



**To Be or Not to Be:  
Rethinking the Future of  
the Center's Israel Office**

Tayere Khaverim:  
Dear Friends:

I'm glad to announce to you that the number of Yiddish books collected by the National Yiddish Book Center's Israel Office has now reached over 16,000! 3,500 of these volumes are already roughly cataloged and on display at the Israel Office itself — located in my two-room apartment in Jerusalem — where visitors come regularly to choose and purchase Yiddish books which they can't find anywhere else in Israel. Moreover, several hundred copies of important Yiddish works which aren't currently to be found in the States are waiting for shipment to Amherst to fill some lacunae in the provisions of the Holyoke Book Annex, from which they will be placed in libraries around the world.

Last month the staff of the Israel Office set out with a truck to Tel Aviv, where we saved hundreds of copies of *Di goldene keyt* — the world's most eminent Yiddish literary magazine — which were doomed for the paper-mill, together with parts of the editor's library. On the same day we also rescued a Yiddish library that consisted of several thousand important Yiddish books.

Our colorful rescue team consisted of Dan, a mathematics professor and volunteer zamler, our driver, Ahmed, who revealed himself to be a fervent book lover too, and myself. In the morning we set out to Tel Aviv, respectively initiating each other during the ride into the Generalized Recursion Theory, the richness of the Koran, and to some peculiarities of Yiddish culture. Six hours later we had filled our Jerusalem storage space with a load of more than two tons of books. By that point we were slightly less talkative, but we shared the satisfaction of having saved something which would otherwise have been lost forever.

Apart from the successful zamling activities, we continue to provide books in mounting numbers for students and also for visiting researchers. In particular, the Israeli Office is beginning to feel the

impact of the Russian immigration. Several *olim hadashim* (new immigrants) are already taking advantage of our new "Immigrant Discount" to reconnect with Yiddish culture by purchasing Yiddish books at a fraction of their actual cost, thanks to subsidies provided by members of the National Yiddish Book Center in the United States.

Concerning the future: On the 31st of April, 1992, the first trial year of the Israeli Office came to an end. In June, the Center's Board will consider how — or if — the Israel Office is to continue for another year. In December, when I met with Aaron at the Center's Winter Program in San Diego, it was already clear to us that with the Center's ambitious new agenda (creating new study programs, reaching out to college students, putting up a new building, and several other exciting projects), the organization's limited financial resources will have to be rechanneled, and that it will not be so obvious how to find the funds to keep the Israel Office working. So it was decided that I should start exploring the possibility of relegating the activities of the Israel Office to other Yiddish-minded organizations in Israel, so that the Center itself might be free to focus more efficiently on its other goals. Although the Israel Office was somehow our child, we thought that it might grow better if someone else would foster and promote its continuation.

I went out on a quest, but alas!, no existing organization was ready or capable to take up and continue this exciting cultural adventure on which the National Yiddish Book Center and the Israel Office had set out. The older Yiddish organizations were too tired, static or discouraged, while some younger organizations preferred to talk about taking action without actually acting. I started to feel desperate about the thought that the Israeli Office's presence might come to an end. Desperate, because I'm convinced that in the social and cultural landscape of Israel, it is of vital importance that

there should be a young Yiddish presence which should reclaim and perpetuate Yiddish culture in an updated, modern and sensible way; a presence which would shake off the dust and preconceptions which have emerged in Israeli society against Yiddish so that Yiddishkayt, which is still very much alive in Israel, although underground, might be perpetuated as a legitimate, vital and living component in the cultural mosaic of this country, and of Jewishness in general.

Happily, however, it appears that these thoughts are shared by a fine group of young people in Israel, some of whose imaginations were fired by the activities and achievements of the National Yiddish Book Center and of the Israel Office. Having gathered together to discuss practical ways of continuing energetic Yiddish activity in Israel, they have come up with a number of interesting ideas about ways in which the Israel Office might function more independently, while maintaining a close connection with the Center's headquarters in the United States. We are now looking both in Amherst and in Jerusalem for support to assure a continuation and even an extension of the activities of the Israel Office, and I'm hopeful that somehow we will find a way to make it happen. After all, we have already found the will, the power and the energy, so let's hope that we'll find the funds too.... How goes the Yiddish saying again? "Whoever doesn't believe in miracles, isn't a realist." So let's not worry too much!

I'm looking forward to sharing good and exciting news with you in the near future, and remain, dear friends,

Mit herzlichke grusn,  
Cordially and Yiddishly Yours,

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Individuals interested in supporting the continued existence of the Center's Israel Office should contact our Executive Director, Steve Hays, at 413/535-1303. Eds.