

## VIIth International Summer Yiddish Language Seminar in Śródborów (6-19.07.2009)

2009-06-16

### Dovid Katz / lectures



Website: [www.dovidkatz.net](http://www.dovidkatz.net)

Brief bio:

<http://www.sumlitsem.org/lithuania/jewishlithuania.html#Dovid>

### I. LECTURES:

#### 1. The Past, Present and Future of Yiddish

A four-thousand year linguistic and cultural survey. Starting with ancient Hebraic prehistory, in a brief outline, Jewish language history is traced from Hebrew, through Aramaic, and into Yiddish (with emphasis on subtle linguistic continuities). A discussion of the origins of the Yiddish language, old Western Yiddish, the rise of Eastern Yiddish and the modern movements of the nineteenth century, leading to modern Yiddish literature. A frank discussion of the situation of Yiddish today and its future prospects.

#### 2. The Holocaust Obfuscation Movement: from the Baltics to Brussels

Without denying a single death, a powerful new movement emanating from the Baltics and certain circles in other new European Union accession states is attempting to delete the notion of the Holocaust from European history, and to replace it with a new model of "equal double genocide." The speaker will argue that this movement, which he calls Holocaust Obfuscation, emanates from various states' failure to come to terms with the annihilation of their Jewish populations during the Holocaust (and particularly local participation). There will be a discussion of an occasional strategy to implicitly shift blame to the victims and consciously confuse the issues. The movement, at first local, has now morphed into a series of European Union

resolutions, particularly the “Prague Declaration.” The speaker will concentrate on events and experiences during his own decade in Lithuania.  
WITH POWER POINT PRESENTATION

### **3. The Litvaks and Litvish**

Who are the Litvaks? What are the distinct meanings of the term in differing times and places? What, and precisely where, is Líte (or Lító or Líta, or Jewish Lithuania, or the Lithuanian Jewish lands)? What is the relationship of Líte to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and to the modern Republic of Lithuania (and to the territory of today’s Belarus, Latvia, parts of Poland, Ukraine and other countries)? A survey of the cultural heritage, dialect, folkloristic characteristics, intellectual and religious movements of Lithuanian Jewry, with reference to the allegedly distinct Litvak character.

WITH POWER POINT PRESENTATION

### **4. Expeditions to the Last Yiddish Speaking Jews**

During his first trip to Lithuania and Belarus, in late 1990, the speaker, then the head of Oxford University’s Yiddish program, was transformed, as he puts it, “from a teacher of Yiddish into a student of Yiddish.” Having discovered that there was still much to be learned from the last “in situ” survivors, he began a series of expeditions to Lithuania, Belarus, Latvia, northern and eastern Ukraine, and northeastern Poland, to map out the still-recoverable last-moment-in-history on-site Yiddish. The result is his ongoing project *Litvish: An Atlas of Northeastern Yiddish*, of which a number of draft maps have been posted on his website. The speaker will recount various of his adventures on the road during the last two decades — particularly in Belarus. He hopes to soon publish the first volume of his memoirs of these expeditions, called *Back to the Old Country*.

WITH VIDEO CLIPS OR POWER POINT PRESENTATION

## **II. WORKSHOPS IN YIDDISH (FOR ADVANCED AND HIGHER INTERMEDIATE LEVEL STUDENTS)**

The series of workshops in Yiddish, intended for those who speak and write the language, will be focused on enriching, enhancing and widening participants’ stylistic scope and mastery of subtleties. Participants will be brought into the complex world of the intricate diversity of authentic Yiddish usage and expression (both in active usage and in appreciation of texts). In contrast to some modern masters of Yiddish, Professor Katz is a firm

believer in the authenticity of variation within the larger bounds of literary and cultural Yiddish, and will be stressing the cultural, religious and intellectual correlates of competing usages in vocabulary, sound and spelling that are to be encountered. There will also be discussion of the role of dialect vs. standard language; neologisms vs. nineteenth century borrowings; religious vs. secular, and other exciting tensions in the realm of modern Yiddish stylistics. Participants will be able (if they so wish!) to present a short newly-written text of their own for analysis, discussion and suggestions.

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**Professor Dovid Katz is research director of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute, which he cofounded in 2001, and has just celebrated completion of ten years as Professor of Judaic Studies at Vilnius University in Lithuania. He founded and led the Yiddish program at Oxford University for eighteen years, and, after a stint at Yale, relocated to Vilnius. A well-known Yiddish educator, he has been stressing mastery of the language per se for decades; in 1982, he founded the four-week Oxford summer program in Yiddish, which he relocated to Vilnius in 1998. He is the author of a book on Yiddish stylistics (*Tíkney takónes: Fragn fun yídisher stilístik – Amended Amendments: Issues in Yiddish Stylistics*, Oxford 1993), of three works of collected Yiddish fiction, and hundreds of shorter works in various genres. He edited three volumes of *Oxford Yiddish* in the 1990s, dedicated to new academic works written in Yiddish, and for several years was founding editor of the world's only Yiddish literary monthly, *Yiddish Pen*. In recent years, he has contributed the column *Igéreslakh fun Vilne* to New York's *Algemeyner Zhurnal*, and is readying for the press his fourth volume of collected Yiddish fiction, and an academic work in English for Palgrave Macmillan. His English books include *Lithuanian Jewish Culture* (2004), *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (2007), *Windows to a Lost Jewish Past: Vilna Book Stamps* (2008), and *Seven Kingdoms of the Litvaks* (2009).**

**For further information, please, visit:**

**[VIIth International Summer Yiddish Language Seminar Website](#)**