

Michal Friedman At A Yiddish Lesson



This is me teaching Yiddish. The photo was taken in Warsaw in the 1990s. . I taught Hebrew at the University for several years, in parallel with taking the Yiddish language class. I have taught Hebrew and Yiddish at TSKZ for many years - about 700 students of both languages have passed through my classes. I still teach Yiddish in the Jewish Theater, twice a week. Most of my students are Poles, not Jews. But I must be hardened, because I don't care about it in the least while I'm teaching them. These young Jews of today are from a different world. And these Poles are also a bit not from this world. They meet somewhere. There is a group that learnt Yiddish with me for years, all of them Poles. We studied Yiddish literature and discussed it in Yiddish. Now they have decided to meet in a private apartment to talk in Yiddish. And they are doing it. Which was my first language: Yiddish or Hebrew? This is a dilemma that Jews have had since the birth of their national consciousness. Jews have always used several languages. It was either Hebrew and Aramaic, or Hebrew and Greek for the elite; during the Babylonian rule Aramaic had the upper hand relative to Hebrew. Afterwards, in the Persian times, the elite wrote in Persian and in Aramaic. Next came Arabic; after all, Maimonides wrote in Arabic; later he translated Arabic into Hebrew. After that, there was Spanish and the Jewish language Ladino, then German and Alt Yiddish. While speaking in all those other languages, in their writing the Jews have always used the Hebrew script. When the Crusades began, Jews were locked up in ghettos and their German started to deteriorate, turning into a jargon, since it had been cut off from its German root. Contemporary Yiddish evolved out of Alt Yiddish at the beginning of the 20th century. In the Talmud it is written that Greek is the best language to sing in, Latin to command an army in, Hebrew to tell a story in, and Aramaic to talk in. And I am going to add to this by saying that the best in all these languages can be found in Yiddish.