

LESSON 1

ערשטע לעקציע

יידן אין אלע לענדער

יידן זינגען היינט א פאלק פון דרייצן מיליאן. יידן וווינען אויף אלע קאנטינענטן: אין אמעריקע, אין אייראפע, אין אזיע, אין אפריקע און אין אויסטראליע. איבער א העלפט פון אלע יידן וווינען היינט אין אמעריקע. איבער פינף מיליאן יידן וווינען אין די פאראייניקטע שטאטן. 5 אין ניו-יארק וווינען איבער צוויי מיליאן יידן. אנדערע יידישע צענטערס אין די פאראייניקטע שטאטן זינגען: שיקאגא, פילאדעלפיע, לאס-אנג-דזשעלעס, באסטאן, דעטרויט, סינסינאטי. אין ארגענטינע, קאנאדע און מעקסיקע וווינען אויך א סך יידן. אין די פאראייניקטע שטאטן רעדן יידן יידיש און ענגליש. אין ארגענטינע און מעקסיקע רעדן יידן יידיש און שפאניש. אין זייער א סך לענדער רעדן יידן יידיש. יידיש 10 איז די שפראך פון יידן אין א סך לענדער. יידיש פאראייניקט יידן פון אלע לענדער.

VOCABULARY

many, much [ASA'kh]	א סך •	a	א •
Africa	אפריקע •	also, too	אויך •
Argentina	ארגענטינע •	Australia	אויסטראליע •
the (neuter)	דאס •	on (preposition;	אויף •
the (feminine)	די •	usually pronounced [AF])	
the (masculine)	דער •	and	און •
thirteen	דרייצן •	Asia	אזיע •
have	האבן •	over	איבער •
today	היינט •	is	איז •
half	העלפט •	Europe	אייראפע •
live	ווינען •	in	אין •
are	זינגען •	all	אלע •
very	זייער •	America	אמעריקע •
Jews	יידן •	an	אן •
Yiddish, Jewish	יידיש •	others(s)	אנדערע •

of פון •	Jewish יידישע •
five פינף	countries לענדער •
two צוויי •	million מיליאָן •
centers צענטערס	Mexico מעקסיקע
Canada קאנאָדע	סך ← אַ סך
continents קאָנטינענטן	English ענגליש •
speak רעדן •	people (singular) פֿאָלק •
Spanish שפּאַניש •	unites פֿאַראייניקט
language די שפּראַך •	United States די פֿאַראייניקטע שטאַטן

Words preceded by an asterisk are part of the active vocabulary list. They should be memorized when they first occur as they will be freely used in subsequent lessons without additional explanation. Words without an asterisk are of a more incidental nature in this text, and should they recur, they will be listed again in the vocabulary.

The sign ← means *see*.

The accent, which is given in this book as an aid to correct reading, is actually never written in Yiddish.

GRAMMAR

1. Article and Gender

אַ	a	Jew
אַ	a	language
אַ	a	country

The indefinite article is אַ. If the following word begins with a vowel, the article is אַן:

אַן אָונט an evening

The definite article in the singular is either דער, די, or דאָס. Words with which דער is used are *masculine*:

דער ייד
דער צענטער

Words with which די is used are *feminine*:

די שפּראַך
די העלפּט

Words with which דאָס is used are *neuter*:

דאָס לאַנד
דאָס פֿאָלק

In the plural, no distinction is made between the genders. The definite article used in the plural is always די:

די פֿאַראייניקטע שטאַטן the United States

Nouns denoting males are usually masculine; those indicating females are feminine. The gender of nouns which denote *inanimate* objects cannot be inferred with certainty either from the form or the meaning of the word. The correct article must therefore be memorized with each new noun.

2. Word Order

A word or group of words performing together a syntactical function in a sentence is called a *sentence unit*. Here are two sentences divided into sentence units:

(1) יידן | זינען | הינט | א פאלק פון דרייצן מיליאן

(2) א סך יידן | רעדן | יידיש | אין די פאראייניקטע שטאטן

The subject is one kind of sentence unit. In sentence (1) above, it is a single word: יידן. In sentence (2), it is a group of words that constitutes the subject: א סך יידן. Other sentence units are:

The verb (רעדן, זינען)

The predicate noun (א פאלק פון דרייצן מיליאן)

The direct or indirect object (יידיש)

The adverb or adverbial phrase of time (הינט)

or of place

or of manner

The prepositional phrase of time

or of place (אין די פאראייניקטע שטאטן)

or of manner

The following sentences are divided into units. Observe which unit comes first and which second.

(3) צוויי מיליאן יידן | וווינען | אין ניו-יארק

(4) אין ניו-יארק | וווינען | צוויי מיליאן יידן

(5) הינט | וווינען | אין ניו-יארק | א סך יידן

(6) אנדערע יידישע צענטערס | זינען | דעטרויט און באסטאן

(7) שיקאגא און פילאדעלפיע | זינען | אויך | יידישע צענטערס

(8) יידיש | רעדן | יידן | אין א סך לענדער

(9) אין א סך לענדער | רעדן | יידן | יידיש

In sentence (3), the first unit is the subject: צוויי מיליאן יידן; in sentence (4), the prepositional phrase (of place): אין ניו-יארק; in (5), the adverb (of time): הינט; in (6), the predicate noun, with its modifiers: אנדערע יידישע צענטערס; in (7), the subject: שיקאגא און פילאדעלפיע; in (8), the direct object: יידיש; and in (9),

the prepositional phrase (of place): אין אַ סך לענדער. *But in every sentence the second unit is the verb; this is the basic rule for normal Yiddish word order.*

The verb is followed by other units. Since the verb is the second unit, no more than one other unit can precede it.

און and other conjunctions are not treated as separate sentence units and are marked as non-unit words in the vocabulary.

Word order is discussed in greater detail on pp. 109-110.

3. Direct Questions

- ווי • where
- וואסער • which (*singular*)
- וואסערע • which (*plural*)
- וויפל • how many, how much

These words are all separate sentence units.

יא • yes

ניין • no

These words are not treated as sentence units.

A question requiring an answer of "yes" or "no" usually begins with the word צי, which is a sentence unit.

Do Jews live in Asia? (Yes)
 צי וווינען יידן אין אזיע? (יא)

Another way to ask this sort of question is to change the intonation while retaining the word order of the sentence:

Do Jews live in Asia?
 יידן וווינען אין אזיע?

EXERCISES

A. Answer in Yiddish the following questions about the reading passage on page 30, using complete sentences:

1. ווו וווינען יידן? 2. וויפל יידן וווינען אין די פֿאַראייניקטע שטאַטן?
3. וואסער שפראך רעדן יידן אין די פֿאַראייניקטע שטאַטן? 4. וואסער שפראך רעדן יידן אין מעקסיקע? 5. ווו איז שיקאגא? 6. ווו איז בוענאס-אירעס? 7. צי איז ניו-יאָרק אין קאנאָדע? 8. צי איז פֿילאָדעלפֿיע אין די פֿאַראייניקטע שטאַטן?

B. Make up questions with the following phrases:

1. אין וואסערע לענדער ?
2. וויפל יידן ?
3. צי איז ?
4. ווו ענגליש?
5. צי זינען ?
6. וואסער אין קאנאָדע?

- C. Provide written Yiddish answers to the questions which you have made up.
- D. What is the singular of the following words? (Include the definite article; cf. p. 31, Grammar 1).
1. די יידן. 2. די לענדער. 3. די צענטערס. 4. די קאָנטינענטן.
- E. List fifteen geographical names in Yiddish.
- F. Translate the following sentences into Yiddish, carefully observing the rules for word order. Words in [] are to be omitted.
1. New York is in the United States.
 2. Philadelphia is also in the United States.
 3. New York, Boston, and Philadelphia are in the United States.
 4. Chicago is a Jewish center.
 5. Over five million Jews live in the United States.
 6. Do two million Jews live in Los Angeles?
 7. Many Jews live in Canada.
 8. Many Jews also live in Mexico.
 9. There are thirteen million Jews in the world (=Jews are a people of thirteen million).
 10. The Jews live on all continents and in many countries.
 11. Very many Jews in the United States speak Yiddish.
 12. In Mexico [the] Jews speak Yiddish and Spanish.

YIDDISH AS A KEY TO JEWISH LIFE

The Jews refer to Yiddish as מאמע-לושן [MAME-LOSHN], meaning *mother tongue*. Yiddish actually is the mother tongue of the majority of Jews the world over. For almost a thousand years it has been the language of the largest and most creative branch of the Jewish people. While serving as the vernacular of millions of Jews, it came to express their fears and hopes. In folk songs and informal prayer, it has been enriched by high emotional overtones; as the language of instruction in the Law, it has become capable of great intellectual subtlety.

A considerable literature, not necessarily religious in character, existed almost from the beginning; in the sixteenth century, this early literature reached its peak. In the last one hundred years, Yiddish literature went through a new period of remarkable expansion, so that today it is an expression of a wide range of artistic and intellectual values in a Jewish or a universal framework.

Even a glance at Yiddish idiom reveals the status of Yiddish as a record of Jewish history. Take, for instance, the common expression: *צו זינגען און צו זאָגן* *to have no end of trouble* (literally, *to have to sing and to say*). It dates back to the Middle Ages when wandering troubadours *sang and said* (i.e. *recited*) their heroic epic poems. The more involved and dramatic an adventure, the better it suited their story; and to suggest then that someone would be "singing and talking" about an event was to describe its exciting nature.

There is a Yiddish phrase: *מען זאָל אים אָפּילו בראַטן און ברענען און ברעטן* *even if he should be burned and roasted*. This is an allusion to the practices of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. It is an apt description of a firm will to resist even this kind of torture.

A curious expression for "the olden days" is *מלך סאָבעסקעס יאָרן* *the years of King Sobieski*. This refers to a Polish king of the seventeenth century. Among his achievements were his campaigns against the Turks; and the latter, too, appear in Yiddish idiom. *אַפּטאָן עמעצן טערקיש* means *to play someone a dirty trick*, but literally *to treat someone in the Turkish manner*. The sad experience of the Jews with the Tatars, long under Turkish control, is mirrored here.

The traditional Jewish way of life is reflected in Yiddish similes and metaphors. *פֿירן שטרוי קיין מצרים* *to carry straw to Egypt* is the Yiddish equivalent of "carrying coals to Newcastle." The reference is Biblical. What could be more useless than carrying straw to Egypt, where it was used by the Jews when they had to make bricks for Pharaoh? *אַס רייך ווי קורח* *as rich as Korah* refers to the Talmudic legend about the wealthy Levite Korah. *והאָרראַיה* [VEHO'-RA'YE] *here is the proof* is a turn of speech taken over into Yiddish from the Talmud. The adjective *וואָ'כערדיק* means *common, mean*; it is derived from *וואָך* *week*, and connotes the routine of the working day as contrasted with the holiness of the Sabbath. Such examples could be multiplied without end.

Not only does Yiddish reflect Jewish life, but it has also been an essential instrument in shaping Jewish culture. The high moral precepts of the Jewish religion might have remained in the books or in the minds of the scholars if they had not been expounded by the popular preachers (מגידים [MAGIDIM]) to the people in Yiddish. In interpreting quotations from the Law, the *magidim* created a popu-

1 [AFILE]

2 [MEYLEKH]

3 [MITSRAIM]

4 [KOYREKH]

lar unwritten literature which was thought out in Yiddish. If it is true that one's thoughts follow the associations and categories of one's language, then it is perhaps not insignificant that in Yiddish "beauty" can be homonymous with "spirituality" (א שיינער ייד) *a beautiful Jew, a respected Jew*) and "goodness" with "holiness" (א גוטער ייד) *a good Jew, a holy Jew*).

Several Yiddish phrases have been incorporated into religious ritual, notably מיר וועלן בענטשן *we shall say the blessing*. Many informal prayers, called תחינות [TKHINES], were composed in Yiddish chiefly for women.

Yiddish has also served as the tie between Jews of various countries. After the great migration of Jews from Eastern Europe to North and South America, to South Africa, and to Australia, Yiddish has remained a vital link between outlying communities all over the world.

The wisdom of Yiddish proverbs and stories, the intensity and subtlety of feeling achievable in the language, the artistic heights reached in its literature are sketched in the background chapters of this volume.

י"בן זי"נען א פֿאַלק פֿון אַלץ מיט'יאָן.
 י"בן זי"נען אויף אַלע קאָנטינענטן: אין
 אמעריקע, אין אייראָפּע, אין אַזיע, אין
 קאָנטינענטן און אינעם זעלבן יום.

Sample of Yiddish Writing