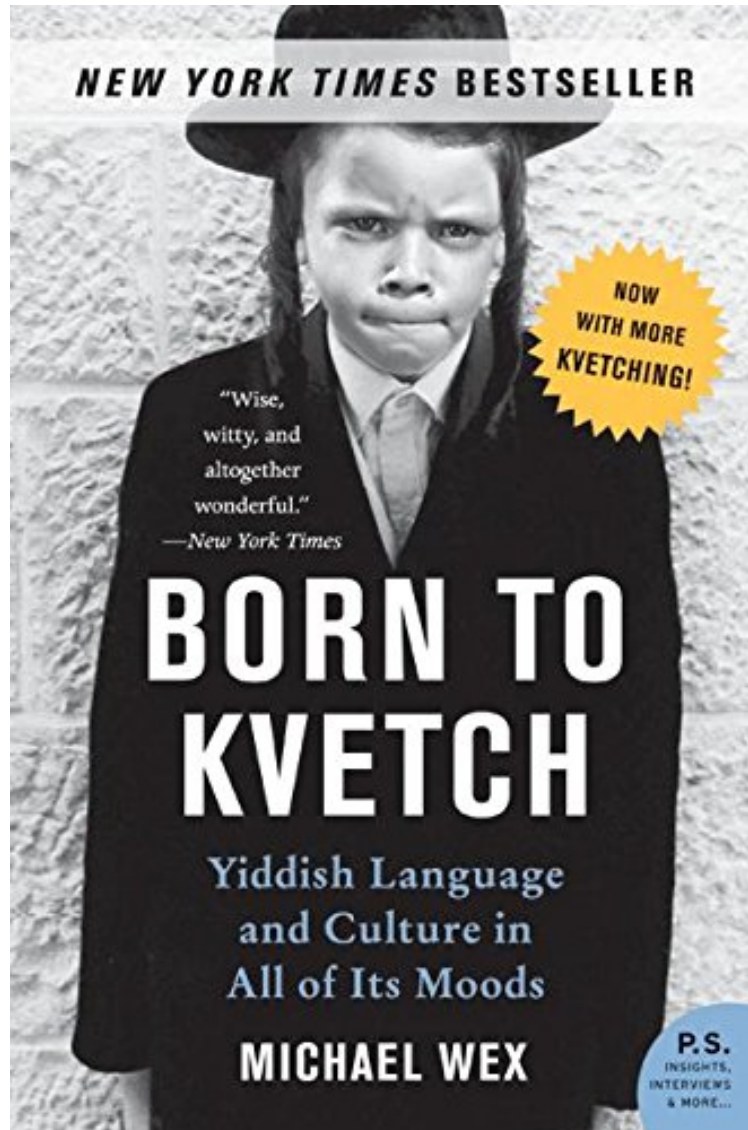


Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All of Its Moods (P.S.)

Michael Wex

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#254261 in Books Michael Wex 2006-08-15 2006-08-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .76 x 5.311, .56 #File Name: 0061132179303 pages Born to Kvetch Yiddish Language and Culture in All Its Moods | File size: 45.Mb

Michael Wex : Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All of Its Moods (P.S.) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All of Its Moods (P.S.):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Beautifully written with a lot of often sarcastic humor By

Customer This is an extremely interesting book focusing on deep cultural aspects of Central European Jewish culture that are reflected in the structure and idioms of Yiddish. It is organized in chapters corresponding to various aspects and stages of Jewish life (birth, marriage, money, sex, death etc.) Examples of sayings and expressions are given in (transcribed) Yiddish, translated into English and thoroughly discussed. It is accessible to a reader not knowing Yiddish but it should be interesting to fluent speakers as well, because of the links between culture and language. A real treat for anybody interested in the relations between the two. Beautifully written with a lot of often sarcastic humor. 68 of 70 people found the following review helpful. Hits the nail on the head By moose_of_many_waters English books on Yiddish generally fall into two categories: the oh isn't it a cute colorful language angle; the scholarly tome that sucks the life out of the language. Mr. Wex has done Yiddish a great service and has written a book that avoids both of these pitfalls. Beneath the humor - and this is a very funny, well written book - is a very serious examination of Yiddish as a language inextricably tied to its religion. Very few people could have written a book as insightful as this one and still made it entertaining. Mr. Wex has the background - a Yeshiva bocher turned secularist - and mindset to carry it off with aplomb. Some people might complain that the examination of Yiddish language and culture in this book is too harsh and well... kvetchadik. But there is pride for a language and culture long gone throughout this book. More than any book on Yiddish that I've read, this one rings true. The description of the culture of Chasidic education of children is particularly unflinching and mordantly accurate. Footnotes would help this book a great deal. But this is a fine achievement. Now if only they wouldn't have put someone else's photo next to the NY Times review. ;) 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Absolutely the best book available on the "spirit" of Yiddish By Eileen E. Freeman I was first attracted to this book by a review that mentioned Wex's comments on a Jewish prayer that is used to thank after going to the bathroom! I had no idea there was such a thing. Why should I, a Christian/Buddhist nun? But I have always been attracted to Judaism, particularly its ethical stance, and I love the Yiddish language. So I bought it. I learned right away that this book is no funny book of Yiddish phrases. It's a serio-comic description of the origins of Yiddish and how it has always mirrored the Jewish cultural and religious identity. The bathroom prayer, for example: it acknowledges G-d the almighty and gives thanks for all of the "orifices" that G-d gave the human body, the necessity of having them, and gratitude that this time they worked fine. Wex pursues this until he comes to the conclusion that even a prayer for a successful "pee" recapitulates creation itself, and serves to strengthen Jewish identity. I did wonder if this was a thing of the past, and then one day I was schmoozing with my Jewish rheumatologist and asked him if he knew of the prayer. Without batting an eye, he said that he used it every time he went to the "little room." If you think that's all there is, wait till you get to the chapter about swinging live chickens with diapers over your head!

A delightful excursion through the Yiddish language, the culture it defines and serves, and the fine art of complaint Throughout history, Jews around the world have had plenty of reasons to lament. And for a thousand years, they've had the perfect language for it. Rich in color, expressiveness, and complexity, Yiddish has proven incredibly useful and durable. Its wonderful phrases and idioms impeccably reflect the mind-set that has enabled the Jews of Europe to survive a millennium of unrelenting persecution . . . and enables them to kvetch about it! Michael Wex#8212 professor, scholar, translator, novelist, and performer#8212 takes a serious yet unceasingly fun and funny look at this remarkable kvetch-full tongue that has both shaped and has been shaped by those who speak it. Featuring chapters on curse words, food, sex, and even death, he allows his lively wit and scholarship to roam freely from Sholem Aleichem to Chaucer to Elvis. Perhaps only a khokhem be-layle (a fool, literally a "sage at night," when there's no one around to see) would care to pass up this endearing and enriching treasure trove of linguistics, sociology, history, and folklore#8212 an intriguing appreciation of a unique and enduring language and an equally fascinating culture.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Fortunately, despite its title and cover photo, this is not a kitschy book about a folksy language spoken by quaint, elderly Jews. It is, rather, an earthy romp through the lingua franca of Jews, which has roots reaching back to the Hebrew Bible and which continues to thrive in 21st-century America. Canadian professor, translator and performer Wex has an academic's breadth of knowledge, and while he doesn't ignore your bubbe's tsimmes, he gives equal time to the semantic nuances of putz, schmuck, shlong and shvants. Wex organizes his material around broad, idiosyncratic categories, but like the authors of the Talmud (the source for a large number of Yiddish idioms), he strays irrepressibly beyond the confines of any given topic. His lively wit roams freely, and Rabbi Akiva and Sholem Aleichem collide happily with Chaucer, Elvis and Robert Petrie. Academics, and others, will be disappointed at the lack of source notes, and a few errors have crept in (the fifth day of Sukkot is not Hoshana Rabba, for instance). Overall, however, this treasure trove of linguistics, sociology, history and folklore offers a fascinating look at how, through the centuries, a unique and enduring language has reflected an equally unique and enduring culture. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Wise, witty and altogether wonderful.... (New York Times) Required reading. (New York Post) From the Back Cover The entry for "kvetchn (the verbal form) in Uriel Weinreich's "Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary reads simply:

"press, squeeze, pinch; strain." There is no mention of grumbling or complaint. You can "kvetch an orange to get juice, "kvetch a buzzer for service, or "kvetch mit di pleytses, shrug your shoulders, when no one responds to the buzzer that you "kvetched. All perfectly good, perfectly common uses of the verb "kvetchn, none of which appears to have the remotest connection with the idea of whining or complaining. The link is found in Weinreich's "strain" which he uses to define "kvetchn zikh, to press or squeeze oneself, the reflexive form of the verb. Alexander Harkavy's 1928 "Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary helps make Weinreich's meaning clearer. It isn't simply to strain, but "to strain," as Harkavy has it, "at stool," to have trouble doing what, if you'd eaten your prunes the way you were supposed to, you wouldn't have any trouble with at all. The connection with complaint lies, of course, in the tone of voice: someone who's "kvetching sounds like someone who's paying the price for not having taken his castor oil---and he has just as eager an audience. A really good "kvetch has a visceral quality, a sense that the "kvetcher won't be completely comfortable, completely satisfied, until it's all come out. Go ahead and ask someone how they're feeling; if they tell you, "Don't ask," just remember that you already have. The twenty-minute litany of "tsuris is nobody's fault but your own. ---from "Born to Kvetch