

# Meshuggenary

## Celebrating the World of Yiddish

"Surprise your friends...[with this] half-dictionary, half-cultural survey of jokes, expressions, recipes and proverbs."  
--William Safire, "On Language," *The New York Times Magazine*

"*Meshuggenary* is the best introduction to Yiddish and Yiddishisms ever published. It provides not only a clear and accurate guide to the Yiddish words and expressions encountered today, but also a fascinating account of the history of Yiddish and Yiddish culture in America and Europe. No one with an interest in Yiddish should be without this wonderful book."

--Jesse Sheidlower, Principal American Editor, *Oxford English Dictionary*

"My only regret after reading *Meshuggenary* was that there wasn't more of it to savor: the covers of this wonderful book are much too close together."

--Leonard Roy Frank, editor, *Random House Webster's Quotationary*

"*Meshuggenary* is a delightful miscellany about a delicious language. Anyone interested in Yiddish-scholars and the general public alike will enjoy and learn much from the book."

--Dr. Bella Hass Weinberg, Professor, Division of Library and Information Science, St. John's University

"Three cheers for *Meshuggenary*! It's a first-class tour of Yiddish that everyone will enjoy. Try a few pages and you'll be *meshugga* for *Meshuggenary* too."

--Dr. Jeffrey McQuain, author of *Never Enough Words* and *Power Language*

*A kluger farshteyt fun eyn vort tsvey.*  
(From one word, a smart person grasps two.)  
--Old Yiddish Proverb

More than a language, Yiddish is a culture embodying over a thousand years of Jewish history. Richly evocative, thick with pathos, funny, absurd, and strangely beautiful, the Yiddish language has been used for centuries as a means of communication between Jews scattered across the world. Yiddish arrived in America over a hundred years ago, and came of age on the wings of Hollywood and the Borscht Belt. Today, Yiddish words are found in any Standard English dictionary. (In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists more than a hundred of them.) The mainstream American media liberally sprinkles Yiddish into its news and entertainment coverage. Even in the heartland of the U.S.A., everyone knows a nebbish or a schlemiel, and at

an eclectic tour through Yiddish heritage, folklore, literature, theater, music, humor, and noshing, with abundant Yiddishisms along the way.

Filled with fascinating facts, illuminating sidebars, and captivating illustrations, **MESHUGGENARY** deconstructs and showcases:

- ❖ *The Heart of Yiddish Vocabulary*, with the definitive list of words and phrases every Yiddish aficionado needs to know, from *alevay* to *zaftig*
- ❖ *Yinglish 101*, with the inside story of eighty-odd Yiddish words that have firmly joined everyday English, from *bubele* (darling or sweetheart) to *klutz* (oaf or blockhead)
- ❖ *The S-Words of Yiddish*, scathingly descriptive put-downs without peer—*schlepper*, *schlub*, *schlump*, *schnook*, *schmendrick*, *schmo*, *schmuck*, and *schnorrer* for starters
- ❖ *The Genius of Yiddish Humor*, with slices of hilarious self-mockery, sarcasm, paradox, and pessimism, and schticks for every occasion
- ❖ *Yiddish Food and Cooking*, with a glossary of tasty food terms, from *babka* to *tzimmes*, plus classic recipes for Chopped Liver, Gefilte Fish, Knishes, Blintzes, and more
- ❖ *Yiddish Proverbs*, serving up timeless snippets of *shprikhverter* (folk sayings), like: “There’s no such thing as a good death or a bad mother”
- ❖ *Yiddish Expressions*, including such classics as *Ekh!*, *Feh!*, *Na!*, *Nu?*, *Oy oy!*, and *Sha!*

For devotees and students of *mame-loshn*, the book also includes a sweeping reference section, with everything from a primer on the transcription of Yiddish to information on Yiddish archives, institutes, organizations, publications, history, music, arts, and literature, complete with Web sites. For language and pop culture buffs, for those of Jewish descent eager to discover or rediscover their heritage, or for just about anyone who enjoys noshing on a bagel,

**MESHUGGENARY** is a fun and enriching read.

#### About the Authors

**Payson R. Stevens** has worked as an artist, designer, filmmaker, and writer for thirty years and co-authored, “Embracing Earth: New Views of Our Changing Planet.” Currently, he is president of InterNetwork Media, an award-winning science/consulting group. He lives with his wife in Del Mar, California.

**Charles M. Levine** is a former publishing executive who has held senior management positions with Random House, Simon & Schuster, John Wiley & Sons, and Macmillan. He now works as a consultant sought out for his expertise in electronic publishing and data management systems. He lives in Forest Hills, New York.

**Sol Steinmetz** is a linguist and lexicographer who has edited numerous reference books and more than thirty dictionaries. He is the author of *Yiddish and English: The Story of English in America*. He lives with his wife in New Rochelle, New York.