

About Our "Mame Loshen" Or "Yiddish Has Not Said Its Last Word" (Bashevis Singer)

By Amalia Warshenbrot, Director, Levine-Sklut Judaic Library & Resource Center

When my mother-in-law, who lived in Israel, visited us in Philadelphia, we always picked her up at Kennedy Airport in New York and drove her to our home. Then we moved to Charlotte and Savta (grandma) had to take a second flight from New York to Charlotte. Coming from the airport in Israel which has one terminal, she did not realize that here it's different. She landed in the international terminal and had no idea how to find her gate. So she walked up to strangers and asked "farshtet Yiddish?" (Do you understand Yiddish?) A nice man not only gave her directions, he joined her in the shuttle to the USAir terminal and walked her to the gate. Thanks to the knowledge of Yiddish she found a friend. It was more than the language that connected them: culture, past and warm feelings connected these two strangers. As Isaac Bashevis Singer said at his acceptance speech for the Nobel prize in 1978, "One can find in the Yiddish spirit expression of pious joy, lust for life, longing for the Messiah, patience and deep appreciation of human individuality."

The Jewish Book Council offers grants to libraries to purchase a special compilation of Yiddish classics read aloud by native Yiddish speakers at Montreal's Jewish Public Library. Those gems are preserved complete in unabridged books on CDs.

The Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center qualified for a special grant from the Rohr family foundation to cover 80% of the price. Rose and Abe Luski provided the remaining funds. Now we own 30 "talking books" that represent the finest in Yiddish literature. Among the authors represented: four CDs of Sholem Aleichem, four of Sholem



Asch and 22 other great Yiddish literary works.

We are grateful to Rose and Abe Luski and the Sami Rohr Foundation for these wonderful additions to the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center. Sami Rohr, the founder and main supporter of the foundation, is among the leading builders of Jewish communal causes worldwide, including support for educational efforts in the U.S. "Sheina dahnk" (thank you) to Abe Luski, who is known for his generosity and especially his support of the annual concert at Temple Israel. Some of the concerts were performed by Yiddish singers. Rose Luski teaches a Yiddish class every Monday from 12:30-2 PM in the Library. As I eavesdrop on her class, I feel the students' great love of the Yiddish language. In addition to grammar and vocabulary, the students sing and share recipes. This proves Bashevis Singer's observation in his speech that was quoted above.

A person who demonstrates passion and rare devotion to Yiddish literature is Aaron Lanski. In his biography *Outwitting History* (Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, 2000) he writes: "...Yiddish culture continues to be erased, our history rewritten, our sensibility recast, our identity redefined. More and more, as memory fades, the books we col-

lected are all that remain." Aaron Lanski salvaged Yiddish books from all over the world and created a home for them in the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA with the financial support of Stephen Spielberg. The entire collections was digitized and placed on-line. The Center is one of the largest and fastest-growing Jewish cultural groups in the world. I hope that Isaac Bashevis Singer was not wrong when he said "Yiddish has not said its last word."

Note: Please also see my article titled "The Day Our Two Cantors Were Excited" on page 16. The Library also holds several CDs of the great Yiddish stage as well as a CD entitled "The Art of Yiddish Song, Klezmer Concertos and more." For full lists please see our catalogue on-line: <http://library-world.net/cgi-bin/opac.pl> ☆



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Do you have questions? "Ask the Rabbi" sessions will be held at the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center on Mondays 9:30 AM-1 PM and Wednesdays 5:30-7:30 PM. Rabbi Shlomo Pinkus from the Torah Center will be to happy to answer any of your questions. He'll try to answer anything you wish to know: Torah, Judaism, Science, Politics,

anything you can think of. What is the true meaning of Shabbat, who is better the Yankees or the Mets? (YANKEES!) How does evolution work and is time travel really possible? What's E=MC2 all about? Rabbi Shlomo Pinkus will be there for you so come to the library and ask away. Hope to see you there. For more information, please call 704-367-1225. ☆

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