriculum are classes in Yiddish, which, according to reports, are not only well received, but thoroughly enjoyed by the "students". This is undoubtedly motivated by a nostalgia, which some might find it hard to admit, but admitted or not, memories of earlier days are sure to be stirred in most.

To be sure, there are some who maintain that Yiddish is, if not already dead, a dying language. In the first place, it is not a language in the accepted classical sense, but a folk language created out of the languages of the nations in which the Jewish people were then residing. Its foundation is basically German, but Polish and Russian influences are notably present. Yiddish was brought to this country by those who fled the terrorism of the Czars, the ghettos of all the neighboring countries, and the growing anti-Semitism of the Germans (it was in Germany that the word "anti-Semitism" was born. Secondly these classes and the revival of interest in Yiddish are refutations of the impending demise of the language.

There is a wealth of humor, as well as philosophy, in Yiddish expressions, often lost in the translation. There is also a pithiness and flavor peculiar to the idiom. This "tam" or flavor, cannot be captured in the translation, though the meaning of the expression is clear. Illustrations of this loss, is found in these two typical selections from one of Molly Picon's favored monologues.

Faiths. Those who are neglecting the responsibilities to their own.

Here we come to the responsibilities and feelings of the active, hard-core Jewish leaders. There are two schools of thought.

At a recent Men's Club directors' meeting the question was asked about the next Father-Sons brunch, a Men's Club function.

"I'm not going to be a baby sitter, while fathers are out on a golf course on a Sunday morning," answered the committee chairman of the last previous event. "You're right," responded another, "let the fathers be concerned about their own children's welfare."

That's what we mean. Are we going to let an irresponsible father be the determining factor in the future members of our Synagogue? Perhaps that is why so many youngsters lose interest and drop out after Bar Mitzvah. We all know it is the duty of the parents to sustain the proper responsibilities and encourage their children by setting the proper example. But it's those who don't, who need our help.

It's important to have teas and social functions to keep members active and enthusiastically involved at high interest. It is equally, or even more important to re-ignite that spark in non-members that changes indifference to a feeling of wanting to belong. Let's encourage the neutral, impartial, unconcerned apathies into active participants. It's easy. It's worth the attempt.

Let's make more calls to George.

In English, she would say, we say, "tall, taller and tallest"; in Yiddish it becomes "hoych, hecher and a d - r - a - n - g. Again, "ugly, uglier and ugliest" becomes "meis, meiser and a schoner laygt men in dredr".

Such expressions as "Darf men geyen in collitch?" "Do you have to go to college?" (to express admiration for a successful, but uneducated, man) and "Men ken geharget verren!" "One can get killed!" lose their gusto when converted into their English equivalents. What does a lanky fellow look like? Compare "a langer loksh" with the English "a long noodle". And who doesn't know that "a gontser knyocker" is a "big shot"? There is no mistaking the meaning intended to be conveyed by these expressions, yet how much more solid and meaty is the Yiddish idiom.

There are, of course, other areas where the Yiddish term transmits the message with greater "tam", flavor. Remember....for instance, when all the commendation you could expect for a job well done was summed up in "a leben auf dein kepele"? Or, contrariwise, when you had just escaped from a danger occasioned by some foolhardiness, you were greeted with "Geharget sollst du verren, bist sheer geharget gevoren!"

These are but a few samples of the richness of the Yiddish idiom, which covers all the forms of philosophical, humorous and emotional expression. Some of these have found their way into American English, on the stage and in TV "Oy, gevalt", "kosher", "meshuga" and "goy" are familiar to many of our Gentile friends. No, Yiddish ain't dead, yet.

TELL TALES

"One Man Plus The Truth Constitutes A Majority"

BY JACK TELL



SHADES OF JOLY

He didn't get down on one knee and call for his "Mammy". There were no appeals to the Swanee River or a little boy climbing on his knee. He didn't appear in blackface and never once said: "You Aint Heard Anything Yet." But Cantor David Kusevitsky is probably the only man alive who could have electrified a sophisticated show-me audience as Al Jolson did in years gone by.

The imaginary curtain opener was a musical medley of ten stringed instruments in an exquisite number under the direction of who else but our own Morry King. Each of the professional musicians was hand-picked by Morry and the net result was a harmonious blend of stirring sounds in perfect unison with all the impact of any philharmonic. Accompanying the stringed instrumentalists was our own incomparable Gene Fehr doubling at the piano and organ.

Then to the delight of the more than 500 attending the concert, Rabbi Aaron S. Gold assumed the pulpit where he officiates for regular Services. Rabbi Gold's chore was narrator to describe in English the number to be sung by Cantor Kusevitsky. The introductory interpretation rendered by Rabbi Gold was a delight. There aren't too many persons around today, who could have topped it. Then Kusevitsky was introduced.

He made no grand entrance from a wing. He wore no costume, not even the customary cutaway and tails of a concert occasion. There was no scenery to create a mood, no piercing spotlight. Any trace of theatrics was missing. The simplicity of the Bemah created the most beautiful background imaginable.

Kusevitsky, in neat tuxedo, walked to the stage from a seat among us in the audience. He was alone, on his own.

Three days previously he first set foot in Las Vegas. Friends back in Brooklyn, Kusevitsky confided to this writer, couldn't understand his consenting to sing in this gambling city. What kind of a Jewish congregation could we possibly have here, they reasoned? Kusevitsky knew better. His past association with Cantor Kohn and Rabbi Gold gave him confidence. These two outstanding Jewish leaders, Kusevitsky reasoned for himself, had to be associated with a flourishing Jewish community. Unquestionably, Cantor was correct in his assumption.

When Kusevitsky first arrived he was touchy, on edge. He probably was debating with himself, whether he had made a mistake or not. But the warmth with which he was greeted, soon dispelled all apprehension. The intensity of preparations being made here on his behalf, the publicity, softened any hardness that may have accrued. The rehearsals with Cantor Kohn's choir and Morry King's musicians, won the visitor's admiration. He knew he was among friends and professionals, bent on giving him the presentation he deserved. The relaxing tours of our fair city removed any trace of qualm. When he was ready to perform there were no distracting thoughts on his mind.

After the first offering, a throat clearing opener, the audience hesitated before assurance it was proper to applaud in a Sanctuary. It was, not being a regular religious Service, and the appreciation gathered momentum.

One number followed another in a diversified program. Not a monotonous moment. A sad psalm, then a happy theme. A lilting tune and a song with a story. Operatic areas and Hebrew liturgical music we all knew. Each was a delight, not only to audience, but to singer as well. A happy man who came back for encore after encore.

About his voice? We know only how we were affected by the sounds. We are not qualified to describe the technical comparative values of each note. We felt ecstasy. Each utter was clear, like a bell. At one piercing, penetrating high note, we turned to song-stylist Dave Burton, seated with his lovely wife, and asked the degree of the pitch.

We recalled, many years ago, a Galli Curci recording on the phonograph in which the opera star reached C above high C. This was the pinnacle.

Kusevitsky, we were told on Sunday, hit D above high C.

This sound, which we probably will never hear again in our lifetime, brought immeasurable pleasure to our ears, here at Temple Beth Shalom, for \$2.00 admission.

LET'S CALL GEORGE

While we were mulling over in our mind the nature and scope of an editorial for this week's edition, the phone rang. It was a wrong number and the conversation lasted only seconds, but it was enough to inspire thoughts for a full piece.

When we lifted the receiver a voice asked: "Why weren't you at Priesthood this morning?" For an instant we were under the impression it was someone kidding at 11 a.m. Sunday morning. We answered, "Who is this?" The voice responded, "This is your Bishop. Is this George?"

After we'd hung up, we got to thinking. Who was George? Why didn't he attend church services that morning? Was he someone special? Was he on parole in the technical custody of his spiritual leader? Then our thoughts ran to the possible practice in religions other than the Jewish Faith. Was it customary to make calls to individuals asking why they did not attend services?

Then we remembered why the coincidence of the name, George, rang a bell in our mind. If it were Harry, or Sam or Pete, the incident promptly would have been forgotten and we'd be writing about Spring or the horrible state of the local press, or some such insignificant generality, but not when George was involved. That's different.

Some of you readers may recall a headline vaudevillian, Harry Baker, who played an accordion while he told jokes. A sideman, Sid Silver, sat in an upper box making remarks that heckled the star. At one point in the act a beautiful worldly-wise showgirl walked onstage. During conversation with her, Baker asked for a kiss. She refused, indignantly. "Who do you kiss," asked Baker ungrammatically, but innocently? She answered point-blank: "I only kiss George."

The next query, naturally, from Baker was, "Who's George?"

The answer, that brought a roar of laughter from the audience, came from Silver, who yelled out, "Who aint!"

That's the point we're trying to make concerning attendance at religious services. We're all George.

There is no question that all religions encourage attendance. The strength and growth of each Faith depends on active participation of the congregants. The core of each religion is evident, unquestionably. Otherwise there would be no foundation for the initial establishment. Therefore, it is not the encouragement of those who are already part and parcel, with whom we are concerned. It is those who are indifferent and those on the fringe who can take it or leave it, who need our attention.

Without reflection, some religions encourage persons from other Faiths to convert to theirs. Some religions are deeply engrossed in missionary work in far corners of the earth, teaching heathens and un-Godly races the worthiness and wholesome necessity of belief in God. This is admirable and deserves full commendation.

The Jewish Faith, for the most part, is not after new acquisitions. We will accept converts only after intensive conversation with a spiritual leader, who is careful and thorough in explaining the practice and purpose of our beliefs. Other religions probably have the same or even more intensive procedure. Most conversions are brought about by inter-marriage, which creates an inherent, binding tie.

The problem, we believe, in the Jewish Faith is not attracting converts, but in rejuvenating enthusiasm in those who have strayed. Not those who have joined other

JACK TELL

LETTERS

Dear Mrs. Tell:
 Enclosed is a check for \$6.00 to cover the cost of a year's subscription to the "Israelite".

I look forward to receiving your newspaper and would like to take this opportunity to wish you success in your wonderful achievement and contents of your newspaper.

Respectfully,
 Norman Merkin
 (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Dear Jack:
 Marthele and I wish to extend our sincere thanks to you and Bea for bringing us the opportunity to subscribe to what must become an essential to the completeness of our Jewish Community, a newspaper whose echo will help resound the greater growth and prosperity that is to come.

Sincerely,
 Leonard, Marthele & Sharon Sperling

Israelite's Granddaughter



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