Yiddish Folk Songs sung by Ruth Rubin
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8720

SIDE I
1. MIKHALKU—Children's cumulative activity song.
2. OKSN (Oxen)—Children's cumulative nonsense song.
4. ER HOT MIR TSUGEZOGT (He Promised Me)—Lullaby.
5. MIT A NODL, OH A NODL (With a needle, without a needle). Song of the tailor.
6. LID FUN BEKER YINGL—(Song of the Baker Boy).
7. HOT ZIKH MIR DI ZIP TSEZIPT (My sieve is all worn out)—Wedding Dance.
8. OT AZOY NEYT A SHNAYDER (This is how a tailor sews)—Work Song.
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4. DORTN, DORTN, IBERN VASSERL (There, across the water)—Love Lament.
5. DI MAME IZ GEGANGEN (Mother Went off)—Love Song.
7. BAYM OBSHEYD (At Parting)—M. Kaplan-M. Gelbart.
8. YEDER RUFT MIKH ZIAMELE (Everybody calls me Ziamele)—Children's Song, World War II.

Yiddish Folk Songs sung by Ruth Rubin

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DESRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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The entire collection of tapes has been acquired by the Haifa Museum of Israel.

As an author, Mrs. Rubin has had numerous articles and essays published in scholarly journals, magazines, and anthologies. She is the compiler and editor of Jewish Folksongs in Yiddish and English and A Treasury of Jewish Folksong, and author of Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong, now in its second edition, published by McGraw-Hill. In Voices of a People, which utilizes the texts of some 500 Yiddish songs, Ruth Rubin has recreated the culture of the people through their Yiddish folksongs. It is the most complete analysis of Yiddish folksongs that has ever been published.

Yiddish Folksongs
Sung by
RUTH RUBIN

This recording brings you eighteen Yiddish songs from my personal repertoire. I learned some of the songs from my family, as a child growing up in the city of Montreal, Canada. Others, I learned from relatives and friends, as well as from informants during my field collections. In time, the songs became my very own, to treasure and enjoy.

Of the 18 songs on the recording, sixteen are East European folksongs, one was authored in New York City, and the other by a Jewish teacher living in Western Canada in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Although the songs originated from many parts of Eastern Europe, and people sang them in different dialects, I have not adhered to any particular dialect or accent. Rather than imitate a speech pattern which would be unnatural for me, I simulated them. However, the song "Hot Zikh Mir Di Zip Tseizipt," which I learned from my Bessarabian-born mother, is given in the Bessarabian dialect.

I hope you will enjoy listening and learning the songs on this recording.

RUTH RUBIN—folksinger, recording artist, lecturer, educator, author—is recognized both here and abroad as a leading authority on Jewish folksong. Audiences in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Israel have delighted in her performances, which have served as a bridge between cultures and generations, and she has recorded 10 LP records of Yiddish and Israeli folksongs.

Mrs. Rubin has been guest instructor and lecturer at major universities and colleges in the New York City area. She is the United States National Secretary of the International Folk Music Council, has twice been elected Councillor of the American Folklife Society and is an A.S.C.A.P. Popular Awards recipient.

Samplings of Mrs. Rubin's large collection of taped Yiddish songs are to be found in the Library of Congress, the Lincoln Center Library, Wayne State University Archive (Detroit), the National Museum of Canada (Ottawa), and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (New York).
1. MIKHALKU - Children's Cumulative Activity Song.

Refrain:

Hob ikh mir a kleynev Mikhalik, Mikhalik, 
Voyent er oyf der langer gas.
Makht er mir vos er vil, 
Makht er mir vos er ken.

1. Makht er mir a fayfele, 
Dos fayfele makht azoy; 
Flu-flu-flu, Flu-flu-flu, 
Azoj makht dos fayfele.

2. Makht er mir a paykele, 
Dos paykele makht azoy; 
Tara-bam-bam-bam, tara-bam-bam-bam, 
Azoj makht dos paykele.

3. Makht er mir a trubetsake 
Di trubetsake makht azoy; 
Tru-tru-tru, tru-tru-tru, 
Azoj makht di trubetsake.

4. Makht er mir a fidele, 
Dos fidele makht azoy; 
Fidik-didik-didik, fidik-didik-didik, 
Azoj makht dos fidele.

5. Makht er mir a tsimbele, 
Dos tsimbele makht azoy; 
Tsim-tsim-tsim, tsim-tsim-tsim, 
Azoj makht dos tsimbele.

2. OKEN. Children's Cumulative Nonsense Song.

Hob ikh a por oken, oken, 
Vos zeyt broken lohen, lohen, 
Av, vunder isher vunder, 
Vi di oken broken lohen, 
Dos iz mir a vunder! (2)

Hob ikh a por bern, bern, 
Vos zeyt shitter kern, kern, 
Av, vunder isher vunder, 
Vi di bern shitter kern, 
Un di oken broken lohen, 
Dos iz mir a vunder! (2)

Hob ikh a por tsig, tsig, 
Vos zeyt kinder vign, vign, 
Av, vunder isher vunder, 
Vi di tsig kinder vign, 
Un di oken broken lohen, 
Dos iz mir a vunder! (2)

Hob ikh a por hint, hint, 
Vos zeyt makhn tign, tign, 
Av, vunder isher vunder, 
Vi di hint makhn tign, 
Un di oken broken lohen, 
Dos iz mir a vunder! (2)

Hob ikh a por hener, hener, 
Vos zeyt klayb henener, shpenener, 
Av, vunder isher vunder, 
Vi di hener klayb shpenener, 
Un di hint makhn tign, 
Un di tsig kinder vign, 
Un di oken broken lohen, 
Dos iz mir a vunder! (2)

Hob ikh a por feygolekh, feygolekh, 
Vos zeyt bakn beygolekh, beygolekh, 
Av, vunder isher vunder, 
Vi di feygolekh bakn beygolekh, 
Un di hener klayb shpenener, 
Un di hint makhn tign, 
Un di tsig kinder vign, 
Un di oken broken lohen, 
Dos iz mir a vunder! (2)

Not only half of this song is "nonsense" it seems... For the other half truly reflects the environment in Eastern Europe of a century or so ago, where noodles were chopped, houses swept, children rocked to sleep in cradles, ink was made, kindling wood gathered and little beysgl baked.
Lullaby.

Hush-a-bye and sleep,
My beloved child.
Close your little eyes,
And go to sleep at once.

Close your eyes,
And open them wide,
In good health,
May you not child sleep.

You whine and you whimper,
And won’t go to sleep,
Are you causing mother
Anguish that way.

Rocking and crooning
Is all that you want,
So close your little eyes,
And sleep in good health.

Toads and bears,
Are sitting outdoors,
With tails hats,
And long points.

A little girl who cries,
And will not be still,
They carry her off,
And stuff her into a sack.

A little boy who cries,
And will not be quiet,
They pull off his pants,
And give him a good spanking.

1. Ay-lye-lye-lye shlof,
Mahn lib kind.
Makh-zhe tsvai di eygelakh,
Un shlof ayn geshveind.
Makh zey tsvai,
Un makhe zey ofn.
Ganztinkheroyt
Zolstu kind maynsh shlofn.

2. Pysheeshats zikh un veynsp,
Un shlofn viltsu nit,
Makhst dohkh on dayn muhn
Shmeren mit demit.
Vign un zingen
Is dayn santsz grunt.
Makh-zhe tsvai di eygelakh
Un shlof ayn gezunt.

3. Zhabes mit bern,
Tu-en ojf droyt zitan,
Mit di hoykhne hitlen,
Mit di lange shipten.
A meydel vos veynt
Un vil nit ru-ig zayn,
Nemen zey tsvai,
Un warfn in torbo arayn.

4. ER HOT MIR TSUGEZOGT.

Lullaby. (He promised me)

Er hot mir tsugezogt, er hot mir taugezogt,
Er hot mir taugezogt tau nemen.

He promised me, he promised me,
He promised he would marry me,
He’s gone off with another woman
And my heart aches.

Refrain:

Ay, shlof mayn kind, shlof,
In dayn zisn shlof.
Got sol im batesin far der falscher lib,
Dos sol zayn zayn shcroft.

Ch, sleep my child, sleep,
In your innocent sweet slumber,
May God punish him for his false love,
May that be his punishment.

2. Ich hob mir ovzgeneyt a zaydn kleydele,
Pinuf arahin di breyt,
Oy, kayn freyd un kayn nakhes sol der mentsh nisht hohn,
Vos er hot unds in undzler lib tseasheyt.

I made myself a satin dress,
Five yards wide,
So joy, no pleasure may that one have,
Who broke us up in our love.

3. Asoyvi s'is nishto kayn royt epele,
Vos sol hohn kayn vermel derymen.
Asoy is nishto der manu-parshoym,
Vos sol nishto hohn dem falshen zinen.

As there is no red apple
Without its little worm inside,
So there is no man to be found,
Without his false motives.

Note: A rare example of a Yiddish lullaby, with the jilted woman rocking her illegitimate bay to sleep. (Collected in Montreal, Canada, 1925, from J. Zipper.)
5. MIT A NODL, ON A NODL. 
(With a needle, Without a needle).

Refrain:

Mit a nodl, on a nodl,
Ney ikh mir b’kovid godi.

1. Zitan zits ikh mir
   A fis af a fis,
   Vayl di arbet
   Is tsiker-siz.

2. Un az ikh hob
   A nodl mit a fodim,
   Ney ikh mir oyfn
   Di shenetse b’godim.

3. Tsi-on ts’ikh mir
   Di festerge,
   Un ikh mis es
   Di mamalige.

4. Un az ikh nem
   Di shor un ayn,
   Kon ikh shoynt
   Mayn vayn un kinder shpayz.

5. Shames gev ikh mir arovy -
   Vi in posik shoynt -
   Vos ikh hob aleyn geneyt.

Song of the Tailor.

With a needle, without a needle,
I do my sewing with great dignity.

I sit on my work-table,
With my legs crossed under me,
Because my work
Is sugar-sweet.

So long as I have
A needle and thread,
I can sew up
The most beautiful clothes.

I pull out
The basting threads,
And eat
My cornmeal mush.

And when I take
My shears and iron in hand,
Then I can
Feed my wife and children.

On the Sabbath, I walk out -
"As it is written" -
In the very clothes
That I myself have made.

6. LID FUN BIKER YINGL. (Song of the Baker Boy)

1. Indroyan geyt a drobiner regn,
   Di volkenes, zey hohn sikh farshpreyt.
   Tsasyt ikh hoib nor di bekerey derkont,
   Azoy hot sikh mir der kop fardeynt.

   (A soft rain is falling outdoors,
   The clouds have spread all over the sky.
   Since I began to work in the bakery,
   My head has been spinning.

2. Oy, a mit, az si molt, molt si k’seydey,
   Ir ophitel hot oykhe a minut.
   Tut nor a koyk oyf dem klenst bekereyngl,
   Tsi farmaot er dem a tropy blut.

   (Oh, a mill that keeps turning and turning,
   Even it has its moment of rest.
   But look at the youngest baker-boy,
   He hasn’t a drop of blood in him.

3. Ay, der bekere mit der bekern, zey kumen in der bekerey,
   Loyt zeyer raykhtum un Loyt zeyer shveyger;
   Zi geyt ongeton a por brilyantone oyringen,
   Un er, in a goldenem zeyger;

   (Oh, the baker and his wife, they
   Come to the bakery,
   Dressed according to their fancy style;
   She wears a pair of diamond earrings,
   And he – a golden watch and chain.)
HOT ZIKH MIR DI ZIP TSEZIPT.
Wedding Dance Song.
(My sieve is all worn out)

1. Hot zikh mir di zip tsezipt,
   Un hot s’kh mir tsebrokhn,
   Hot zikh mir di shikh tseren -
   Tonsa ikh in di hoyle zohn.

Refrain: Tonsa, tonsa, antkeg mir,
   Un ikh antkeg dir,
   Do wesn nemen dem eydium,
   Un ikh vel nemen di shnir.

   (My sieve is all worn out,
   And broke altogether,
   My old shoes are torn,
   So I dance in my stocking-feet.)

   Dance, dance opposite me,
   And I will dance to you -
   You will take the son-in-law,
   And I will take the daughter-in-law.

2. Tsebrokhn iz der lokshnentop,
   Farbrent der nahiit.
   Tonsa in der makhnystes -
   Di koles in der mit.

   (The noodle-pot is broken,
   And the chick-peas burned to a crisp,
   All the in-law women are dancing,
   With the bride in the center)

3. Khosn’s taos un koles taos,
   Di gontse mishpukhe,
   Tonsa of der khasene
   In mozi un un brukhe.

   (The groom’s family and the bride’s family
   Are dancing at the wedding
   In blessed good fortune)

Note: I collected this song from my mother, many years
ago, in Montreal, Canada. But she only knew that first
stanza and not a single other one could she recall. In
time, like many another “carrier”, I did “my own thing”,
and added two additional stanzas, which I continued to
enjoy singing and still do.

OT AZOV NEYT A SHNAYDER.
(Work Song)
(This is how a tailor sews)

Refrain:
Ot azov neyt a shnayder,
Ot azov neyt or guti

1. Ey neyt un neyt a gantsa vokh,
   Fardint a gilk mit a loch.
   He sews and sews the whole
   Week long.

2. A shnayder neyt un neyt un neyt,
   Fardint kovkhes, mit kov broyt.
   A tailor sews-and-sews and sews,
   Earns the plague but not any
   recurr.
   We toild from eight to eighti

3. Farsyorn, mit heynyt gedekht,
   ‘Obn mir gehorevot fun akhet
   Biz akhit

4. Ober di struktsve hot gemakht,
   ‘Ober ahrn geben mer nit akht,
   Biz akht.

5. Ober der vos arbet fun zihn biz
   Meyn -
   Hakt men in di shoyn in shhtub
   Arayn!

   (This is how a tailor stitches,
   This is how he sews so well)

Note: This 19th century song began as a merry lilt among
tailor apprentices. It continued to be popular
into the 80s, when the struggle for the ten-hour
day was going on. The final stanza above, sounds
a warning to those who persist in working the
12-hour day......
9. VEY DEM TATN. (Woe unto the Father) Soldier Song.

1. As vey dem tatn un vey der menem,
Vos keyn hofn a sun a zapevov,
Men tih tih om di soldateke krepid,
Un men shikh im, oy vey, glekh in boy.

(Woe unto the father and woe unto the mother,
When they have a son of draft age,
They put him into a military uniform,
And send him straight into battle.

(When we arrived at the train,
We stood there on the platform.
And when the whistle blew,
Ah me, we all broke out into a great cry!

3. Nor veyn nit mame un veyn nit muter,
As got vel helpn, vel ikh kumen geshvind.
Du solist mir mayn shnup ophitz,
Du solist mir ophitz mayn vayb un kind.

(But week not, mother, oh week not mother,
With God's help, I'll come home soon.
Take good care of my home,
Take good care of my wife and child.

4. Nor veyn nit mame un veyn nit muter,
Konst noch meynen as ikh lig aleyn.
Alle treg brennt men naye branderlekh -
Es vart a yemer mit a geveyn!

(But week not mother, oh week not mother,
You may think I lie here alone.
Every day brings us new little brothers -
The air is filled with cries of pain.

Note: The above is a "letter-ballad" - written by a wounded soldier to his mother. In this lament of World War I vintage, several Russian and Yiddish words are evident. They are: zapevov - a draft age young man.
how - train.
boy - battle.
ploeshet - platform.
oysge-svitshet - whistled.

40. IZ GEVEN AMOL A PASTUKHL.
(Once upon a time, there was a little Shepherd)

Mixed-language Ballad.

1. Iz geven amol a pastukhl, a pastukhl,
Iz in faroiyem gegangen mayn eyn-eyn oyntsig shefele.
Geyt er, zet er a fur mit shtyenrolekh, mit shtyenrolekh.
Hot er gemeyst az dos zemen fun shefele, di beyndolekh...

(Once upon a time there was a little shepherd,
Who lost his one and only little lamb.
As he walked along, he saw a wagon carrying little stones,
And he thought they were of his little lamb, the bones.

Refrain:
Zogt er: Adoyni, Adoyni, Adoyni.
Iahl nye batevi ti?
Iahl nye vidgel ti move oitz?

Makht er: Nyet!
Bida bidu, nyme nishto.
A yak-sho va doney oitus?

(As he said: My Lord, My Lord, My Lord!
Have you noticed anything?
Have you seen my little lambs?
And the peasant replied: No!
Ah me, poor me, nothing have I found,
How then can I return home?

2. Geyt er, zet er a fur mit dernerolekh, mit dernerolekh.
Hot er gemeyst az dos zemen fun shefele di hernerolekh.
Geyt er zet er a fur mit nilolekh, mit nilolekh.
Hot er gemeyst az dos zemen fun shefele di fiselekh.

The ballad consists of Yiddish in the main. However, the refrain uses a Ukrainian dialect (underlined words), the Hebrew word "Adoyni" and the rest - Yiddish. This mixed-language ballad reflects the time when Jews in the Czarist lands were sunk in deepest misery and despair. The people felt like the poor shepherd who had lost his only little lamb, abandoned by the Lord, faced with a harah nyet from a peasant, whom he feared.
1. In a finisterer sho, mame,
Oy, hosut mikh geboyrn,
Un wenen ikh hob lib gehat,
Oy, dem hob ikh farloyrn.

2. Oy vey, tokhter,
Es tor azoy nis sayni
Der szejfer hot shoym tsvelf
Gashlogen.

3. Oy-vey, mame,
Fartsap mir nit mayn blut
Lomkh mit in reydn.
Khatsh eyn-soy min untum
Khim bin a meyd mit farshand.

4. Fi-le musikantn,
Oy, shuln oyfn frayn feld.
Ich hob farspyt mayn lebn.

5. Fi-le blyeivntn,
Oy, hob ikh shoyn gezin,
Nor as men kukt zikh ayn in soy,
Oy, zenen zoy gemenin.

Refrain: Ay, fishelekh in vasser,
Aykhn iz fil besser.
Tevish an eykh iz nit faran.
Kam kneler un kam gresser.

(All the rivulets).

1. Ale vasserklokh filan avek,
Di gribelkheh blaybn leydlig.
Nito esa menshn oyf gour der valt,
Vos sol farshteyn mayn vegnig.

2. Di yoreleksh tse-chen, di yoreleksh fil-en,
Di tsayt geys avek vi roykekh,
Un az ikh demon sikh on dir, mayn zis-lebn.

3. Un az a meydle shpiln a libe,
Shpiln in ir ale farbn.
Un az si shpiln ir libe nit oys-
Kon si kholle nokh shartbeyn.

4. Un az di tepelekh trikenen oys,
Blaybn zey ale leydlig.
Un az a meydle firt ir libe nit oys,
Vert si farfain oyf eybig.

(All the rivulets flow away,
The little ditches remain empty.
There's not a person in all this world,
Who can understand my anguish.

The years go by, they fly away,
Time disappears like smoke,
And when I remember you, my sweet-life,
I am weak with longing.

And when the little pots dry out,
They all remain empty.
And when a young girl loses her love,
She is lost forever.
SIDE II: No.3

VOS HOSTU MIR OPGETON?

1. - Vos hostu mir opgeton -
   - Oy, tayer lebn mayna?
   - Vos ikh benk asoy nokh dir?
   - Ay, ikh hob dir gornit opgeton -
   - Oy, tayer lebn mayna -
   - Ikh hob zikh poshit ayngelith in dir...

(What have you done to me -
On, darling life of mine -
That makes me yearn for you so?
- I haven't done a thing to you-
On, precious life of mine -
I only fell in love with you...

Refrain:

Un az du fors akh fun mir,
Oy, benken vel ikh hartsenyu nok dir...

(And now that you are leaving me,
Oh, darling life of mine -
I cannot live without you for a moment!
And now that you are leaving me - oh woel!
Oh, how I shall miss you, my dear heart...

2. Mayn tate fleg mir shvendig zogn,
   Mayn mane fleg mir shvendig zogn;
   Loz zikh inem bokher nit arayn;
   Kh'ob mayn tate nit gevelt folgn;
   Kh'ob mayn manen nit gevelt folgn -
   Is varf zikh khotsh in vasser arayn!

(My father always told me,
My mother always told me;
Don't get involved with that fellow!
I didn't want to listen to my father,
And I didn't want to listen to my mother -
So I might as well jump into the water and drown.)

Note: Collected from Dora Wasserman, Montreal, Canada, 1955.

SIDE II: No.4

DORTN, DORTN IBERN VASSEL.

1. Dortn, dortn ibern vasseler,
   Oy, dortn, dortn ibern brik.
   Fartribn hostu mikh in di vaytene lender,
   Un benken, benk ikh nokh dir twurik.

(There, across the water)

(There, across the bridge,
You have driven me into distant lands,
And I yearn to be with you again.

2. Oy, viflik ovntleh tsuzmam gezessn,
   Oy, viflik ovntleh schpt in der nakht.
   Oy, viflik trerelekh mir hohn fargoan,
   Bis mir hohn di lihe tsuzmam gebrahkt.

(Oh, the many evenings we sat together,
Oh, the many evenings - so late into the night,
Oh, the tears we shed together,
Until we brought our love together.

3. Oy, helf mir gotenyu, oy, got in hml,
   Oy, helf mir gotenyu, s'ilz mir nit gut.
   Shoyn tsayt drey vorelekh, vit mir shpilin a libe,
   Un oys-shpilin di libe, kenen mir nit.

(Oh, help me, God in Heaven,
Oh, help me Lord, I feel so bad.
For three years now we have been couring,
And we still cannot fulfill our love.

4. Oy, dayne oygelakh, vit di shventse karelekh,
   Un dayne leplelekh, vit rozenve papir.
   Un dayne fellakh, vit tunt un vi foder -
   Oy, shraybn zoisstu ofte briu tso mir.

(Oh, your little eyes like little black cherries,
And your little lips like pink crepe paper...*
And your little finger, like ink and a quill,
Oh, write to me with them from afar....)

Note: A love-letter from a young man, possibly gone off to the New World to put down new roots, to his sweetheart “back home” in Eastern Europe.

*In the days “before lipstick”, dipping a piece of pink crepe paper in some water and passing it over the lips - did just as well, apparently...
Love Song.

1. Di mame iz gegan in mark arayn nokh koyin,
    Hot si mir gebrahte a yunge fun poynim.
    Ay, iz dos a yingele, a sheyn un a fayns,
    Mit di shvarts eygelikh, oy, kets zale du maynns.

   (Mother went off to market to buy some coal,
    She brought me a young lad from Poland; 
    Ah, what a young lad, so handsome and so fine,
    With little black eyes, oh, kitten mine.

2. Di mame iz gegan in mark arayn nokh kroyt,
    Hot si mir gebrahte a yingele fun boy.
    Ay, iz dos a yingele, a sheyn un a fayns,
    Mit di vayse tseyneedsakh, oy, kets zale du maynns.

   (Mother went off to market to buy some cabbage,
    And brought me a young lad, right off the coach; 
    Ah, what a young lad, so handsome and so fine,
    With his little white teeth, oh, kitten mine.

3. Ikh hob gegan mandlenn, ikh hob getrunken vayn,
    Ikh hob soln b a yingele um kon on im nit sayn.
    Ay, iz dos a yingele, a sheyn un a fayns,
    Mit di lange peysakah, oy, kets zale du maynns.

   (I ate almonds and I drank wine,
    I loved a young lad and cannot be without him.
    Oh, what a young lad, so handsome and so fine,
    With his long sideburns, oh, kitten mine.)

Note: During the 16th c. the rabbinical supremacy of Polish Jewry was firmly established and young men from all over Europe were flocking to the rabbinical academies in Poland. At the end of the term, the teachers and their pupils went to the Polish Fairs...where the keenest intellects received wealthy brides as a reward for their mental exertions...the above 19th c. lilting song echoes the centuries-old way of life of arranged marriages and the Dedication to Learning. It also reveals the first "modern" expressions of young Jewish women in Eastern Europe, who were beginning to ask for love as one of the requirements in a marriage match.

Mixed-language Song.

1. Say, O'Brien,
    Knasr mir a zimlé-khesed layen,
    A taystir nonekh khozim,
    I'm broke without a penny,
    Which nobody can deny.

   Oh, trials, oh-oh-oh,
    I could lie down and yell.
    Oh, blessings and mercies,
    For God is a jolly good fellow,
    Which nobody can deny.

2. O'Brien,
    Six nito vos tsay koyen,
    Na noymir uma n'saper,
    Bread without butter for supper,
    Which nobody can deny.

3. Say, O'Brien,
    Men darf khanen makhon Khayen,
    Siti hay'nkor shomart,
    She's way over forty,
    Which nobody can deny.

4. O'Brien,
    Gib a bisele yaivin,
    Yavin yissahakh l'vay anosh,
    There's none without a blemish,
    Which nobody can deny.

Note: This mixed-language drinking song, which utilizes Yiddish, Hebrew and English, was written in Western Canada (Winnipeg, Manitoba) during the 20s of this century. It combines secular matters with snatches from Hebrew prayers and is set to a melody which incorporates Jewish and non-Jewish elements. Listeners will recognize part of the tune from the English drinking song "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow". O'Brien has been popular in several variants among Yiddish-speaking Canadians and Americans and this one is my remembered version.
1. Ven endign yestu dayn lange nesiye,
Un kumen besheles awot,
Dertsayl dort fun ales, dertsayl nor fun mir nit.
Ikh bet dikh, mikh loz in gehayn.

(Translation: After your long journey - When you will arrive safely home, Tell them about everything, but nothing about me, I beg of you, leave me out of it.)

2. Un vet oyf mir fregen mayn tate, mayn mane,
Dertsayl nit fun alte vos du veyst.
Dertsayl zey likh es do gebrote un yevtans,
Zey veln hohn hano-farshayt?

(Translation: And should my father and mother ask about me, Don’t tell them everything you know, Tell them that I eat wheat bread and roasted meats, It will please them to hear this, understand?)

3. Un vet oyf mir fregen a meyzl, a blasse,
Du veyst doh boym venen lkh meyn,
Ir meystu dertsaylin fun ales, fun ales.
Nor zil vet nit fregen, o noyn...

(Translation: And should a pale young girl ask about me, You know whom I mean - Her you can tell everything, everything, - But she will not ask you, oh no...)

4. Nor oyfhsyn vet zi tsvey oygn vi karshn,
A kuk ton a miln, oyf dir,
Un vet zikh farshern, farshern a lok,
Nu, loz ir gerian fun mir...

(Translation: She will look up at your with two eyes like cherries, Looking at you so tenderly, Shyly, she will brush a lock of hair away - Well - give her my greetings...)

Note: Written on the eve of World War I, this tender ballad tells us about two young men who had come to the New World, to cut down roots. One has decided to remain. The other, disillusioned, is returning home, to Eastern Europe. The singer, who has apparently left a sweetheart “back home”, begins to sense that he may perhaps never see her again...

1. Yeder ruft mikh zamele, Oy, vi mir iz shver, Kh’ob gehat a namele, Kh’ob zi shoyt nit mer, Kh’ob gehat a tatele, Not er mikh gezht, Itet bin likh a shmatele, Vayl ikh bin yid.

(Everybody calls me Zamele, Oh, how heavy is my lot, Always I am a mother, Always I have no rest, Always I am a wife, Not is life easy, Each time a new blame, Because I am a Jew.)

2. Kh’ob gehat shvestrele, Iz zi shoyt nito, Akh, vu bishet esterle, In der shevorer sho? Ergets be a heymele, Ergets be a ployt, Ligt mayn bruder shloymele, Fun a daytsh getoyt.

(Once I had a little sister, But she is not longer here, Oh, where are you Esther, In this terrible time? Always a heymele, Always a ployt, Lies my brother Shloymele, From a daytsh gotoyt.)

3. Kh’ob gehat a heymele, Iteter iz mir shlakh, H’bin vi a beheymele, Vos der talyen slakh, Got, du kuk fun himele, Of der erd roop, Ze nor vi dayn bimele, Rayst der gaelon op!

(Always a heymele, And he comes to the heymele, Always I am a heymele, And he is slain, God, look down from the sky, Upon the earth, And see how your little blossom, Is being uprooted by the murderer.)

Notes:
During the German occupation, one million Jewish children perished.
Songs written by children are one of the categories of that dreadful period.

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