

June 27, 1988

TO: Judith Love
FROM: David G. Roskies
RE: Yiddish at the Seminary

It's taken me thirteen years to realize that the Seminary has yet to capitalize on what it already boasts in the way of academic excellence. We simply have not kept pace with our own achievements! This proposal, then, is merely the tip of the iceberg.

A major campaign for new academic chairs at the Seminary should begin, I firmly believe, with a Chair for Yiddish Studies. This is because:

- (a) the money is out there and
- (b) we are now in a position to make a serious claim that Yiddish language, literature and culture are an integral part of the Seminary curriculum.

Exhibit A is a letter I recently received from Bar-Ilan University. Please disregard the text of the letter, for it is the letterhead to which I want to draw your attention. The main heading is The Joseph & Norman Berman Dept. of Literature of the Jewish People. Now Bar-Ilan claims to have set up the first such department in history, while the fact of the matter is that we preceded them by many years (1975, to be exact, the year I was appointed to the faculty). I'm sure, however, that this putative claim was a major selling point for Joseph Berman, a wealthy Jew and passionate Yiddishist from my home town of Montreal. Now look to the left. There you will see no less than seven chairs and institutes, all but the first of which were established by American-Jewish money during the past five years. The brains behind this whole operation is a graduate of this Seminary named Rabbi Gershon Weiner. He realized that Holocaust survivors who "made it" in America would love nothing better than naming a chair after themselves in some area of East European Jewish culture: Yiddish language and literature, Hasidism, etc. You've got to hand it to Weiner for managing to sell the same product seven times over (if you include the Departmental Chair as well). Why he even threw in two libraries and a training center for Yiddish teachers, even though Yiddish is taught in but a handful of Israeli highschools!

Exhibit B is a blurb that recently appeared in Divrei Hayamim, the Seminary in-house bulletin that I'm sure you receive. It substantiates my claim that Yiddish is now being integrated into the curriculum. We would not be selling a donor a bill of goods. In fact, someone like David Fishman would be just as deserving of an academic chair. And why not endow a Yiddish language instructor too!

Roskies memo /2

There's much more to be said on this whole subject, but my purpose here is merely to whet your appetite. At your convenience, we could meet and discuss the matter further.

Yours,

David J. Roskies

cc. David C. Kogen, Raymond Scheindlin