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THE BAAL SHEM TOV:
MASTER HEALER OF THE BODY AND SOUL

REBECCA POMERANTZ

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 6, 2000
Advised by Dr. Nancy Wiener

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REBECCA POMERANTZ

The goal of this thesis was to analyze the healing tradition of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, The Baal Shem Tov. Through reading a large body of Chasidic stories, I selected and translated twenty tales pertaining to the traveling ministry of the Besht. The stories were chosen from three Hebrew anthologies: *Shivchei HaBesht*, *Sippurei HaTzadikim*, and *Sippurei HaBesht*. Every tale was selected because it portrayed the Besht as a healer, able to rid a person or community of a physical, spiritual or demonic malady.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each portraying a different aspect of the Besht's healing and magical powers. Two tables provide information about each tale by their Hebrew sources and page numbers and by geographical information, when available, for each one. Because these stories are not readily available, I have provided the Hebrew for every quotation in the body of this text, as well as a section with all twenty stories in Hebrew and my translations.

Because the Besht was a pivotal figure in the development of the Hasidic Movement of the eighteenth century, I studied many secondary sources about this tradition. Other sources necessary for this topic include studies of mysticism, magic, and storytelling. Finally, modern studies of chaplaincy and the efficacy of healing prayer were other instructive avenues of research.

This thesis was crafted through the unending dedication and guidance of Rabbi Dr. Nancy Wiener. Through this scholar's love of language and firm commitment to the healing tradition of yesteryear, today, and tomorrow, these stories came alive. Amulets and demonology no longer apply to today's healer, but being a present, active listener must certainly does.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the formal development of Judaism there was a constant elaboration of what, according to Joshua Trachtenberg, may be called "folk religion." That is to say, there were ideas and practices that never met with the total approval of the authorized religious leaders, but which enjoyed great popularity among Jews. Common in folk religion were beliefs concerning demons and angels and many practices that those who adhered to normative Judaism understood as "superstitious" usages. These practices and beliefs were integrated into the lives of many Jews. Much to the dismay of the official leadership, these folk religious practices developed as an alternative or adjunct to mainstream Jewish communal life. In many Eastern European communities folk traditions related to faith healing reached an apex in eighteenth century Eastern Europe¹.

Life was particularly difficult for the Jews of Eastern Europe at that time. In order to ease the cankers of illness and poverty, the Jews often turned to the ministrations of recognized "healers" who traveled from town to town in order to perform "miracles" through their knowledge of Jewish folk practices and the Kabbalah. According to Gershom Scholem, the Kabbalah, is:

The very doctrine which centers about the immediate personal contact with the Divine, that is to say, a highly personal and intimate form of knowledge, is conceived of as traditional wisdom.²

¹ Joshua Trachtenberg, *A Study in Folk Religion*, (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961)¹.

² Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing House, 1941) 21.

According to Gershom Scholem, the essence of this faith is the belief that the presence of God permeates and sustains all living matter and in the intense enthusiasm that is imparted to every action³. Among the practitioners and adherents of Kabbalistic and folk practices were people known as *Baalei Shem*, literally Masters of [God's] The Name. The *Baalei Shem* were believed to access this personal connection with the Holy One through their knowledge of the secret names of God. With this understanding, the *Baalei Shem* had access to various modes of healing. According to Jerome Mintz, these men:

... were healers and prognosticators; they gave blessings and amulets, promised insurance against fire and other ills, and, as masters of Kabbala, exorcised demons.⁴

In the words of Moshe Rosman, the *Baalei Shem* were able to, "pass from one cosmic region to another"⁵. With this unlimited access they were able to ascend to the realm of the holy, descend to the netherworld, and to communicate with the spirits. Thus their powers were limited to neither time, nor space, nor this worldly realm. According to Moshe Rosman, *Ba'alei Shem* were ecstatic mystics whose main technique in communicating with the supernatural was the magical employment of the names of God. According to Gershom Scholem, the use of these names, "opens the door to the transformation of mysticism into theurgy."⁶

³ Scholem, 331.

⁴ Jerome R. Mintz, , *Legends of the Hasidism: An Introduction to Hasidic Culture and Oral Tradition in the New World*. (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995) 25.

⁵ Moshe Rosman , *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 13.

⁶ Scholem, 55.

Personality cults have been rare in Judaism. Our tradition has focused on ideas rather than people. What we do know of our great leaders is from data of the roles they played in our community, and not abundant information about the individuals themselves. Moses is our great and revered teacher, the man through which God speaks to the Children of Israel, yet his burial site is unknown because God did not intend for Moses, the man, to be a focal point for our religion. However, the Hasidic⁷ movement of the eighteenth century progressed as a result of the teachings, piety, and work attributed to one individual, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov⁸, The Master of the Good Name. The wisdom, piety, accessibility, and ability to heal both the body and spirit ascribed to him, made him the great figure that he was and still is, even approximately two hundred years after his death.

Scholarly biographical descriptions of the Baal Shem Tov vary on many points, but most writers agree that he was born as Israel ben Eliezer and lived from 1700-1760. He was born in what is now eastern Poland and according to legend, based his ministry in the Carpathian Mountains. Because he was orphaned at a very early age:

... much has been made of the fact that the Baal Shem Tov had a scant formal education. This did not mean that he was in any way ignorant, since some of the greatest scholars of that age were self taught.⁹

⁷ Whereas many scholars assert that the history of this movement began in Ukraine and Poland in the middle of the eighteenth century as a result of the teachings of Israel ben Eliezer, its mystical origins are much older and can be traced to the Book of Ezekiel and the Talmud, *Masechet Chagigah*. For more information see Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.

⁸ Also referred to as the Besht, this acronym is taken from the Hebrew words Baal Shem Tov.

⁹ Aryeh Kaplan, *The Chasidic Masters and Their Teachings*, (New York: Maznaim

One of the reasons why the masses found the Baal Shem Tov so easy to relate to was because of his simplicity and poverty. The Besht's financial status is revealed in the tales about him. He was described as a wandering Jew that had neither appropriate warm clothing nor a permanent place to live. Thus he was revered and accepted by the masses of Eastern European Jews not only because of his mystical powers, but also because he lived just like they did.

The greatest way the Besht paved the way for masses of common people to embrace Judaism was by presenting them with a religion that was more joyous, mystical, popular, and communal than they had previously known. According to Yitzhak Buxbaum, "One of the ways he attracted them was by way of storytelling"¹⁰. Later, during his lifetime and after his death, many stories were told about him.¹¹

The Besht himself did not write books of his own. It is interesting that stories are our only source of information about the Besht, who himself was recognized as a great storyteller. All that we know comes from stories about the Baal Shem Tov that have been transmitted and written for the past two centuries. It is through these tales that we can have a window into the world of the Besht.

Many of the stories open with a long account of exactly how the story was transmitted to the author. For example, a story of the Besht predicting the need for a bloodletting opens with the following extended series of attributions:

Publishing Corporation, 1984) 8.

¹⁰ Buxbaum, 7.

¹¹ The stories about the Besht were first recorded in Yiddish and later translated into Hebrew. All English translations in this thesis are based on Hebrew sources.

And after his [Rabbi Abraham Polisker's] death, he was accepted by them [members of that community] as the head of the Rabbinic Court, Rabbi Aba of the aforementioned holy community of Kribush. I will write this tale for him, as well. It is a tale about the Baal Shem Tov, which I heard from a man from among the men of our community and he heard [it from] Rabbi Isaac Aizik the Hasid, the son of the rabbi of the holy community of Brahın, who heard it from his father. And I did not want to write to anyone on behalf of my hidden [secret] matter.¹²

Thus each story provides a series of people who are in some way connected to the tale. In addition, they provide information about the extensive travels attributed to the Besht. According to the stories included in this thesis, he traveled throughout Eastern Europe and as far as Istanbul. The locations in which the stories take place may be divided into three categories: (1) stories in which the Besht is a resident of a small town, (2) stories in which the Besht happens to be on a journey and a need for healing arises in a local village, and (3) stories in which the Besht is invited to a particular locale in order to heal.

The stories in this thesis have been chosen to highlight the Besht's methods as a great healer and they will also present his criteria for serving as a healer. They have been selected from three bodies of Hebrew Chasidic Anthologies. One tale is from a collection entitled *Sippurei HaBesht* (Stories of the Baal Shem Tov), another story is from *Sippurei HaTzaddikim* (Stories of the Righteous), and the remaining eighteen tales are from *Shivchei HaBesht* (In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov). Every tale was chosen because it portrayed the Besht as a healer, able to rid a person or community of a physical, spiritual or demonic malady.

¹² S. A. Horodetzky, *Shivchei HaBesht*, (Tel Aviv: Dabir, 1907) 109.

Because these stories are not readily available, an appendix is provided at the end of this text with each of the stories in both the original Hebrew with my own translation. The translations keep as close to the original Hebrew as possible. The only exceptions are the non-gender specific translations provided for the masculine Hebrew pronouns describing God. Moreover, I have provided two tables in order to catalog each tale and to provide geographic information as to where it is said to have taken place. Because of the disparity of "healing locations," there is no such thing as "the" territory of the Besht's ministry. Therefore, there is a mystique not only concerning how the Besht healed in these stories, but also as to exactly where these stories took place.

This thesis is created in order to translate and analyze twenty stories that portray the Baal Shem Tov as a great healer. These tales highlight his diverse healing techniques which are presented in four different chapters: (1) the healing power of physical touch, (2) the healing power of words, (3) spiritual healing, and (4) the healing of those afflicted by demons, witches and sorceresses. The fifth and final chapter is a presentation of why the Besht chose to heal some people and let others remain in their suffering.

CHAPTER I

THE HEALING POWER OF PHYSICAL TOUCH

The Baal Shem Tov was a healer of men, women, and children throughout Eastern Europe and beyond. According to legends written about him, he traveled from town to town in order to tell stories, pray, perform miracles, and heal. Some claimed that, "the Besht's touch was so powerful that he could start a fire by simply touching a tree."¹³ This chapter will focus on the Besht's ability to heal through physical touch.

Story number one¹⁴ about the Baal Shem Tov opens with a detailed description of the Besht not as a miracle man, but rather as an indigent traveling salesman. He traveled from town to town with his wife as:

He earned his living in suffering and great poverty by the labor of his hand. He had a carriage and a horse and he carried in them mud and sand to sell in the town.

והיה מתפרנס בצער ודוחק גדול מיגיע כפיו. היו לו עגלה וסוס,
והיה טוביל בהם טיט וחול למכור בעיר.

The story explains that the two traveled through the countryside without a soul paying attention to them because they were thought of as transient, indigent people. Yet one particular event made one particular person take note of this poor peddler. When the Besht's horse fell sick, the impoverished couple was advised to go to the home of a wealthy, charitable man named Reb Baruch, who had a custom of giving transient people a less than stellar, but yet adequate, horse. The person who directed them to Reb Baruch

¹³ Meyer Levin, *Classic Chasidic Tales*, (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996) 92.

¹⁴ Shlomo Zevin, *Sippurei HaBesht*, (Jerusalem: Beit Hillel, 1955) 268.

explained that he and his wife were committed to fulfilling the commandment of welcoming the stranger (*hachnasat orchim*), and that the two would benefit from finding this gracious couple's home. The Besht and his wife did so and the couple gratefully accepted the offer of the wealthy man to stay at his home.

While at the generous man's home the Besht did not reveal who he was to his host. One *Motzei-Shabbat*¹⁵ Reb Baruch was very frightened when he saw a bright light shining from the house where his poor guests slept. When he approached the door of the room emanating light:

He saw that it was the poor man . . . sitting on the floor and loudly reciting the Midnight Lamentation (*Tikkun Hatzot*)¹⁶, and he stood for the verse, "Why will you forget us forever and forsake us for so long a time?"¹⁷ His hands were raised upwards and his face was shining greatly, and from his eyes, tears ran down. He saw again, that a tall man stood near the poor man, a man with a long beard and wearing white, and also this man's face was shining greatly. Fear and great fright fell upon Reb Baruch from this vision to the point that he was not able to stand on his feet, and he fell from his height, and he fainted and fell to the ground.

When the Besht heard the sound of the fall, he ran to the door and opened it, and he saw Reb Baruch lying down from his faint. He began to rub him until he woke up from his fainting, and his spirit returned to him, and he brought him to the room to rest a bit.

¹⁵ Saturday night, when the Sabbath is complete.

¹⁶ Not content with the three daily services, the mystics introduced an additional midnight service. On every weeknight they would assemble in the synagogue at midnight in mourning clothes, sit on the ground, recite lamentations for the destruction of the Temple and the dispersal of Israel, and conclude with a confession of their sins. For further information see Elbogen's *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, 293-294.

¹⁷ This quotation is from Lamentations 5:20. This scroll is read on *Tisha B'av*, a day of mourning for the Jewish people which occurs on the day when Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. For more information see Rabbi Albert Friedlander's edition of *The Five Scrolls*.

וראה כי זה העני, שנתן לו את הסוס
 למתנה, יושב על הארץ ואומר ברעדה גדולה „תיקון חצות“, ועומד בפסוק
 „למה לנצח תשכחנו תעזבנו לאורך ימים“, כפיו פרושות למעלה ופניו
 מזהירים מאוד, ומעיניו נשקפות דמעות. וראה שוב, שאצל העני עומד
 איש גבה-קומה, בעל זקן ארוך ולבוש לבנים, וגם האיש הזה פניו מזהירים
 מאוד. פחד ואימה גדולה נפלו על ר' ברוך מכל החזיון הזה, עד כי לא
 יכול לעמוד על רגליו, ונפל מלוא קומתו ארצה והתעלף.
 כששמע הבעש"ט את קול הנפילה, רץ אל הדלת ופתח אותה, וראה
 את ר' ברוך שוכב מתעלף. התחיל לשפשף אותו עד כי העירו מעלפונם,
 ורוחו שב אליו, והביאו אל החדר לנוח קצת.

It was the Besht's otherworldly prayer experience that both brought Reb Baruch to that room and caused him to faint. And, it was also the Besht's unique powers that revived him with a forceful physical touch. This healing act is described in Hebrew as: *hitchil lishafshaif oto ad ki hairu m'alfono v'rucho shav ailav*. The verb *lishafshaif* may be translated as to rub or to “give someone a good grinding” or “to put someone through the mill.” Thus this healing story does not provide a picture of the Besht gently laying hands on the sick person. Rather, his healing is vigorous, even aggressive.

Story number two¹⁸ highlights the Baal Shem Tov's ability to have access to both bodies and souls in both this world and the upper world. A request of healing may come to him from either realm. When Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz was very ill, his soul was already in the upper world. There he saw the Besht and asked him to bless him and give him a complete healing, a *refuah shleimah*.

¹⁸ Yisrael Halevi Rosenzweig, *Sipurei Tzadikim: Otzar Yisrael*, M.H. Bloom, ed., (Jerusalem:1992) 131.

Once the rabbi proved his connection and worthiness to the Besht, he: *hayniach yado al rosho*, he placed his hands on the ailing rabbi's head. This touch did not yield instantaneous healing. Rather it initiated a gradual process of touch, perspiration, and slow healing.

Tale number three¹⁹ is about a madman who feigned death. The Besht's treatment was neither a fierce rubbing nor a gentle touching. Rather, he threatened to use force and treated the man as if he were alive and capable of feeling pain. The Besht said to the scribe (of the town), '*Anachnu muchrachim hayom lihakot mait echad*, Today we must strike a dead man.' This may seem like a cruel and unusual punishment, but the Besht then says, "Take a thick shoe-strap."²⁰ This phrase is the Talmudic equivalent of saying that one must be lashed with a wet noodle. The man is physically touched, but neither directly nor harshly. In fact, the touch is so light that even when the Besht ordered the scribe to strike him and beat him, the man did not move. This unconventional way of dealing with the mentally ill may be understood as the Besht's tactic to disallow the madman's notion that he is dead.

The next phase of the Besht's healing occurred at a Passover Seder. The Besht ordered the townspeople to prop the madman up with pillows so that he would be able to sit. He arranged for members of the community to touch him in the following manner:

They assigned one man to give him by mouth all that they were doing, that is food and drink, and they guarded him

¹⁹ S. A. Horodetzky, *Shivchei HaBesht*, (Tel Aviv: Dabir, 1907) 159-160 and #136 in Dan Ben Amos and Jerome Mintz's English translation of *Shivchei HaBesht (In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov)*, 160.

²⁰ See Sanhedrin 74b.

so that he would not escape. And if he were to escape, it would be difficult to find him. And with the third glass, he was not able to bear [his situation anymore], and he sprung up and ran from the house and he escaped. And they searched for him round the clock until they found him, and the Besht healed him.

ויעמידו לו איש אחד שיתן לו בפיו כל מה שהם
עושים, הן אכילה והן שתיה, וישמרו אותו שלא יברח. וכאשר יברח יהיה
קשה למצוא אותו. ובכוס ג' לא היה יכול לסבול, וקפץ ודלג מן הבית וברח.
ויבקשו אותו מעת לעת עד שמצאו אותו וריפא אותו.

Thus the Besht knew that it would “take a village” to heal this man. He healed him by orchestrating scenes in which others would either “beat,” feed, or give drink to the madman. He, alone, could not heal the man.

Story number four²¹ tells the tale of three brothers, two of whom were God fearing men and followers of the Baal Shem Tov and one who was a *mitnagged*²². All three men had a relationship with the Besht and whenever he was in that holy community, the Besht would stay with his two followers. One day the *mitnagged*, became ill. He lay on his sickbed and he no longer had the power of speech.

The rabbi [the Besht] said that it was necessary for him to go to his home and visit him [during] his sickness. And on Friday, the eve of the Holy Sabbath, he said to the two brothers in the words of a question: Would it be possible

21 Horodetzky, 156-157 and #225, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 229-230.

22 A *mitnagged*, literally opponent, was a person who did not accept the teachings of or the miracles ascribed to the Besht. The *mitnaggdim* went to great lengths to attempt to suppress the spread of Hasidism among East European Jewry. According to the *mitnaggdim*, “the mystical and ecstatic element of Judaism were both detrimental and dangerous, and should be eliminated in favor of a purely intellectual approach.” For more information about the struggle between the *mitnaggdim* and the *hasidim* see Aryeh Kaplan’s *The Chasidic Masters*, 1-7.

to pray there, at the house of your brother on the Holy Sabbath?

אמר הרב שצריכין לילך אצלו לבקר חוליו. וביום ו'
עש"ק אמר לשני האחים בלשון שאלה, אם אפשר ויכול להיות להתפלל שם
אצל אחיהם בשבת קודש.

He said to the townspeople that they all must go to the sick man.

Once the Besht was in the physical presence of the dying man, he could begin his art of healing. However, the man did not want to be healed by this faith healer. His mother chided him into giving the Besht a chance.

And his mother said to him: Why do you not greet the rabbi? And he did not answer her at all. And she placed his hand in the [middle of the] rabbi's hand. . . . The rabbi [then] said: Give me your hand. And he gave him his hand and he stood up. And the rabbi instructed him to let his feet down from the bed, and he did this. And after that he instructed him to slowly dress himself and to wash his hands, and he did this, [he did] everything that he instructed him [to do]. And after that he went with him to the synagogue and he prayed *Musaf*²³ with everyone and he became healthy with the help of God, may God's name be blessed.

ואמרה לו אמו, מדוע אינך נותן שלום להרב. ולא ענה לה כלום. ונתנה ידו לתוך יד הרב. שאל הרב את החולה אם למד גמרא. ושחק. וכן כמה פעמים שאל ממנו, והוא שתק. עד שגער בו הרב, היכן הוא דרך ארץ שלך. שאני שואל ממך ואינך משיב לי כלום. אז השיב לו, למדתי גמרא. ושאל באיזו מסכת הוא מאמר חביבים עליך יסורים. אמר לו במסכת ברכות. ומה נאמר שם. אמר לו, לא הן ולא שכרן וכו'. שאל לו הרב, חביבים עליך יסורים. והשיב לא הן ולא שכרם. אמר לו הרב, הב לי ירך. יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה. אחר זה צויה לו הרב שיויריד רגליו מן המטה, וכן עשה. אחר זה צויה הרב שילביש את עצמו מעט מעט ויטול ידיה, וכן עשה. כל דבר אשר צוהו. ואחר זה הלך עמו לבית התפילה והתפלל מוסף עם כולם והבריא בעוה"שית.

23 "The word *musaf* means 'something additional' whether a prayer or a sacrifice.... The Additional Service is known in connection with the Additional Sacrifice, and it is generally viewed as a replacement for the latter." Elbogen, 97.

The sick man's mother *nitnah yado latoch yad harav*. Literally, she gave his hand over to the Besht.

But the touching of hands merely initiated a process in which the Besht became a kind and patient caretaker who helped the man stand up, wash, and dress. Healing was more than touch, it also was in the more mundane actions of daily life. The Besht models the principles of giving care, especially to those with whom he has a connection. Moreover, in certain circumstances, he even renders healing to people who do not want to receive it.

Story number five²⁴ takes place in Istanbul and recounts the Besht's restoration of a blind boy's sight and the subsequent reversal of that healing. The boy's wealthy father employed doctors to heal him, but they did not help. He and his wife gave up hope about the child's healing until the Baal Shem Tov was in their community and told them that he could render a complete healing. This tale provides proof that the Besht's methods were known in such far off places as Istanbul. Moreover, his legendary healing practices were thought of as efficacious even to some who were not his followers.

Upon first glance, the boy's mother disapproved of the Besht because of his ragged appearance, which she found abhorrent. The mother could not bear that this European, transient guest-healer was a man of poor social status. Moreover, she was opposed to his mystical usage of the holy names. This less than gracious welcome angered the Besht greatly.

²⁴ Horodetzky 111-112 and #231 *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 237-238.

And the Besht became angry about [the fact] that she did not believe in the active power of the holy names, and he said, 'Where is the blind boy? Bring him to me and I will heal him so he will see immediately as the way of anyone.'

ויחרה אף הבעש"ט על שלא האמינה
בכוח פעולת שמות הקודש, ויאמר היכן הוא הילד הסומא, הביאהו אלי
וארפאנו שיראה תיכף ומיד כדרך כל האדם.

With this statement, one can learn that the Besht had complete faith that the boy's sight would return. The servants brought the sick boy to the Besht and he began a process of healing. First he whispered something into the child's ear²⁵, next:

[The Besht] ordered [them] to bring a Gemara to him, and he ordered him [the boy] to read, and he read in the manner as everyone does.

ומיד ציוה
להביא גמרא לפניו וציוה לו לקרות, וקרא כדרך כל הארץ.

The members of the household rejoiced at this miracle, but the Besht remembered the sharp criticism of the mother.

Even though the father offered the Besht a huge sum of money, he declined it. Unlike a doctor, the Besht did not charge a fee. His healing was for a different purpose, "only for the sanctification of God's name." Yet, because the woman mocked the holy names employed by the Besht:

Immediately and suddenly, the rabbi passed his hand over his eyes, and they returned [to as they were] in the beginning.

ותיכף ומיד העביר הרב ידו על עיניו וחזר לבראשונה.

²⁵ The healing touch is usually accompanied by a *lahash* – a whispered formula of blessing. For more information see Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi's *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidism*, 252.

According to the Besht, because this woman did not believe in the power of the holy names, she (and therefore her son) did not merit receiving benefit from his healing.

In story number six,²⁶ the Baal Shem Tov resuscitates a boy. This boy was born only after many years of an infertile man begging the Besht for a child. The child finally came in the couple's old age. After a few days, the boy died. The new and bereaved father came to the Besht in anger and rage.

Why did you deceive me and give me something as this that would be immediately taken from me? It would have been better had I not had children at all.

למה תשלה אותי ליתן לי דבר כזה שיופסק ממני מיד. והלא
יותר טוב היה לי שלא היו לי בנים כל עיקר.

The Besht responded to this chiding by assuring the man that the boy would live.

After days of waiting, the man chose to take a different tactic with the Besht. He asked if he should prepare his child for a *bris*²⁷. Thus the man acknowledged that the Besht was capable of restoring the boy to life. He asked the Besht whom he should choose for roles of honor for the ceremony.

And he ordered him to prepare himself according to custom, and to honor a well-known man as the *sandek*²⁸ and another for the cutting and himself [the Besht] for the *metzizah*²⁹, and he did thus.

²⁶ Horodetzky, 113-114 and #244, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 252-253.

²⁷ Religious ceremony observing an eight day old boy's circumcision and entrance into the covenant of Abraham.

²⁸ An honored person chosen by the parents to either hold the baby on his lap or hold the child's hands and legs firmly while he is placed on a table.

²⁹ This is the third step in ritual circumcision. Opinions differ as to whether *metzizah* is an integral part of the ritual or a health measure. According to Lawrence Hoffman this ceremonial action is the cauterizing of the wound. This method favored by medieval tradition calls on the *mohel* to suck the blood from the wound with his mouth. Since

וציוה לו שיכין את עצמו כנהוג,
וסנדק ציוה לו לכבד אדם ידוע, וכן חיתוך, ולעצמו מציצה. וכן עשו.

Thus we see a new and highly unconventional mode of healing. The Besht's physical touch takes place while he fills a role of honor in the *bris*. *V'la'atzmo mitzizah*, he himself performed this act and as a result, the boy's soul returned.

Stories one through six illustrate how the Baal Shem Tov was a master healer who employed various methods of physical touch. In five out of six stories the Besht himself touched the afflicted person directly, in the sixth he ordered others to do so. The Besht's physical healing may be categorized into three genres. The first subset is aggressive touch. This healing was either vigorous rubbing (such as the with the charitable man of story number one) or beating with a strap (such as with the madman of story number three). The next category is gentle touching or even not touching at all. This may be found in laying on of hands (such as with Rabbi Chernovitz in story number two), tender hand holding (such as with the *mitnagged* in story number four), or passing over of hands (such as with the blind boy in story number five). The final aspect of physical healing may be categorized as uncommon touching (such as the Besht's performance of the *metzizah* ritual on the dead boy).

Rabbinic Judaism equates wine with blood, wine then came to be sucked by the child instead of blood. "This act was reserved as an oral transfusion of wine as blood for the child. . . Wine is now utilized in the *brit milah* of modernity as a mirror image, so to speak, of the blood being sucked from him at the very same time – and when we observe also the content of the extended prayer that adds Ezekiel's words (lines 55-56) I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood; and I said to you: 'In your blood live'; 'I said to you: 'In your blood, live'" (Ezekiel 16:6), we cannot help but notice a certain ritual integrity centering on the symbol of blood." For further information see Hoffman's *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism*, 90-95.

While normative Judaism does not focus on the healing power of physical touch writings of other traditions that do may shed light on our understanding of the Besht's talents. According to Zach Tomas a healing touch is a vital way of showing compassion, and is to be, "understood as an expression of a potential built into every one of us."³⁰ Thus the Besht did much more than literally touch these human beings. He reached out to them with both his body and soul. In addition to the actual touch (or non-touch as the case may be) other factors were at play in the healing moments. At most of these times the Besht uttered a blessing or made a statement of his faith in God. The use of prayer and faith will be explored in subsequent chapters.

³⁰ Zach Thomas, *Healing Touch: The Church's Forgotten Language*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994) 2.

CHAPTER II THE HEALING POWER OF WORDS

The Baal Shem Tov's words are so powerful that they cause healing to happen at either the exact time of their utterance or at some future date. When the Besht predicts that an event will happen in the future, it will most assuredly happen. This ability to foretell the future is not a frivolous mind reading game. When the Besht makes such statements they seem to affect and even mandate the future healing of an individual or individuals.

In the story of Reb Baruch (story number one) and the tale of the resuscitated boy (story number six) the Besht's ability to proclaim that childbirth would take place is highlighted. All the Besht had to do was to say that a child would come and in fact it did. In tale number one³¹ the Besht blesses Reb Baruch, the charitable landowner, and says to him:

That he merited having a son who will be a great *tzaddik*.³² And he warned him that his wife [must not] behave in the way that she had until now, that she did not want to suckle her children by herself and she paid a wet nurse for them. Rather this boy that she will give birth to she will actually suckle precisely by herself. Reb Baruch said, 'Amen. May it be God's will.'

ובירך אותו שיוכה לכן שיהיה צדיק גדול.
והזהירו שאשתו לא תתנהג כדרך שהתנהגה עד עתה, שלא רצתה להיניק
בעצמה את ילדיה ושכרה להם מינקת, אלא שאת הילד הזה שתלד תיניק
דוקא היא בעצמה. אמר ר' ברוך: אמן, כן יהי רצון.

³¹ Zevin, 268.

³² A righteous man

In this tale the Besht is able to tell the couple what they must do in order for them to give birth not only to a son, but a righteous son to boot.

In story number six³³ the Besht is also able to predict the birth of a child to an infertile couple. The tale recounts that:

In the holy community of Medzhibozh there was a man who had no children and would always mention it. When he became old [the days came], he bothered the Besht many times. And with the help of God, his wife bore him a son remembering her at the time of her old age.

ב"ק"ק מעזיבז' היה איש אחד חשוכי בנים והיה מזכיר תמיד. כאשר
בא בימים הטריח כמה פעמים את הבעש"ט, ובעזה"ש אשתו ילדה לו בן זכר
לעת זקנותה.

After some time the couple did in fact have a child, but the boy only lived for a couple of days. The man approached the Besht in "anger and rage" demanding to know why this happened.

And the Besht answered, 'Did I not say that you would have children? Of course the boy will live.'

והשיב הבעש"ט, הלא אמרתי שיהיו לך בנים, בוודאי יחיה הילד.

The man became proactive and asked the Besht if he should prepare for a bris, thus implying that the child would in fact live. The Besht agreed to the man's plans and counseled him on how to prepare properly. It was only the actual physical portion of the bris had been complete that the Besht articulated life saving blessings.

And the rabbi began to say blessings that follow a *bris*, and when he said the words, 'Preserve this boy to his father and to his mother.' He lingered a great deal until the boy's spirit returned to

³³ Horodetzky, 113-114 and #244 *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 252.

him, and blood from the circumcision spurted up to the ceiling.
And with the help of God, the boy completely lived.

והתחיל הרב
לומר ברכות שאחר המילה, וכשאמר תיבות קיים את הילד הזה לאביו ולאמו,
שהה הרבה עד שחזרה נפש הילד אל קרבו וניתן דם מהמילה עד שמי קורה.
ובעזה"ש חי הילד לגמרי

Thus the Besht's original pronouncement was true and the child lived.

In the fifth story, the Besht predicts that the blind boy's sight will return. Even
before examining the boy, the Besht said:

'Where is the blind boy? Bring him to me and I will heal him so
he will see immediately as the way of anyone.' He [the Besht] said
that 'in this minute he [the boy] would see. Perhaps he would be
able to make his words come true.'

ויאמר היכן הוא הילד הסומא. הביאהו אלי
וארפאנו שיראה תיכף ומיד כדרך כל האדם. ויהי באומרו נתפעם רוחה.
כי הרוצה לשקר ירחיק עדותו והוא אומר שבזו הרגע יראה, יכול להיות
שיאמת דבריו.

The Besht's formula of healing continued with the whispering of a blessing in the boy's
ear.

And suddenly they brought him the sick boy and he whispered
something in his ear.

ומיד הביאו לו החולה וילחוש באזניו איזה דבר.

The Besht is confident that he will be able to heal the child regardless of the mother's
skepticism. Several doctors tried unsuccessfully to restore the boy's sight, but the Besht
says he can do it, and so he does. Moreover, this healing seems to take place quite
quickly. The Hebrew word *miyad* meaning right away, in this minute, or at once is used
three times in four sentences. And the fourth articulation of this word is combined with
the word *taykef*, meaning immediately. The prediction does not foretell of some far off

healing that the family will have to wait to receive. This healing scene is fast and yields instantaneous results. The Besht, in fact, does make his words come true and the boy is then able to see again.

In story number seven³⁴ the Besht predicts that he will rid the holy community of Kotiv of demons.³⁵ After three nights of the demons performing mischievous acts while appearing in various forms such as pigs that walk on the ceiling, as attempted kidnappers, as assailants and as invisible noisemakers, the Besht is ready to intervene. With absolute certainty the Besht predicts that he will be able to rid the household of the demons and thus restore their home to normal.

And on the third night the Baal Shem Tov said, 'I will go to your place and he [the demon] will not knock anymore in the house. And I will lie down to sleep a little bit. And when you hear a song at the window or at another place, you should say, 'Israel ben Eliezer is here,' and he will not knock again.' And so it was.

בלילה השלישית

אמר הבעש"ט, אני אלך אצלך ולא יכה עוד בבית. ואני אשכב מעט לישון.
וכשתשמעו שירה בחלון או במקום אחר תאמרו ישראל בן אליעזר יש כאן,
ושוב לא יכה. וכן היה.

Therefore the Besht is not only able to solve the community's problem by a prediction that he is able to do so, but in addition, he may heal their woes by simply pronouncing his name. It is instructive to note that the Besht does not identify himself as the Baal Shem Tov, but rather as Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer. This articulation of his full and proper name proved to have the healing results that he sought.

³⁴ Horodetzky, 84 and #162, *In Praise of The Baal Shem Tov*, 180-181.

³⁵ For a further study of the Besht and demonology see Chapter V.

Story number eight³⁶ demonstrates a different application of the Besht's healing power of words. The person in need of healing in this tale was a well-known and highly respected *maggid*.³⁷ When the *maggid* fell ill a student of his recommended that he seek healing from the Besht. At first the *maggid* resisted saying that, "It is better to seek refuge in God than security from people." But the *maggid's* relatives pressed him to go seek healing from the Besht and so he went.

When the *maggid* approached the Besht, the healer first turned him away. Dejected, the *maggid* left the Besht's presence and another young rabbi pleaded the *maggid's* case before him. Rabbi Yaakov from Annopol said:

There is one melancholy man sitting in front of the house, and he asked me to speak to his honor [and say], 'Why have you not fulfilled [the commandment]: And you shall love the stranger?'

איש אחד מרה שחורה יושב לפני הבית, וביקש אותי שאומר לרומע"ל למה
לא קיימתם ואהבתם את הגר.

This plea from the *maggid* (albeit through a messenger) was all the Besht needed to hear. He then was convinced that the *maggid* truly wanted his help regardless of his previous sentiments.

Immediately the Besht gathered ten men, and he went out to him to appease him and he wanted to heal him with words.

מיד אסף הבעש"ט עשרה
אנשים, יצא אליו לפייס אותו ורצה לרפאות אותו בדיבורים.

36 Horodetzky, 70-72 and #62, *In Praise of The Baal Shem Tov*, 81-84.

37. According to David Sears the title *maggid*, 'often refers to an itinerant preacher or a rabbi known for his speaking abilities.' For more information see David Sears, 'The Path of the Baal Shem Tov: Early Chasidic Teachings and Customs', 226.

The tale continues with a description of the Besht going to the *maggid* for a couple of weeks in order to recite psalms. This healing did not occur as a result of the Besht's own words or as a result of a formulaic blessing, but rather through the recitation of the words of the Hebrew Bible.³⁸

In the third story the Besht heals the madman by instructing others in how the healing was to take place. The Besht directs the scene with his words:

And he ordered him [the scribe] to strike him [the son], and he beat him [the son] and he [the son] did not get up and he did not move.

וציוה להכות אותו, והיכה אותו ולא קם ולא זע.

The action of the scene is moved along as a result of the Besht's speech. He: *amar lasofer*, literally told the scribe what to do. When the madman does not respond to this treatment, the Besht yet again directs others to act.

And the Besht ordered them to leave him in one [particular] house, and to close the house and guard it until the holiday of Passover.

וציוה הבעש"ט

שיניחו אותו בבית אחד, ויסגרו את הבית וישמרו אותו עד חג הפסח.

The Hebrew verb *tzivah* is employed, thus describing the Besht as commanding others to act in a way that would lead to the madman's recovery. The Besht continues to order the people of the town to feed and to give drink to the madman, as if he were a regular participant in a seder and not a man feigning death. They treat the madman as such until:

With the third glass, he was not able to bear [his situation anymore], and he sprung up and ran from the house and he escaped. And they searched for him round the clock until they found him, and the Besht healed him.

38 For a further exploration of the utilization of sacred texts in healing see Chapter III: Spiritual Healing.

ובכוס ג' לא היה יכול לסבול, וקפץ ודלג מן הבית וברח.

That is to say that the Besht healed him by his commanding speech and the follow through actions of others.

Thus the Baal Shem Tov was able to heal with the power of the spoken word. Whether it was predicting the birth of a new child (such as to Reb Baruch or the infertile man), or the whispering of a blessing in the ear (such as to the blind boy), or the recitation of the Hebrew Bible (such as with the *maggid*), or giving commands to others (such as with the madman) his words were important instruments in the art of the Besht's healing.

CHAPTER III SPIRITUAL HEALING

The Besht employed the articulation of the words of the Bible in general and the words of the Torah in specific in order to heal in various stories. According to the anthology called *Sefer Hasidut* (The Book of Hasidism),

When R. Shalom of Belz would touch a hasid's afflicted body and the hasid would be healed, he explained that the healing was effected because his finger, active in Torah study, deserved such power.³⁹

According to Joshua Trachtenberg's study of Jewish magic and superstition, this use of holy texts was not an uncommon healing practice in the medieval period. In fact according to Trachtenberg:

Various religious acts and occasions were believed to bring immunity against the powers of evil. One way to combat adversarial forces was to study. The Bible in itself possesses anti-demonic virtues.⁴⁰

Thus the Besht orchestrated various religious acts in order to heal others.

In the fourth story when the Besht learns that the *mitnagged* is ill his first response was to go and visit him. He then:

Said to the two brothers in the words of a question: Would it be possible to pray there, at the house of their [sic.] brother on the Holy Sabbath.

אמר לשני האחים בלשון שאלה, אם אפשר ויכול להיות להתפלל שם
אצל אחיהם בשבת קודש.

³⁹ Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidism*, (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991) 252. For further information, see *Sefer Hasidut*, 289, 293.

⁴⁰ Trachtenberg, 155.

The Besht's healing utilized the power of prayer, not only personal but communal, as well. Once again it is instructive to learn from sources outside of the Jewish milieu.

According to Christian theologian Bruce Epperly:

Prayer alters the world and thus enhances the divine will toward healing and transformation.⁴¹

The Besht acts in a way that demonstrates that prayers were both medicinal and transformative. For example in the tale of the three brothers, the *mitnagged*:

He [the Besht] ordered the holy ark and the Torah scroll to be brought there, and there he prayed *Minchah*⁴² and *Ma'ariv*⁴³ on Friday, the eve of the Holy Sabbath. And in the morning he prayed *Shacharit*⁴⁴ and he lengthened the prayers until two o'clock in the afternoon. And before the Reading of Torah, he went into a passageway in order to cool himself. And he immediately heard a moaning voice [indicating that] the sick man was a *goses*⁴⁵. And he said to his people: Let us go to visit the sick man, and he sat by the sick man.

וציוו להביא לשם
ארון הקודש וספר תורה והתפלל שם ביום ו' עש"ק מנחה ומעריב, ובבוקר
התפלל שחרית והאריך בתפילה עד ב' שעות אחר הצות. וקודם קריאת
התורה הלך לפרוזדור בכדי לקרר את עצמו, ומיד שמע קול יללה איך
שהחולה הוא גוסס, ואמר לאנשיו, נלך לבקר את החולה, וישב אצל החולה.

Thus the Besht healed the ailing man by bringing the Torah scroll him, by bringing a community to his home, and by conducting services three times a day at his home. It was only while anticipating the reading of the Torah that the Besht heard the man's moans

41 Bruce G. Epperly, "To Pray or Not to Pray: Reflections of Prayer and Medicine," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer 1995, 146.

42 The afternoon daily prayer. It can be recited from noontime until sunset.

43 The evening prayer which is recited daily after sunset.

44 The morning daily prayer which is recited after sunrise and before the end of the first quarter of the day.

45 A technical term used to indicate that the man is dying.

and call for help. Thus serving as an example of Trachtenberg's assertion, the words of Torah could be understood as curative. The healing process began at this point and continued as the Besht went to the man's side with the community members, discussed Jewish text with him, as previously mentioned, touched him, and ultimately healed him.

In addition to reading the Torah in a public worship service, the Besht had other methods of restoring a person's will to live. For example in that same story of the three brothers, the Besht quoted the Talmud to the *mitnagged*. In his book *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidut*, Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi analyzed this particular tale. He writes:

The Besht quoted the Talmud to a learned man, asking him, 'Do you enjoy pain?' The man answered in the words of the Talmud, 'Neither suffering nor its beneficial effects.' By appealing to [a person] in an idiom familiar to him, by bringing to light the answer that the [he] himself knew, the Besht was able to stimulate his will to live.⁴⁶

Thus engaging a sick person in the study of Jewish texts, especially one who is firmly connected to rational scholarship, may be the most appropriate healing activity for said person.

As we saw in the fifth story, the Baal Shem Tov healed the blind boy by performing a variety of tasks. The first of which was predicting the boy's healing, the second was whispering a blessing into the child's ear, and the third is the final mode of healing was the actual bringing and reading of a Jewish text.

⁴⁶ Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidism*, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991) 245-246.

And suddenly he [the Besht] ordered [them] to bring a Gemara⁴⁷ to him, and he ordered him [the boy] to read, and he read in the manner as every one does.

ומיד ציוה
להביא גמרא לפניו וציוה לו לקרות, וקרא בדרך כל הארץ.

It is through a process of healing that involves a holy text that the boy's sight is returned.

In story number nine⁴⁸ the Besht's nurturing healing is compared to the curative methods of a doctor. The tale takes place when the great rabbi of Whitefield, Rabbi Podlisker, employed the Besht.

He [Rabbi Podlisker] sent for the Besht for he was very ill, and the Besht stayed with him a long time and occupied himself with his [the rabbi's] healing. And when the rabbi's sons saw that there was no effect for him, they sent for a doctor in the holy community of Ostrog and he traveled to Whitefield.

ושלח אחר הבעש"ט כי היה חולה גדול,
ונתעבב הבעש"ט אצלו זמן רב ועסק ברפואתו. וכשראו בניו של הרב שאין
לו פעולה, שלחו אחר דאקטער • לק"ק אוטטרהא ונסע לשדה לבן. וראה

When he learned of the engagement of the doctor's services, the Besht volunteered to leave the rabbi to the physician's care.

And the rabbi did not know about this and he entreated him greatly to not go away, and he [the Besht] stayed there because of his many pleas.

הדאקטער דק"ק אוטטרהא. והרב לא ידע מזה והפציר בו מאוד לבל יסע, ולן
שם מחמת רוב הפצרתו.

The Besht was correct in his inclination to leave the scene before the doctor arrived. The doctor from the town of Ostrog was so opposed to the Besht's healing tactics that when

47 The discussion and interpretation of the Mishnah in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds.

48 Horodetzky, 108-109 and #26, In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, 40-41.

he learned that the rabbi already asked the Besht to heal him, the doctor said that when he would see the Besht, he would kill him. When the two healers finally meet, the doctor asked the Besht from where he had learned the wisdom of healing?

And the Besht answered, 'God, blessed be The Holy One's name, taught me.' And he went home.

והשיב השי"ת לימדני, ונסע לביתו.

The Besht leaves the scene with the rabbi still ill. The tale then continues with the doctor attempting to heal the sick rabbi. Yet somehow no matter what the doctor did, the rabbi's sons told him that the Besht had already tried this or that treatment on the ailing man. The doctor then left the town disappointed. But then the sickly rabbi complained to his sons as he said:

'What have you done? Even though the Besht did not heal me, at any rate, when the Besht entered my room, I would know that the *Shechinah*⁴⁹ came with him. And when the doctor entered my room, it seemed to me that a priest entered my room.'

או התרעם הרב החולה על בניו מה עשיתם. אף על פי
שלא היתה לי רפואה מהבעש"ט מכל מקום כשנכנס אצלי הבעש"ט הייתי
יודע שהשכינה באה עמו וכשנכנס אצלי הדאקטער נדמה שנכנס אלי גלח
אחד.

Thus the Besht does not offer the rabbi a cure, but rather, an awareness of the divine presence through which he offers him a break from his pain. The Besht is able to use non-medical interventions.

49 The Divine Presence. "The manifestation of the presence of God in the life of man and the community." Ben-Amos and Mintz's *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 268.

Another tale of the Besht's spiritual healing is story number ten⁵⁰. In this account a sick man sought a cure to his illness from a doctor, but the physician was unsuccessful.

And again the sick man was not able to speak. And the Baal Shem Tov came to that place and they called him to the aforementioned sick man. And he [the Besht] said to cook for him meat soup and then he would immediately [be able] to speak. And they gave him soup to eat and he [the Besht] treated him until he recovered.

ושׁוב החולה
לא היה יכול לדבר. ובא הבעש"ט לאותו מקום וקראו אותו להחולה הנ"ל.
ואמר לבשל לו מרק של בשר ותיכף יתחיל לדבר. ונתנו לו מרק לאכול
ורפא אותו עד שהבריא.

The doctor was amazed by the affect of this "magic potion," so he asked the Besht how he healed the man.

The doctor asked him [the Besht] how he healed him, [saying], 'I knew that the veins were bad, and it is impossible for these veins to be healed.'

שאל אותו הדאקטער איך ריפא אותו. ידעתי
שנתקלקלו הגידין ואותן הגידין אי אפשר להיות להם רפואה.

The Besht explained his methods by sharing his belief in a Talmudic teaching that there is a connection between ethical behavior and human physiology.⁵¹ He said to the doctor:

'You approached the sick man corporally and I approached the sick man spiritually. Because a man has 248 limbs and 365 veins, as corresponding to them⁵² are 248 positive commandments⁵³ and 365 negative commandments⁵⁴. And when a man commits a crime, God forbid, his corresponding limb or vein becomes hurt. And when he

50 Horodetzky, 113 and #157, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 177-178.

51 See B. Makkoth 23b.

52 The conception of the human body and the positive and negative commandment corresponding to its parts, which is expressed here, follows the Talmud B. Makkoth 23b.

53 Commandments that one must do.

54 Commandments that one must refrain from doing.

does not observe many negative commandments, many veins become ill, the blood is not able to flow in them and the man is in danger. And I spoke with the soul [and said that] it will receive repentance, and it received it. And in this all the limbs and veins were repaired. And I was able to heal him.'

אמר לו

הבעש"ט, אתה השגת את החולה בגשמיות, ואני השגתי את החולה ברוחניות. כי יש באדם רמ"ח איברים ושס"ה גידים, כנגדן יש רמ"ח מצוות עשה ושס"ה מצוות לא תעשה, וכשאדם פוגם ח"ו נתקלקל האבר או הגיד שנגדו, וכשיעבור הרבה לא תעשה נתקלקלו הרבה גידים ואין הדם נובע בהם ואדם בסכנה. ודיברתי עם הנשמה שתקבל עליה תשובה וקיבלה עליה, ובה נתקנו כל האיברים והגידים ויכולתי לרפאות אותו.

Thus the Besht offers his philosophy of spiritual healing. According to him, repentance and the promise of the soul being able to repent will lead to healing.

Another example of the Besht's spiritual healing being compared to a doctor's cure can be found in story number eleven⁵⁵. The tale begins:

A certain great and well-known doctor came to the duchess of the town. And the duchess praised the Baal Shem Tov highly, because he was a great man who also was knowledgeable in healing.

פ"א בא איזה דאקטער גדול ומפורסם לדוכסה שבעיר. ותתפאר הדוכסה בשבח הבעש"ט כי אדם גדול הוא וגם בקי ברפואות

The doctor was eager to meet this man and asked the duchess to send for him at once. Because she felt that the Besht was worthy of honorable treatment, she sent a proper carriage for him. Once the Besht arrived in the town, the doctor interrogated him and asked for his medical credentials.

And the doctor asked the rabbi if it was true that he was knowledgeable in healing. He [the Besht] answered, 'Yes, it is true.' He [the doctor] said, 'Where and with what expert did you study?' The Besht responded, 'I studied

⁵⁵ Horodetzky, 113 and #245, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 253-254.

with the Holy One, blessed be God.' And this was a joke in the eyes of the doctor.

לפניהם. וישאל הדאקטער מהרב אם אמת שהוא בקי ברפואות, והשיב לו
אמת הדבר. ויאמר באיזה מקום ומאיזה מומחה למד, ויאמר השי"ת לימדני.
ויהי לצחוק בעיני הדאקטער.

But when the doctor laughed at the Besht, he decided to be the one who laughed last.

The Besht challenged the doctor to diagnose his ailment.

And the doctor took the rabbi's pulse. He understood there was a certain deficiency, but he did not know what it was. Because, in truth, he [the Besht] was lovesick for God. May God's name be blessed, and [this] was beyond his [the doctor's] understanding.

ולקח הדאקטער את הדפק של הרב, הבין שיש איזה
חסרון אבל אינו יודע מה הוא. כי באמת היה חולי חולת אהבה להשי"ת. מה
שוהו למעלה מהבנתו.

Therefore, the Besht demonstrated that one can physically show lovesickness for God.

Additionally, the story demonstrates that the taking of the pulse is more than an indication of physical well-being, it is an indicator of spiritual well-being, as well.

In addition to being adept at healing spiritually, the Besht was aware of and used some of medical procedures of his time. In story number twelve⁵⁶, the Besht is able to advise the rabbi of Whitefield by way of a letter. It read:

'You will come from the road and you will find in the courtyard of your house a great upheaval. Men, women, and children, and you will be faint because of the fear. And when they awaken you, immediately order [them] to let blood from two of your veins. And immediately send a special messenger to inform me about the matter of the upheaval. Even though, thank God, I have eyes to see from afar, regardless, send me a letter by messenger.' So said Israel Baal Shem Tov. So it was.

⁵⁶ Horodetzky, 109 and #27, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 41.

תבוא מן הדרך ותמצא בביתך
 על החצר שלך רעש גדול, אנשים ונשים וטף, ותתעלף מחמת הפחד.
 וכשיעוררו אותך אז תצוה תיכף להקז דם משני גידים. ותיכף תשלח
 שליח מיוחד להודיע לי על דבר הרעש. אף על פי שתהילה לאל יש לי
 עינים לראות מרחוק, אף על פי כן תשלח לי איגרת ע"י שליח. נאום ישראל
 בעש"ט. עד כאן.

With this letter the Besht demonstrated his ability to predict the need for healing in the future and the necessary cure. According to Joshua Trachtenberg,

A most popular medieval panacea, almost universally employed, was the abstraction of blood, to permit the bad to flow away while the good remains in the body.⁵⁷

Therefore not only was the Besht aware of common "medical" practices of the time, but he also was able to provide the spiritual cure. He knew that the upheaval of a community could be turned around by treating (bloodletting) the leader of that community.

Another tale of bloodletting is the thirteenth story⁵⁸. The Besht received word that a member of his community was ill. Immediately the Besht returned to the town, went to the *mikveh*⁵⁹, went to services, and after services he called for the doctor and went with him to see the sick person.

And he [the Besht] saw that he was very weak and that he had lost the power of speech. And he [the Besht] said to the doctor to let his blood, but the doctor did not want to, saying that it is very dangerous to let his blood.

וראה שהוא חלש מאוד אישתקל מלוליה *.
 ואמר להרופא להקז דם, והרופא לא רצה, באמרו שמסוכן הוא מאוד להקז
 לו דם.

But the Besht understood that if he let his blood, the man would live. In spite of the doctor's resistance:

⁵⁷ Trachtenberg, 195.

⁵⁸ #119, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 140-141.

⁵⁹ Jewish ritual bath.

The Besht immediately ordered to let his blood, and everyone gossiped about the Besht concerning the bloodletting. And the Besht also returned home, and in about half an hour, the sick person wanted them to give him water to drink and, thanks be to God, he recovered.

וציוה הבעש"ט תיכף להקיז לו דם,
וכל העם רינגנו על הבעש"ט על הקזת הדם. והבעש"ט גם כן הלך לביתו, וכמו
ערך חצי שעה ביקש החולה שיתנו לו מים לשתות ותהילה לאל שהבריא.

Thus it was the Besht who taught the doctor about the healing power of blood. Even though the Besht knew about such medical techniques, they themselves were not enough. He also knew that God was always a part of what was going on in any individual or community. Thus God was as much in the healing equation as any current medical cure.

A final tale of spiritual healing is told when the Besht himself was in need of healing. Story number fourteen⁶⁰ recounts how the Besht choked on his food at the festive meal following a *pidyon haben*⁶¹ ceremony.

And at the end of the meal, the Besht took a piece of bread and he chewed. His face became red and he became agitated. They thought that he was choking and they wanted to save him. Rabbi Ze'ev Kotzes looked at his face and said, 'Leave him alone.'

ובסוף
הסעודה לקח הבעש"ט חתיכה לחם ולעס, ונעשו פניו אדומים ונשתגר
הרגשותיו והיו סבורים שנחנק ורצו להצילו. והביט ר' זאב קוציעס בפניו,
ואמר הניחו לו.
דבר.

Rabbi Kotzes knew that the Besht could take care of himself. After some time, the Besht's face returned to its normal color and he was able to breath freely. When the

⁶⁰ Horodetzky, 150 and # 203, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 204.

⁶¹ This is a service for the redemption of the first-born son, which takes place when the baby boy is one month old. This is a custom which is based on Numbers 18:14-17. For more information see Isaac Klein's *A Guide to Jewish Ritual Practice*.

students present at the meal asked the great healer what had happened he responded by saying:

‘When I ate the piece of bread, I concentrated on the food, and I felt with one intention what Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, [experienced when] Tzipporah gave him a meal for the first time. And when I concentrated on this *yichud*⁶², Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, came here, and that is what happened.’

כשאכלתי התיכח לחם כיוונתי כוונות האכילה, והשגתי עם כוונה אחת מה שכיון משה רבינו ע"ה כשנתנה לו צפורה לאכול בפעם הראשון, וכשכיוונתי יחוד זה בא משה רבינו ע"ה לכאן, והיה מה שהיה.

The English words concentration and intention correspond to the Hebrew root word *kavein*. The Hebrew phrase “*kivanti kavanot*,” literally “I concentrated on intentions,” describe the Besht’s thoughts at this moment of danger. Whereas this word usually describes, “inner devotion in prayer directed toward God,”⁶³ here the Besht focuses on a specific tale from Jewish legend.

According to the midrash⁶⁴, Tzippora convinced her father Jethro to allow her to marry Moses. Jethro agreed, but when Moses brought a sapphire rod to him:

He [Jethro] conceived the idea at once that he [Moses] was the prophet in Israel concerning whom all the wise men of Egypt had foretold that he would destroy their land and its inhabitants.⁶⁵

62 Hasidic notion of spiritually connecting with an ancestor or God. *Yichud* are, “special mystical contemplations to bring about the names which are used to bring about the ultimate union of God and the *Shechina* – the true unity of God.” Ben-Amos and Mintz, 271.

63 Ben-Amos and Mintz, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 265.

64 Rabbinic interpretation of a biblical word, phrase, or story.

65 Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Translated by Henrietta Szold, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969) 293.

Concerned by this revelation, Jethro seized Moses and threw him in a pit. Out of love for her intended husband, Moses, Tzippora devised a plan to save him.

Now Tzipporah could provide Moses with all sorts of dainties as he lay in the pit, and she did it for the space of seven years.⁶⁶

The Besht is able to heal himself by focusing his thoughts on a tale from Jewish tradition. His command of Jewish lore provided him with the knowledge to connect to a legend that involved not only great religious figures, but also how food was a source of healing to those characters in the midrash. Thus the Besht was able to demonstrate the healing powers of connecting to ancestors and their experiences.

Thus the Besht was able to help his "patients" by engaging in various aspects of spiritual healing. The Besht found power not only in his hands, but in his mouth, and in his knowledge of Jewish lore, as well. This was accomplished through Talmud Torah (such as in the stories of the *mitnagged*, the blind boy, and the *maggid*) and conducting communal prayer (such as with the *mitnagged*). The Besht was able to be a calming and healing presence even to those whom he could not heal (such as the rabbi of Whitefield). The Besht could even heal himself when he focused his thoughts on a midrash (such as in the tale when the Besht chokes). No matter what the specific method, the Besht was able to heal the body and spirit, if not completely then partially.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV DEMONS, WITCHES, AND SORCERESSES

Although known for his physical and spiritual healing of human beings, the Besht was also able to help communities in which demons possessed both people and buildings. According to Joshua Trachtenberg, the methods of warding off spirits fall into three general categories: (1) to drive them away or to render them powerless, (2) to buy them off with gifts in order to appease them, or (3) to deceive them by disguising their intended victims or by pretending that the situation was other than it actually was.⁶⁷

The Besht employed one of these techniques in story number seven⁶⁸. In this tale a demon came to the town of Kotiv because:

The daughter-in-law of Rabbi Moses, the rabbi of the holy community of Kotiv, had the pains of parenthood, and employed Gentile sorceresses. They did their⁶⁹ magic and they hid a castrated cock under the threshold of the house. Because of this sorcery, a demon became manifest in the house.

ר' משה הרב דק"ק קוטיב יב, היה לכלתו
צער גידול בנים ועסקה בנכדיות כשפניות. ועשו בכשפיהם וטמנו תחת מפתח
הבית תרנגול מסורס. ועל-ידי כשפים נעשה לץ אחד בבית.

Thus the story indicates a belief that demons can be brought on by the performance of gentile magic.

⁶⁷ Trachtenberg, 53.

⁶⁸ Horodetzky, 84 and #162, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 180-181.

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that this noun that relates to the sorceresses, appears in the masculine form in the Hebrew.

One night the preacher of the town and his three friends tried to guard the house from the demon. Their plan was to stay up all night and study, but the four men were not able to stay awake. While they slept, the demon extinguished their candle and:

... poured a pile of dust from the attic on every book. And when the preacher awoke and saw that it was dark, he trembled greatly. And [when] he entered the house, the demon threw a plank from the attic at him. And had he not turned a little back into the room, he would have been injured, God forbid.

ושפך הלץ על כל ספר קופה
עפר מן העליה. וכשנתעורר המוכיח וראה שחושך נרעד מאוד. ונכנס לבית
וורק הלץ עליו דף אחד מן העליה. ואלולי שחזר מעט לאחוריו לתוך
האלקער ** היה מתנוק ח"ו.

Terrorized, the preacher went to the Besht's home. Once he was there he recounted the activities of the demon and took the Besht to the house. There they found the three men sleeping, and next to each man was a pile of dust on each one's book.

In an effort to destroy the demon, the Besht prescribed that the house be drenched with scalding water. After the water was poured, the Besht instructed the townspeople to remove any household objects that s/he wished to take. But the demon survived and that night he had his revenge on every neighbor that took something from the house. If a person took a bench or a plank, the demon knocked on the wall and on the windows of that person's home. Although the Besht was not able to rid the community of the demon entirely, he devised a plan to make the unwelcome guest less of an annoyance.

And on the third night the Baal Shem Tov said, "I will go to your place and he [the demon] will not knock anymore in the house. And I will lie down to sleep a little bit. And when you hear a song at the window or at another place, you should say, 'Israel ben Eliezer is here,' and he will not knock again." And so it was. Then

the preacher said, 'Since that name, Israel ben Eliezer, is a name, it means that he is a tzaddik.'

ובלילה השלישית

אמר הבעש"ט, אני אלך אצלך ולא יכה עוד בבית. ואני אשכב מעט לישון.
וכשתשמעו שירה בחלון או במקום אחר תאמרו ישראל בן אליעזר יש כאן,
ושוב לא יכה. וכן היה. אז אמר המוכיח, כיון ששם ישראל בן אליעזר הוא
שם שמע מניה צדיק הוא

The articulation of the Besht's proper name was enough to make the demon cease his tricks. The original problem of the daughter-in-law was not solved (the pains of parenthood), but the woes of the community were. In the words of Trachtenberg, the Baal Shem Tov made the demon "powerless." The preacher recognized this power and proclaimed the Besht to be a *tzaddik*⁷⁰.

Demons appeared in the community of Zbarah in story number fifteen⁷¹. There they:

... were seen in the women's [section of the] synagogue.
And the women were so fearful that they had to leave the
synagogue. And Rabbi Chayim, the *maggid* of our
community, went and sat in the synagogue and studied
there and drove away the two demons. And they went and
took hold of [possessed] two of his children.

נתראו בבית הכנסת של נשים שני לצים. והיו מפחדות הנשים עד שהוכרחו
לעזוב את ביהכ"נ. והלך הרב ר' חיים מ"מ דקהילתנו וישב בבהכ"נ ולמד
שם וגירש משם את הליצנים. והלכו והחזיקו שני הילדים שלו.

The *maggid* attempted to do the work that only the Besht was capable of doing.

However, once he saw that his children were at risk, the *maggid* sent for the Besht.

⁷⁰ A righteous man.

⁷¹ Horodetzky, 118-119 and # 84, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 107-108.

The Baal Shem Tov and the scribe, Mr. Tzvi, lodged in a house in town. In order for him to maintain contact with the possessed children, the Besht had the townspeople bring them to his bedroom. He was not yet asleep when:

The two mischief makers⁷² came to the house, and they stood at the doorway and mocked the way the Besht sings *L'cha Dodi* (Come my Beloved)⁷³.

באו שני המזיקים לבית ועמדו אצל הפתח ולצצו מן הבעש"ט.
איך הוא מזמר לכה דודי.

The Besht then began his process of exorcising the demons from the children. He first reprimanded them and then he asked:

'Where are you going?' And they were not afraid and they said, 'What concern is it of yours?' And they began for a second time to mock and sing *L'cha Dodi* in the Besht's melody. And he [the Besht] did whatever he did. . . .

להם, להיכן אתם הולכים, והם לא פחדו ואמרו מה איכפת לך. והתחילו פעם שניה להתלוצץ ולזמר לכה דודי בניגון של הבעש"ט. ועשה מה שעשה

The Besht began his exorcism by not being afraid of the two demons. He spoke with them directly and did not rely on the *maggid's* technique of studying. Instead, he did something to which the reader is not privy. There is deliberate ambiguity in the Hebrew phrase: "*v'asah mah sheashah*," literally: he did whatever he did.

When the demons did not relent the Besht decided to find out why they had come to the town.

⁷² Yiddish term used to describe mischievous children.

⁷³ The mystics of Tzefat conceived of the Sabbath as entering the world as Israel's bride, and they welcomed her with ecstatic joy. They saw Shabbat, especially hollowed by God, as the day when Israel may unite with God in love. This liturgical poem is included in the Kabbalat Shabbat liturgy.

And they answered, 'Because the cantor would pray in the synagogue, and he, the singer led [prayers] in a bass [voice], was a great adulterer. And at the moment of his singing it was his intention [to fare] well in the eyes of the women. And he had thoughts, and also the women had thoughts about him, and from two of these thoughts we two demons were created, a male and a female. And our life is in that synagogue.' Therefore the Besht gave them place in a pit, a place where no human beings are found.

השיבו כי החון היה מתפלל
בבהכ"נ, והיה לו משורר שקורין באס, והיה נואף גדול. ובעת מזמרתו היתה
כוונתו שיוטב בעיני הנשים. והיה לו הרהור, וגם הנשים הרהרו עליו, ומשני
ההרהורים הללו נבראנו אנחנו שני מוזיקים, זכר ונקבה. וחיינו הוא בבהכ"נ.
אז נתן להם הבעש"ט מקום אצל באר אחר, מקום שאין בני אדם מצויים שם.

Thus, according to this tale, there was a very good reason why these two trouble-makers came to Zbarah. Jewish tradition, beginning with the Bible, teaches that sickness is a heaven-sent punishment for one's sins. In the world of Jewish medieval and Chassidic beliefs there is a direct connection between the suffering of individuals (the demonic possession of the children) to the sins of another (the adulterous cantor). Even though the Besht was not capable of killing the demons, he was able to relocate them. His banishment may have also placed the demons in a forest, an attic, or a pit. The common trend was for the Besht to send them to a place where humans do not go.

The Besht exorcised a demon from a madwoman in story number sixteen⁷⁴. This woman revealed to everyone in the town the Besht's virtues and vices. When the rabbi of the community asked the Besht to see her, the whole town went to observe his work.

⁷⁴ Horodetzky, 52-53 and #20, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 34-35.

When the Besht entered her room, the madwoman greeted him by his proper name, Rabbi Israel. The Besht could discern immediately that the woman was possessed by a spirit, and so he then spoke directly to it:

‘If you are not quiet, behold I will convene a rabbinic court and they will allow me to drive [exorcise] you out from this woman.’ She began to beg him, ‘I will be quiet.’ And the Hasidim that came with him begged him to free him [the demon] and they exorcised it from the woman. And the Besht asked that they not free him, because it was very dangerous, and they did not stop him. Therefore the Besht said, ‘Look what you [the demon] have caused. Because of this, my advice is that you go easily from this woman, and we, all of us, will study on your behalf.’

ולא תשתוק הנה אני מושיב על זה בית־דין
אחד ויתירו לי, ואותך אגרש מן האשה הזאת. התחילה היא להתחנן אליה, אני
אשתוק, והחסידים שבאו עמו הפצירו אותו שיתירו לו ויגרשנו מן האשה.
והבעש"ט ביקש מהם שלא להתירו, כי מסוכן הוא מאוד, והם לא הרפו ממנו.
אז אמר הבעש"ט, ראה מה שגרמת, על כן עצתי שתלך בטוב מן האשה, ואנחנו
כולנו נלמד בעבורך.

After some more coaxing, the spirit told the Besht its name and that he only became a spirit in order to mock the Hasidim of Kotiv. The Besht persuaded the spirit to release itself from the woman by offering it a choice: either come out on good behavior, or stay in the woman forever. The demon chose freedom and at that same moment, “the spirit separated itself from this woman with ease.”

The saga of the Besht encountering demons continued. Subsequent to that exorcism, the Besht came into contact with more demons when a local tax collector employed him to be his children’s tutor. The father told him that:

... he only had one house in which to take him in and it was not pure. The Besht said that he would live there. And when the demons played in the attic, he [the Besht] reprimanded them and they were quiet.

שׂאִין לוֹ כִּי אִם בֵּית אֶחָד שֶׁמְחַזְקִין אוֹתוֹ
שׂאִינוֹ טְהוֹר. אָמַר הַבַּעַשׁ״ט שִׁדּוּר בּוֹ. וַיַּיְחָד הָעֲלִיָּה לַחֲצוֹנוֹת ר״ל, וּכְשֶׁהָיוּ
מִשְׁחָקִים הָיָה גּוֹעֵר בָּהֶם וּנְשַׁתְקוּ.

Just giving a simple scolding, the Besht was able to continue his power over the demons in the tax collector's home.⁷⁵

The Besht is able to combat a witch in story number seventeen⁷⁶. In this tale, a witch did sorcery so that it would not rain, but the Baal Shem Tov's prayers spoiled her magic. This witch controlled her own demon and when she sent it out to check the status of her work, the demon reported to the witch that the Besht rendered her sorcery powerless. With great anger the witch went to the Besht's mother in order to complain. The witch demanded that she tell her son to leave her alone, for if not, she would put a spell on him. Fearful of her magical powers, the Besht's mother begged him to avoid the witch. Despite his mother's pleas, the Besht continued his prayers for rain and ignored the sorceress' threats.

As a result, the witch attempted to attack the Besht by sending her demon directly after him. However, when the demon tried to approach him:

⁷⁵ The tale is ambiguous regarding how many demons were in the town. Either there was one who possessed the woman's body and then became two demons that possessed the tax collector's house, or there may have been two new demons that happened to be in the same town at the same time. Regardless, both parts of the story illustrate the Besht's capacity to control demons.

⁷⁶ Horodetzky, 82 and #98, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 123-124.

... it was not able to enter [within] four steps. And the Besht told him, 'How dare you come to me! Go immediately and harm that gentile woman through that small, glass window.' And so he did. And afterwards he [the Besht] seized him [the demon] and [put him] in jail in the forest, and he would never be able to move from there. And when the Besht became famous, he traveled with people through the forest. He stood and went to the forest and he saw that he [the demon] was sitting in prison, and he [the Besht] laughed a great deal.

לא היה יכול לכנוס לד' אמותיו. ואמר לו
הבעש"ט אתה העזת לבוא אלי, תיכף תלך ותזיק הגויה דרך חלון קטן של
שאוב * אחת, וכן עשה. ואחר-כך תפס אותו בבית הכלא ביער, ואינו יכול
לזוז משם עד עולם. וכשנתפרסם הבעש"ט נסע עם אנשים דרך יער. עמד
והלך ליער והציץ בו שהוא יושב בתפיסה, ושחק מאוד.

The tale illustrates the folk belief that witches are not only capable of using demons for their advantage, but they also have control over nature (i.e. their magic can bring about a drought). This tale provides yet one more example of how the Besht was able to banish a demon to a remote place.

The eighteenth story⁷⁷ continues the theme of the Besht's refusal to heal when he deduced that gentile sorcery had been used to create a demon. The tale opens with a conflict about an *arrenda*⁷⁸:

There once was a man that wanted to take land from a widow.
And the Baal Shem Tov reprimanded him but he [the man] did not
listen to him [the Besht]. And he rode on horseback to the Besht's
home and he knocked on the window, and he said, 'Look, I am
going to rent the land, and I will see what God will do to me.'

⁷⁷ Horodetzky, 136 and # 197, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 200-201.

⁷⁸ "A leased estate or revenue derived from taxation and collected on a contractual basis by other people," Ben-Amos and Mintz, 262.

שהיה איש אחד שרצה
ליקח כפר מיד אלמנה אחת, והוכיח אותו הבעש"ט והוא לא שמע אליו. ורכב
על סוס אצל בית הבעש"ט והיכה בחלון, ואמר ראו שאני הולך לשכור את
הכפר, ואראה מה יעשה לי אלקים.

What God "does" to this man is strike him with a series of illnesses, including severe headaches and incessant salivation. This tremendous pain prevented him from signing what would have been his lucrative business contracts

As a result of this, the townspeople brought the businessman back to his house. It was there that his condition worsened.

His hands and legs were lacking [paralyzed] and also his tongue was lacking for him [paralyzed]. And they called for the Besht to heal him, and he began to speak a little. And in the middle of this, the Besht sensed that the children of his house hired gentile sorceresses to heal him, and after that he did not want to go to him. And he [the man] was only able to speak but a few words.

והיו נטולים ידיו ורגליו וגם הלשון ניטל ממנו. וקראו להבעש"ט
לרפאות אותו, והתחיל לדבר קצת. ובתוך כך הרגיש הבעש"ט שבני ביתו
עוסקים בנכריות כשפניות לרפאותו, ומאז לא רצה לילך אליו. ולא היה יכול
לדבר רק מעט דברים.

Therefore we learn that the man was struck with a series of ailments as a punishment for not only overcharging the rent to the widow, but also because he dared God to do something about it. Even though the Besht tried to prevent the man from doing such a horrible thing, he still went to the man to relieve him of his suffering. But when he sensed that the man's children employed gentile sorceresses, the Besht refused to heal him. As a result, this greedy man is left only with a slight ability to speak

Therefore the Besht proved himself adept at controlling demons that possessed people and communities. He was able to control demons by the mere mention of his full name and by reprimanding demons (such as in the sixteenth story of the possessed woman). Even when the demons were caused by the immorality of a human (such as with the cantor of story number fifteen), the Besht was able to banish the menacing demons. The Besht was not deterred by sorcery (such as with the witch in story number seventeen). But he did refuse to heal someone if he thought that the demon was a result of the employment of gentile sorcery (such as with the greedy, mute man of story number eighteen).

CHAPTER V TO HEAL OR NOT TO HEAL

We have read many stories about the Besht's methods of healing and exorcism. One would think that the Besht would always heal an ailing person, yet, as story number eighteen illustrates, there are times when a person did not merit healing. This query, to heal or not to heal, is posed in the second story⁷⁹, the tale of the rabbi who meets the Besht in the World to Come. Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz asked the Besht to heal him, but since according to the hasidim, "a rebbe can only bless and help someone who has formed a connection to him or has benefited him in some way,"⁸⁰ the Besht rebuked him and asked the rabbi what connection he had with him. Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz answered him by saying that his rebbe:

'Rabbi Michaleh of Zlotchov, may his virtue stand us in good stead, told stories every third meal⁸¹ of deeds of yours.⁸² Once at a third meal, it was very late and Rabbi Michaleh already washed his hands,⁸³ before saying *Birkat Hamazon*⁸⁴, and he did not yet tell a story⁸⁵ of a deed.

⁷⁹ Rosenzweig, 131.

⁸⁰ Yitzhak Buxbaum, *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism*, (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994) 42.

⁸¹ *Se'udah Shlishit* is a light meal between the afternoon and evening meals on Shabbat. The practice is based on the talmudic provision that one should eat three meals on the Sabbath (B. *Shab.* 117b). For more details, see Isaac Klein's *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, 71-72.

⁸² According to Hasidic teaching, it is a *mitzvah* to tell and listen to stories praising the tzaddikim. For more information see Buxbaum's *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism*, 49.

⁸³ A ritual washing of hands is the last part of the meal which immediately precedes the recitation of the grace after meals.

⁸⁴ Grace after meals.

⁸⁵ At this meal on Shabbat afternoon, the Rebbes often wove their teaching into an extended metaphor or parable or told an illustrative tale. For more information see

Therefore, I reminded him he had not yet told about a work of the holy Besht, may his virtue stand us in good stead. And I understand (that) if my rabbi recounted your works it would be well for you in the World of Truth⁸⁶. And by this merit, I requested healing.' The Besht said 'yes.' And he placed his hand upon Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz's head and he began to sweat. And he recovered very slowly, and afterward, he had a complete recovery.

הרבי ר' מיכל'ע מזלאטשוב זי"ע

סיפר בכל שלש סעודות עובדא מכם, פעם בשלש סעודות היה מאוחר מאד והרר"מ כבר נטל ידיו מים אחרונים ולא סיפר עדיין עובדא, אז הזכרתי לו כי עדיין לא סיפר עובדא מהבעש"ט הק' זי"ע, ואני מבין אם הרבי שלי סיפר עובדא מכם היה לכם נייחא בעלמא דקשוט, ובזכות זה אני מבקש רפואה, אמר הבעש"ט כן, והניח ידו על ראשו של הבמ"ח והתחיל להזיע ולאט לאט הוטב לו, והיה לו אח"כ רפואה שלימה.

It was because Rabbi Chayim had reminded his rabbi to tell a story of the Besht, thus increasing the Besht's merit, that the Besht agreed to heal him.

Another example of the Besht's refusal to heal is in the eighth story of the *maggid*⁸⁷. When this teacher was quite ill, his colleague, Rabbi Mendel, approached him and said:

'Have you not heard that there is a Baal Shem Tov in the world? He will lift up his merit [so that] he will heal you.' But he [the *maggid*] answered him, 'It is better to seek refuge in God than security from people.'

האם לא שמעתם שיש

בעש"ט בעולם, ויסע מעלתו אליו וירפא אותו. והשיב טוב לחסות בה' מבטוח באדם.

Jerome Mintz's *Legends of the Hasidim*.

⁸⁶ The Hereafter.

⁸⁷ Horodetzky, 70-72 and #62, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 81-84.

In spite of his original resistance, Rabbi Mendel was able to bring the *maggid* to the Besht. But when the two men approached the healer, the Besht scolded him by saying, 'My horses do not eat matzah'⁸⁸. The *maggid* interpreted this strange retort as the Besht's way of saying no and, "he then began to sweat from weakness."⁸⁹ Thus with this refusal, the narrative implies that the Besht was aware of the *maggid's* prior resistance to the Besht's healing. Not only did the *maggid* have no connection to the Besht, but also his first reaction to the Besht as an efficacious healer was negative. Because the *maggid* primarily shunned the Besht, the Besht in turn shunned the *maggid*.

It was not uncommon for the Besht to refuse to heal because a person did not believe in his powers. This was so in the story of the blind boy in Istanbul⁹⁰. After the Besht returned the boy's sight back to normal, he reversed his healing once he discerned that the child's mother was a skeptic. Once the people of the household saw what the Besht had done:

...there was a great cry in the house. And they asked him with a curtesy and they bowed to him and he [the father] wanted to give him a huge sum of money. And the rabbi answered, 'You are a wicked woman, [who] mocked the holy names, it is forbidden to you to enjoy them. Because from the beginning, I did not want to do [things] for my honor, God forbid, or for money. Only for the sanctification of God's name, blessed be God. You were shown with your [own] eyes the great power of the holiness of God's name, but you will not enjoy it.' And he went from them so.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Horodetzky, 111-112 and #231, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 237-238.

והיה בכיה גדולה בבית. וביקשו אותו בקידה ובהשתחויה ורצה ליתן לו מעות סך עצום. והשיב הרב את המרשעת, שלגלת משמות הקדושים אסור לך ליהנות מהם. כי מתחילה לא רציתי לעשות לכבודי ח"ו או בשביל מעות, רק בשביל קידוש השם ית', הראיתיך בעיניך גודל כוח קדושת השם, אבל לא תהני מהם. והלך מאתם כך.

Therefore, the Besht explained that he healed to benefit neither his own honor nor his finances. Rather, he simply healed in order to praise God. Because the mother doubted his God-given powers, she did not deserve to profit from them.

Another pivotal reason for the Besht to refuse to heal appears in story number nineteen⁹¹. While staying at his inn in the community of Chmielnik, the town's:

... proofreader came to the Besht to ask him to heal his wife, and he [the Besht] did not want to do so. And more than that the Besht was angry with him and said unkind words to him.

ובא הבעל-מגיה
לבעש"ט לבקש ממנו שיתן רפואה לאשתו, ולא רצה. ולא עוד אף שרגז עליו
וריבר אליו דברים לא טובים.

When the rabbi of the community came to the Besht to demand a reason for this harsh treatment, he provided the rabbi with a salient reason:

'Because she is a righteous woman and because of her weakness she protects the city from the robbers that are in the forest. And when the robbers are extinct from [leave] the forest, her health will return.'

והשיב כי היא צדקניית ומחמת חולשתה מגינה על העיר מן הלסטים
שביער. וכשיכלו הלסטים מיער ממילא תוחזר לבריאותה.

Thus, there were times when an individual's illness could actually serve a positive function, such as the protection of an entire town. Moreover the story suggests that only the Besht, not even the town's rabbi, was able to perceive its function.

⁹¹ Horodetzky, 131 and #117, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 138-139.

In the twentieth and final story⁹², the Besht refused to heal people because he thought he was not old enough to do so. This refusal seems linked to a Chasidic understanding of a Talmudic passage, Chagigah 13B-14B⁹³. This source states two stipulations that must be achieved in order to study and be involved in the *Maaseh Merkavah*⁹⁴: to be of a high intellectual caliber and to be old enough or at “life’s mid-way point.” Accordingly, many of the stories of the Baal Shem Tov refer to thirty-six as the minimum age to be involved in mysticism and to be a healer.

Continuing with the twentieth story, the Besht, as a well-known teacher and a leader in the community, had many sick people come to him. But he, knowing the Talmudic age requirement of healing:

... did not want to receive [see] them. Then once a madman, or madwoman [came to see him] and he did not want to receive him [or her]. That night they told him that he was already thirty-six years old, and in the morning he calculated and thought about it, and so it was. And he saw him [the madman] and healed him. And [thereafter] people would travel to [be healed by] him from everywhere.

ולא רצה לקבל אותם. עד שפעם אחת הביאו משוגע או משוגעת ולא רצה לקבל אותה. ובלילה הגידו לו שמלאו לו ששה ושלשים שנה, ובבוקר חשב חשבוננו והיה כן. וקיבל אותו משוגע וריפא אותו, ועזב את המלמדות וקיבל את חמי ז"ל לסופר, והיו נוסעים אליו מכל המקומות.

⁹² Horodetzky, 53 and #20, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 36.

⁹³ According to Rabbi Eleazar, one must not speak of the *Maaseh Merkavah* in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge.

⁹⁴ ‘A term applied to the principle subject matter of Jewish mysticism in the Tannaitic and post-Tannaitic periods. In Hebrew it means ‘work of the chariot’ and essentially it concerns Ezekiel’s vision of the divine throne-chariot.’ Ben-Amos and Mintz. 266.

It is mysterious how the townspeople are more aware of the Besht's age than he himself; however, once the Besht comes to realize his proper age, he begins to lead a life of healing. At first, the tale does highlight this age limit, but then shifts its focus on how the Besht became a popular healer.

Thus there were many factors that played a role in the Besht's decision to either offer or refuse healing to an ailing person. That person or his/her family had to believe in the Besht's healing powers (such as in the fifth story of the blind boy). The Besht might at first refuse to see someone because of that person's skepticism (such as with the *maggid* of story number seven), but if that person changed his/her mind about the Besht's abilities, then he would help said person. The Baal Shem Tov had the power to discern if a person's sickness was serving a greater purpose (such as the sick woman of story number nineteen), and that knowledge could lead him to offer or refuse healing. A final factor influencing the Besht's decision whether or not he would heal was his age. As long as he believed he was not old enough to function as a healer, according to Jewish custom, he did not.

CONCLUSION

We are discovering things we never should have forgotten
– that the practice of medicine is not limited to the repair of
mechanical flaws. Physicians deal with the larger, more
elusive subject, the human condition.⁹⁵

Writing in a medical journal, *Literature and Medicine*, Dr. Lawrence Schneiderman longs for modern practitioners to achieve the multiple healing capabilities that the Besht had and mastered. Dr. Schneiderman articulates to the modern concern for understanding healing as much more than a mechanical process. The Baal Shem Tov recognized this need and therefore was an exemplary healer for both his time and beyond.

Although the Besht was familiar with the medical techniques of his time, he did not solely rely on them. He knew that medicine was (and still is) only one mode to achieve healing. The stories about him highlight two categories of people who contacted him for the types of healing he provided: (1) those who turned to him and believed in his healing powers from the beginning of their illness and (2) those who turned to him as a last resort when physicians failed to cure them. The Besht made no distinction in the healing of his "patients," once it was clear that they believed in him.

The Besht never approached people as merely medical problems, to him they were not objects that needed to be fixed nor merely their diseases. Rather they were human beings who were not only ill, but were fearful and uncertain of what was wrong

⁹⁵ Lawrence Schneiderman, "Literature and Medicine," *Literature and Medicine: Toward a New Discipline*, Vol. I, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982) 40.

with them. This uncertainty is what Morton Hunt calls "sick thinking." Morton, an author of biomedical and behavioral research, writes about this disorientation:

The changes are for the most part not caused by the physical disease itself but largely by the social-emotional shift to what the sociologist Talcott Parson labeled the 'sick role' or what Dr. Cassell prefers to call the 'sickness state' of illness.⁹⁶

Thus the Besht worked to acknowledge a person's fear and disorientation by treating the whole person. He would do this by sitting by the side of a sick person's bed just to be there. He would intimately communicate with the *choleh* through a private whisper into his/her ear. He would hold a hand and, when necessary, serve as a caretaker and literally help a sick person get out of bed and prepare to leave the isolated 'sickness state' and reenter the greater community. Moreover, the Besht would include the family, and sometimes other community members in this process of reentry.

The Besht would often offer a prayer as a key element of his healing. Modern chaplains experience the efficacy of this component of healing everyday. As the Director of Pastoral Care of Roper Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina, Reverend Bruce Evenson asserts, "prayer affects people – it affects the patient."⁹⁷ Prayer has the capability to connect the seemingly isolated person, as well as his/her family, to the greater Jewish people. Additionally, prayers have the power to calm a person in pain, soothe that person's anxiousness, and provide hope that the Holy One may grant healing.

⁹⁶ Morton Hunt, "Sick Thinking," *The New York Times*, Body and Mind section.

⁹⁷ Bruce Evenson, "Prayer and Pastoral Care," 1991, 2.

The Baal Shem Tov also recognized the power of reciting Psalms at the side of the *choleh*. Rabbi Rachel Mikva writes in *The Journal of Reform Judaism* that the incorporation of texts in healing is a strong source of comfort. She writes:

People have read Psalms for this purpose throughout history, weeping and rejoicing as the poetry spoke to their souls. Certainly there are numerous passages that communicate God's strength and support, God's love for the individual in distress. Comfort, however, can be interpreted more broadly, increasing the usefulness of this model. The text offers both a perspective on the human condition [and] indicates that we do not suffer alone. 98

Another text that the Besht often chose to read at the bedside was the Gemarra. Not necessarily a soothing text, it was familiar, nonetheless, to the Jews whom he healed and perhaps brought some normalcy into the most unusual of rooms.

The Besht also brought communal prayer services to the sick. By bringing the community to *choleh*, the Besht included them in the process of healing. No longer isolated, the sick person could feel the support and care of his/her neighbors. More often than not entire communities responded to a sick person's needs and the Besht was able to coordinate that desired interaction by orchestrating events to help in an organized fashion. Tefillot and especially Torah services were essential components of the Besht's healing method's.

The stories of the Besht make it clear that one should never assume that illness is a concern limited to the sick person. Both the family and the community are involved and sometimes it is the actions of others that cause a malady to become manifest in the

98 Rachel Mikva, "Text and the Human Document: Toward a Model for Rabbinical Counseling," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Summer 1990, 30.

first place. In his world, this understanding was expressed through the belief in demons who could take hold of an entire community because of the immorality of one community member. We, too, know the suffering and pain that immorality can have on an entire community. While we no longer attribute the widespread suffering that an entire community can experience on demons, we have a lot to learn, still, about how as healers, we can address communal needs for healing.

The Baal Shem Tov's approach can be instructive for us as modern Jewish healers. We need not necessarily adopt the belief structure of his time in order to learn from the Besht. Gone are bloodletting, demonology, and the use of amulets, but the treatment of the entire human being still remains. We are still struggling with the issues of who is a qualified healer and how the openness of patient and healer are to each other can influence the healing process, just as the Besht and his contemporaries did. The stories of the Besht provide a powerful model for clergy as it challenges us to consider the impact that belief in God, prayer, and human contact have on healing.

STORIES AND THEIR SOURCES

#	TITLE		
1	The Besht and the Wealthy Land Owner	268	<i>Sippurei HaBesht</i>
2	The Besht and Rabbi Chayim	131	<i>Sippurei Tzaddikim</i>
	<i>Shivchei HaBesht In Praise of The Baal Shem Tov</i>	PAGE # Ben-Amos & Mintz	PAGE# Horodezky
3	A Madman Feigns Death	160	159-160
4	The Three Brothers	229-230	156-157
5	The Blind Boy	237-238	111-112
6	The Besht Resuscitates a Child	252	113-114
7	The Great Maggid and the Besht	81-84	70-72
8	The Demons	180-181	84
9	The Besht and the Physician	40-41	108-109
10	The Spiritual Cure	177-178	113
11	The Doctor	253-254	113
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13	The Besht Cures by Bloodletting	140-141	112
14	The Besht Chokes on His Food	204	150
15	The Besht Banishes Demons	107-108	118-119
16	The Besht a Madwoman	34-35	52-53
17	The Besht Combats a Witch	123-124	54-55
18	Competing For the <i>Arrenda</i>	200-201	136
19	The Sick Woman	138-139	131
20	The Besht Cures a Madman	36-37	53

STORIES AND THEIR LOCATIONS

Story #	Title	Location
1	The Besht and the Wealthy Land Owner	Oman
2	The Besht and Rabbi Chayim	Chernovitz
3	A Madman Feigns Death	Tulchin
4	The Three Brothers	-----
5	The Blind Boy	Istanbul
6	The Besht Resuscitates a Child	Medzhibozh
7	The Great Maggid and the Besht	Torchin
8	The Demons	Kotiv
9	The Besht and the Physician	Whitefield
10	The Spiritual Cure	-----
11	The Doctor	-----
12	The Besht Predicts a Need for Bloodletting	Whitefield
13	The Besht Cures by Bloodletting	-----
14	The Besht Chokes on His Food	-----
15	The Besht Banishes Demons	Zbarazh
16	The Besht a Madwoman	Kotiv
17	The Besht Combats a Witch	-----
18	Competing For the <i>Arrenda</i>	-----
19	The Sick Woman	Chmeilnik
20	The Besht Cures a Madman	Tlust

THE STORIES

(1) Reviving the Wealthy, Charitable Man

In the days of the Besht's youth (may his name be remembered for a blessing), after his marriage, he was, as it is known, hidden from every man, and he earned his living in suffering and great poverty by the labor of his hand. He had a carriage and a horse and he carried in them mud and sand to sell in the town. His righteous wife, even though she was tender and pleasant and from a rich family, with all this, seeing that she knew of the righteousness of her husband, she was full of compassion for him, she also took a spade, and traveled with him to the field and she helped him to dig the sand and the mud, and to place them on the carriage. Sometimes they traveled from town to town for a few weeks, and no one paid attention to them because they were thought of as transient, indigent people. Once the Besht's horse fell sick and it was impossible to place a burden upon him. And the Besht was in great pain, because he did not have the money to buy another horse and he was not able to earn his daily bread. When he met up with other poor people on the road, he told them of his suffering. They advised him to travel to one village next to Oman, and there lived a Jewish landowner by the name of Reb Baruch, and he was very hospitable, and it was his custom, when a poor man traveling by carriage in the villages to buy bones and rags, etc, and his horse was sick and inferior, Reb Baruch gave him another horse from his horses, from those who can no longer successfully do field work, but are good for doing light work. The Besht heard their

advice. And they traveled to there, he and his wife. And after a long and hard trip, they came to that very village.

And the hospitable Reb Baruch, who lived in that village, was very rich, and came to Russia from the State of Bohemia, he fled from there because of the oppression of Jews. Reb Baruch was not a wise student, although he was basically learned, he only was a simple head of a household, was tender and God-fearing man, and his wife, Rachel, was righteous, as well. The two of them did many acts of loving kindness, and more than anything, they endeavored to fulfill the commandment of welcoming the stranger. In the name of this commandment, to welcome the stranger, they set aside many small rooms in their house for the poor. In every room stood two beds, couches, and featherbeds, with a window. And their custom was to give permission to all transients to stay as a guest there for a full week, and they would give them two meals everyday, and on the holy Sabbath, all of them ate at the table of Reb Baruch. When the poor passed by with their wives and their children, they were given, a special room; and if a man and his woman came without children, he did not want to give them a special room, because he thought that perhaps they were not husband and wife. Before the guests traveled from [left] there, Reb Baruch gave gifts to the poor men, and his wife, Rachel, gave gifts to the poor women.

And when the Besht and his wife came there, they rested a bit in the house of hospitality, *hachnasat orchim*⁹⁹. And afterward, food was placed before them to eat, it satisfied them, and they rested. The Besht told Reb Baruch about the hopeless horse.

⁹⁹ Commandment to welcome the stranger.

Immediately, Reb Baruch called for his servants, and asked them if at that time a horse could be found that was no longer fit to the work the field. The servants responded that there was one such horse. Reb Baruch commanded that it be given to this poor man as a gift. The Besht was very happy with the gift, and since he and his wife were very tired from their far travels, and more from sitting in the carriage and then going by foot, because of this they boarded there for several days, until after the holy Sabbath. When the Besht asked Reb Baruch to give him a special room, so that he and his wife could be able to lodge there (together), Reb Baruch said that he was not able to fulfill this request, because he had a rule there, that when he did not clearly know if the guests were husband and wife, he did not give them a special room. This was correct in the eyes of the Besht, and he dwelt there. And the Besht would therefore behave with a great deal of modesty, and therefore he would not make anything of importance known, he was like the rest of the poor.

And it was on *Motzei-Shabbat*¹⁰⁰, when Reb Baruch lay on his bed to sleep, he suddenly saw a light shining from the window, and it was in his eyes like a miracle. He got up from his bed and approached the window, and behold, he saw that this great light was shining from one window of the poor people's house. Reb Baruch was amazed by the light and also (was) afraid, perhaps a fire will burst out from there, God forbid. He put on his clothes, and went over to know from where the light was coming. He slowly approached the door of that room, and looked through the keyhole, and saw that it was the poor man, that he gave the horse to as a gift. He was sitting on the floor and loudly

¹⁰⁰ Saturday night, when the Sabbath is complete.

reciting the Midnight Lamentation (*Tikkun Hatzot*), and he stood for the verse, "Why will you forget us forever and forsake us for so long a time?" His hands were raised upwards and his face was shining greatly, and from his eyes, tears ran down. He saw again, that a tall man stood near the poor man, a man with a long beard and wearing white, and also this man's face was shining greatly. Fear and great fright fell upon Reb Baruch from this vision to the point that was not able to stand on his feet, and he fell from his height, and he fainted and fell to the ground.

When the Besht heard the sound of the fall, he ran to the door and opened it, and he saw Reb Baruch lay down from his faint. He began to rub him until he woke up from his fainting, and his spirit returned to him, and he brought him to the room to rest a bit. Reb Baruch understood that this was not a simple man, and he began to ask forgiveness [for] not having fulfilled his request about the room, he fell to his feet and cried a great deal. The Besht stood him up, and interrupted him and ordered him to be quiet and not to reveal a thing all the days of his life. And he blessed him that he should merit having a son who will be a great *tzaddik*. And he warned him that his wife [must not] behave in the way that she had until now, that she did not want to suckle her children by herself and she paid a wet nurse for them. Rather this boy that she will give birth to she will actually suckle precisely by herself. Reb Baruch said, "Amen. May it be God's will."

And Reb Baruch said to the Besht with great humility, "Forgive me, my Lord, if I may be bold and strong in my soul, to ask one question: That old man wrapped in a white cloak, who was also in that room?"

And the Besht responded, "Since you merited seeing him, I will reveal to you the secret, that it is the soul of the Great Tzaddik, the *Maharal* (Rabbi Yehuda Loew)¹⁰¹ from Prague, may his name be remembered for a blessing, that he will have compassion on you through his stock and his heritage, and now the time has come that his soul is compelled to come to this world, to do awesome and great repairs, and you merit this, that the son which you will sire in him will transmigrate this holy soul. Because of this you will name this son, 'Lieb.'"

And the Besht said more to him, "I am sure that I will see your son that you will sire, and I will bless him."

And Reb Baruch could no longer restrain himself, and he cried with great happiness, for until now he did not have a son. After this, Reb Baruch said to the Besht, "My Lord the tzaddik! I will be so bold as to ask another question, and do not be angry with me. I desire in my soul to know what name is his glory where does he dwell. My soul's request is that he will no longer have a life of suffering and oppression, and that all of his deficiencies will be upon me all the days of my life."

The Besht answered him, "This thing do not ask and do not request, and the moment has still not arrived that he is known in the world." And he said more, "You will know, that also your son that you will sire will not be known immediately in the world, and before he will be known, he will have a life of suffering, and afterward his righteousness will shine as the light of the sun. And more than this do not ask me a thing.

¹⁰¹ A sixteenth century figure to whom legend ascribes the creation of the golem, a clay figure that came to like to protect the Jewish community.

And do not reveal to anyone any of what you saw and said with me. And do not honor me in front of any man, only behave with me as people behave with the rest of the poor and needy, and tomorrow I will travel from here.”

And Reb Baruch separated from him and went to his house, and in the morning the Besht traveled from there in his carriage, and harnessed the new horse that Reb Baruch gave to him, and no man knew what occurred that night, only Reb Baruch recorded for himself the whole matter in his diary. And the blessing of the Besht was fulfilled. Reb Baruch's wife conceived and bore a child, and joy was in their house because of this great salvation, that a boy was given to them. Reb Baruch ordered to announce in all the nearby towns that he was inviting all the poor people to come to the *Bris*. And he signed that, “Your friend, neighbor, reply to him,” and his voice was heard from every place, many poor and needy people were gathered at the *Brit Milah*, and most of them came with their wives and their children, and Reb Baruch prepared for them a place to lodge and a great deal of food.

When the day of the *Bris* arrived, and the several hundred that were there were rejoicing greatly, for all of them loved Reb Baruch, but Reb Baruch himself experienced a slight nervousness, for he was yearning that he would merit to see among the poor people the hidden tzaddik one more time, that he should bless this child, and thus Reb Baruch would walk back and forth the whole time among the poor people to see if perhaps also this day that poor man would be found among them. And his conjecture was verified, because the Besht also came with his staff and his belongings among the poor. And it was when he saw him that Reb Baruch ran to greet him, and said hello with

great joy, although, the Besht hinted to him that he should be quiet, and he said to him, "Guard yourself well to not speak with me, and do not show me any honor, only connect with me [the same as] with all the poor."

And Reb Baruch was compelled to be silent.

And after the service of the *Bris* was complete, the boy was named, "Arye-Lieb." And then it was the custom there that when the godfather returned with the boy after the *Bris*, he would lay his hand on the boy's head and bless him and his father, *Ba'al Ha-Brit*. And when Reb Baruch knew that among the poor people was also located the hidden tzaddik, he therefore ordered the godfather to pass the boy among the poor people, in order that the poor people would also bless him, and especially in order that the boy be blessed by him, the poor tzaddik. And it was so. Everyone blessed the boy, his hands upon the boy's head, and when [the moment] arrived, the godfather arrived to the Besht with the boy, the Besht also placed his hands upon the boy's head, and he said with joy and with a great voice, in these words:

"Behold, I am a simple man, and I do not know how to say blessings in the holy language [Hebrew], but I remember what my father taught me in the *Chumash* [Torah], in the verse, 'And Abraham was old,' [Genesis 18:11] and he said to me the, '*Av*' is, '*Fater*' (father) and '*Zaken*' is "*Zeideh*" (grandfather), and the explanation of '*Avraham Zakan*, ' is, that Abraham our father became our grandfather, and therefore I bless this boy that he will be the grandfather of all Israel, just as Abraham our father was the grandfather of all Israel."

A great laughter broke out from among the congregation to hear the explanation of, "*Abraham Zaken*," and the poor man's blessing to the boy, and immediately this name spread to those who called him, and they called the boy this (based on what was referred to above) as a joke by the name, "*Zeideh*," (grandfather). And the name pleased all who heard it. And when someone asked Reb Baruch or the mother of the boy, how the boy was they would ask in this language: "How is your grandfather?" And also his father and his mother called him our "*Zeidehle*," even so his name remained thus all of his life, and also when he became well known as time passed as the tzaddik of the generation and he worked great deeds and rendered ineffectual evil decrees against/upon Israel, they did not cease calling him by the name of "*Sabah*," (grandfather), rather he is the holy grandfather from *Shifulei*. He was called, "*Shifuler Zeidey*," may his name be remembered for a blessing.

בימי נעוריו של הבעש"ט ז"ל, אחר חתונתו, היה, כידוע, נסתר מכל אדם, והיה מתפרנס בצער ודוחק גדול מיגיע כפיו. היו לו עגלה וסוס, והיה מוביל בהם טיט וחול למכור בעיר. אשתו הצדקנית, אף שהיתה רכה וענוגה וממשפחה עשירה, בכל-זאת, כיון שהיתה יודעת את צדקת בעלה, נתמלאה רחמים עליו, ולקחה גם היא מעדר, ונסעה עמו לשרה, ועזרה לו לעדור בחול ובטיט ולהניחם על העגלה. לפעמים נסעו מעיר לעיר כמה שבועות, ואיש לא השגיח בהם, כי נחשבו כעניים עוברי-אורח. פעם אחת נהלש סוסו של הבעש"ט, ואי-אפשר היה לתת עליו משא. והיה הבעש"ט בצער גדול, כי כסף לקנות סוס אחר לא היה לו ולא יכול להשתכר לחם-הוקו. כשנפגש בדרך עם עניים אחרים סח לפניהם את צערו, ויעצו לו שיסע אל כפר אחד הסמוך לעיר אומן, ששם דר בעל-אחווה יהודי בשם ר' ברוך, והוא מכניס-אורח גדול, ודרכו שכשבא איש עני הנוסע בעגלה בכפרים לקנות עצמות וסמרטוטים וכדומה, והסוס שלו הוא חלש וגרוע, נותן לו ר' ברוך סוס אחר מהסוסים שלו, מאלה שלעבודת-האדמה לא יצלחו עוד, אבל טובים הם לעבוד עבודות קלות. שמע הבעש"ט לעצתם, ונסעו לשם, הוא ואשתו, ואחרי נסיעה ארוכה וקשה באו לאותו הכפר.

ובעל-האחרות ר' ברוך, שישב בכפר ההוא, היה עשיר גדול, ובא לזוהר מפדיונה ברחמיה, שכרח ששם סחמט הרדיפות על היהודים. ר' ברוך לא היה תלמידיהם, ואף לא סתם בר-אוריון, רק בעל-בית פשוט, אבל היה איש חם ורא אלוקים, ואשתו רחל גם היא הייתה צדקנית. הרבה צדקה וגמולות-חסדים עשו שניהם, וביותר התאמצו במצות הכנסת-אורחים. לשם מצוה זו של הכנסת-אורחים הקדישו בית מיוחד, ובו הרבה חדרים קטנים. בכל חדר עמדו שתי מיטות, מוצעות ככרים וכסתות, עם שולחן. ומנהגם היה לתת רשות לכל עובר אורח להתאכסן שם שבע שלם. והיו נותנים להם בכל יום שתי סעודות, ובשבת-קודש אכלו כולם על שולחן ר' ברוך. כאשר עברו קנינים עם נשיהם ושפם, נתן להם חדר מיוחד ; ואם באו איש ואשתו בלא בנים, לא רצה לתת להם חדר מיוחד, כי חשש אולי אין הם בעלי ואשתו. קודם שנמנעו משם האורחים, היה ר' ברוך נותן נדבות לאנשים העניים, ואשתו רחל נתנה נדבות לנשים העניות.

כשבא לשם הבעש"ס ואשתו, נתן מעט כבוד הכנסת-האורחים.

ואחר-כך הושם לפניהם לאכול, והיתה נפשם. סופר הבעש"ס ל' ברוך על אודות המס. מיד שלח ר' ברוך לקרוא למשרתיו, ושאל אותם אם נמצא כעת איזה מס שלא יוכר עוד לעבודת-האדמה. השיבו המשרתים, שנמצא מס כזה. צוה ר' ברוך לתת כמתנה לחנני הזה. שמו הבעש"ס שאר על המתנה, ומחמט שהוא ואשתו היו עייפים מאוד מהנסיעה הרחוקה, שיותר משישבו בתעלה הלכו ברגליהם, על-כן נשארו לנוח שם איזו ימים, עד אחר שבת-קודש. כשביקש הבעש"ס מאת ר' ברוך שימתן לו חדר מיוחד, שוכל ללון שם הוא ואשתו, אמר לו ר' ברוך, שלא יוכל לסלל בקשתו זאת, כי רחוק שם לו, שכשאתו יודע בבירור שהאורחים הם בעלי ואשתו, אינו נותן להם חדר מיוחד. ושר הדוכר בעני הבעש"ס, ושבת שם. והבעש"ס היה מתנהג אז ב"הצנע לכת" מאוד, ועל-כן לא ניכר בו שום דבר של חשיבות, כמותו לשאר העניים.

ויהי כמצואי-שבתי-קודש, כשר' ברוך שכב על מיטתו לישון, ראה פתאום שזורח אור מן החלון, ויהי בעניו לפלא. קם ממיטתו וניגש אל החלון, וראה והנה בחלון אחד של חדר העניים זורח אור גדול. התפלל ר' ברוך על האור, וגם התפחד, אולי מפרוץ מזה שריפה ח"ו. לבש את בגדיו, והלך בחיפזו לחיזוק מחו האור הזה. הוא ניגש בלאס אל דלת אותו החדר, והציץ בעד חור המנעול של הדלת, וראה כי זה חנני, שנתן לו את המס למתנה, וישב על הארץ ואמר ברעדה גדולה, "תיקון הצוה", ועומד בפסוק "למח לנצח תשכחנו תעזובנו לאורך ימים", כפיו פרושות לסעלה ופניו מוחזרים מאוד, ומעיניו נשקפות דמעות. וראה שוב, שאצל חנני עומד איש גבר-קומה, בעל זקן ארוך ולבוש לכנים וגם האיש הזה פניו מוחזרים מאוד. פחד ואימה גדולה נפלו על ר' ברוך מכל החזיון הזה, עד כי לא יכול לעמוד על רגליו, ונפל סלוא קומתו ארצה והתעלף.

כששמע הבעש"ס את קול הנפילה, רץ אל הדלת ופתח אותה, וראה את ר' ברוך שוכב מתעלף. התחיל לשפשף אותו עד כי העירו מעיניו, ורוחו שב אליו, והביאו אל החדר לנוח קצת. חנני ר' ברוך שאין זה איש פשוט, והתחיל לבקש ממנו מהחלה על שלא סילא בקשתו בדבר החדר, נפל לגליו וככה מאור. העמידו הבעש"ס, וגור עליו שישתוק ולא יגלה הדוכר כל ימי חייו. ובירך אותו שיוכה לכן שיתיה צדיק גדול. והזהירו שאשתו לא תמנהג כדרך שהתנהגה עד עתה, שלא רצתה להתיק בעצמה את יליה ושכרה להם מינקת, אלא שאח הילד הזה שתלד התיק דקא היא בעצמה. אמר ר' ברוך : אמן, כן יהי רצון.

ור' ברוך אמר אל הבעש"ט בהכנעה גדולה :
— ימחול אדוני אם ארהיב עוז כנפשי לשאלו שאלה אחת : מי היא
זה חזקן העומת מעיל לבן, שומצא גס-כן בחדר זה ?

והשיב הבעש"ט :

— כיון שזכית לראותו אנלה לך את הסוד, שזוהי נשמת הצדיק
הגדול מהר"ל מפראג ז"ל, אשר יחוסך הוא מגזעו ושרשו, ועתה הגיעה העת
שנשמתו מוכרחת לבוא לזה העולם, לעשות תיקונים גדולים וגוראים, ואתה
זכית לזה שהבן אשר תוליד תתגלגל בו נשמה קדושה זאת, ועל-כן תקרא
את שם הילד „לייב“.

ואמר לו עוד הבעש"ט :

— אני בטוח שאראה את בנך אשר תלד, ואני אברכהו.
ולא יכול עוד ר' ברוך להתאפק, ויבך מרוב שמחה, כי עד עתה
לא היה לו בן.

אחרי-כן אמר ר' ברוך להבעש"ט :

— אדוני הצדיק ! עוד שאלה אחת ארהיב כנפשי לשאול מאתו,
ואל יחר אף אדוני עלי. חשקה נפשי לדעת מה שם כבודו ואיה מקום
משכנו, ונפשי בבקשתי שלא יהיה עוד חיי צער ודוחק, ושכל מחסוריו
יהיו עלי כל ימי חיי.

ענהו הבעש"ט :

— דבר זה אל תשאל ואל תבקש, ועדיין לא הגיעה העת שאתפרסם
בעולם.

ואמר לו עוד :

— תדע, שגם בנך אשר תוליד לא יתפרסם תיכף בעולם, וקודם
שיתפרסם יהיה חיי צער, ואחרי-כך תזרח צדקתו כאור החמה. ויותר
מזה אל תשאל אותי דבר, ואל תגלה לשום אדם מכל אשר ראית ודיברת
עמי, ולא תכבדני בפני כל איש, רק תתנהג עמי כמו עם שאר העניים
והאכיונים, ולמהר אני נוסע מזה.

ור' ברוך נפרד מאתו והלך לביתו, ולמחרתו נסע משם הבעש"ט
בעגלתו, רתומה לסוס החדש שנתן לו ר' ברוך, ולא נודע לשום איש מה
שקרה באותו לילה, רק ר' ברוך רשם לעצמו כל הענין בספר-הזכרונות שלו.
וברכת הבעש"ט נתקיימה. אשתו של ר' ברוך הרתה וילדה בן, והיתה
השמחה במעונם על הישועה הגדולה הזאת, שניתן להם בן-זכר. ציוה ר'
ברוך להודיע בכל העיירות הסמוכות שהוא מבקש את כל העניים לבוא
לברית-המילה. ויען כי „חברך חבא אית ליה“, ונשמע הקול בכל מקום,
התקבצו ב„ברית-מילה“ הרבה עניים ואכיונים, והרכה מהם באו גם עם
נשיהם וטפם, ור' ברוך הכין להם מקום ללון וגם לחם רב.

ויום ה„ברית“ הגיע, וכמה מאות אנשים שהיו שם שמחו מאוד, כי
כולם היו אוהבים לר' ברוך, אבל בפני ר' ברוך עצמו היתה ניכרת עצבנות

קלה, כי הוא היה משתוקק שיזכה לראות בין העניים עוד פעם אותו הצדיק הנסתר, שבירכו כבן הזה, ועל-כן היה ר' ברוך הולך והוזר בכל פעם בין העניים לראות אולי נמצא גם היום ביניהם העני ההוא. והשערתו נתאמתה, כי גם הבעש"ט בא עם מקלו ותרמילו בין העניים. ויהי כאשר ראה אותו ר' ברוך רץ לקראתו, ונתן לו שלום בשמחה רבה, אך תכף רמז לו הבעש"ט שישתוק, ואמר לו: הישמר לך מאוד לכל תדבר עמי, ולא תחלוק לי שום כבוד, רק תתייחס אלי כמו לכל העניים. והוכרח ר' ברוך לשתוק.

אחר התפילה נעשתה „ברית-המילה“, ונקרא שם הילד „אריה-לייב“. והיה שם המנהג אז, שכאשר חזר ה„קוואטיר“ עם הילד אחר „ברית-המילה“, הלך אחריו גם בעל-הברית, וכל מי שה„קוואטיר“ עבר לפניו, היה מניח ידו על ראש הילד ומברך אותו ואביו, בעל-הברית. וכיון שר' ברוך ידע שבין העניים נמצא גם הצדיק הנסתר, על-כן ציוה לה„קוואטיר“ שיעבור עם הילד גם בין העניים, כדי שגם העניים יברכו אותו, ובעיקר כדי שיתברך הילד גם מאותו העני הצדיק. וכך הוה. כולם בירכו את הילד, והניחו את ידיהם על ראשו, וכאשר הגיע ה„קוואטיר“ עם הילד להבעש"ט, הניח גם הבעש"ט את ידיו על ראש הילד, ואמר בשמחה ובקול רם בזה הלשון:

— הנה אנוכי עסי-הארץ, ואינני יודע לברך ברכות כלשון-הקודש, אבל אני זוכר מה שאבי לימדני בחומש, בפסוק „ואברהם זקן“, ואמר לי ש„אב“ הוא „פאטער“ (אבא), ו„זקן“ הוא „זיידא“ (סבא), והפירוש של „אברהם זקן“ הוא, שאברהם אבינו נעשה סבא שלנו, ועל-כן אני מברך את הילד הזה שיהיה סבא לכל ישראל, כמו שאברהם אבינו היה סבא לכל ישראל.

שחוק גדול פרץ מבין הקהל לשמע הפירוש של „ואברהם זקן“ וברכתו של העני לילד, ותיכף נתפשט זה השם בין הקרואים, וקראו לילד הנ"ל על דרך שחוק בשם „זיידא“ (סבא). והשם מצא חן בעיני כל השומעים. וכאשר שאלו את ר' ברוך או את אס-הילד לשלומו של הילד היו שואלים בזה הלשון: „מה שלום סבא שלכם?“, וגם אביו ואמו היו קוראים לו ה„זיידאלי“ שלנו, עד אשר נשאר לו זה השם לכל חייו, וגם כשנתפרסם בהמשך הזמן לצדיק-הדור ופעל גדולות וביטל הרבה גזירות רעות מעל ישראל, לא פסקו מלקרואו בשם סבא, הלא הוא סבא קדישא משיפולי, הנקרא בשם „שפוליר זיידא“, וזכר צדיק לברכה!

2.) The Besht and Rabbi Chayim

Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz, may his virtue stand us in good stead, was once very ill, heaven save us, and he lay in bed unconscious for three days, and suddenly he began to sweat profusely and after that he recovered with God's help, and Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz recounted: Because his soul was already in the upper world, and he saw in heaven the holy Besht, may his virtue stand us in good stead, walking with his students, and he asked who is walking there and they said that it was he, the holy Besht. So he approached the Besht and requested him to bless him that he would have a complete healing. The Besht said to him what connection do you have with me? Were you ever at my home? Do you know me? Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz said: that his rebbe was Rabbi Michaleh of Zlotchov, may his virtue stand us in good stead, told stories every third meal of deeds of yours. Once at a third meal, it was very late and Rabbi Michaleh already washed his hands, before saying *Birkat Hamazon*, and he did not yet tell a story of a deed. Therefore, I reminded him he had not yet told about a work of the holy Besht, may his virtue stand us in good stead. And I understand if my rabbi recounted your works it will be well for you in the World of Truth. And by this merit, I requested healing. The Besht said yes. And he placed his hand upon Rabbi Chayim of Chernovitz's head and he began to sweat. And he recovered very slowly, and afterward, he had a complete recovery.

ג

הבאר מים חיים זי"ע היה פעם חולה מאד ל"ע, ושכב שלש מעת לעת
בהינער פעלט, (בלי הכרה), ופתאום התחיל להזיע מאד והוטב לו
כ"ה, וסיפר הבמ"ח, כי נשמתו היה כבר בעולם העליון, וראה בשמים
הבעש"ט הקדוש זי"ע הולך עם התלמידים, ושאל מי הולך שם ואמרו לו
שזה הבעש"ט הק', אז ניגש להבעש"ט וביקשו שיברך אותו שיהיה לו
רפואה שלימה, אמר לו הבעש"ט איזה שייכות יש לך עמי היית אצלי
אתה מכיר אותי, אמר הבמ"ח כי רבו הרבי ר' מיכל'ע מזלאטשוב זי"ע
סיפר בכל שלש סעודות עובדא מכם, פעם בשלש סעודות היה מאוחר
מאד והרר"מ כבר נטל ידיו מים אחרונים ולא סיפר עדיין עובדא, אז
הזכרתי לו כי עדיין לא סיפר עובדא מהבעש"ט הק' זי"ע, ואני מבין אם
הרבי שלי סיפר עובדא מכם היה לכם נייחא בעלמא דקשוט, ובזכות זה
אני מבקש רפואה, אמר הבעש"ט כן, והניח ידו על ראשו של הבמ"ח
והתחיל להזיע ולאט לאט הוטב לו, והיה לו אח"כ רפואה שלימה. (ב)

3.) #136 Madman Feigns Death

Once Rabbi David, the Maggid of the Holy Community of Tulchin, who was the grandson of the Tzaddik Rabbi David Forkes, observed the Sabbath at the home of the rabbi of our community, and he recounted a tale to me: One man led his insane son to the Besht, and when he arrived one Persian mile near the town, his insanity became more severe and he pretended that he was dead. And his father brought him to town to bury [him], and he lay him down in the women's [section of the] synagogue. And the Besht said to the scribe, "Today we must strike a dead man." And when they brought the dead man out, he said to the scribe, "Take a thick shoe-strap and go to the synagogue and chase from there the Burial Society." And he ordered him [the scribe] to strike him [the son], and he beat him [the son] and he [the son] did not get up and he did not move. And the Besht ordered them to leave him in one [particular] house, and to close the house and guard it until the holiday of Passover. And it was three weeks until Passover. And on the night of Passover, he ordered them to seat him at the table and to bring him close with pillows until he would be able to sit. They assigned one man to give him by mouth all that they were doing, that is food and drink, and they guarded him so that he would not escape. And if he were to escape, it would be difficult to find him. And with the third glass, he was not able to bear [his situation anymore], and he sprung up and ran from the house and he escaped. And they searched for him round the clock until they found him, and the Besht healed him.

3.) #136 Madman Feigns Death

פ"א שבת אצל הרב דקהילתנו ר' דוד מגיד משרים דק"ק טולטשין.
שהיה נכד של הצדיק ר' דוד פורקעס, וסיפר לי מעשה. אחד הוליך בנו
משוגע להבעש"ט, וכשהגיע פרסה אחת סמוך לעיר ונתחזק המשוגע ועשה
עצמו כמת. והביא אותו אביו לעיר לקבור, והניח אותו בבהכ"נ של נשים.
והבעש"ט אמר לסופר, אנחנו מוכרחים היום להכות מת אחד. וכשהביאו את
המת אמר להסופר, קח ערקתא דמסאני עבה ולך לבהכ"נ וגדש משם החברה
קדישא. וציוה להכות אותו, והיכה אותו ולא קם ולא זע. וציוה הבעש"ט
שיניחו אותו בבית אחד, ויסגרו את הבית וישמרו אותו עד חג הפסח. והיה
עד הפסח ג' שבועות. ובלייל פסח ציוה שיושיבו אותו לשולחן ויסמכו אותו
בכרים, עד שיוכל לישב. ויעמידו לו איש אחד שיתן לו בפיו כל מה שהם
עושים, הן אכילה והן שתיה, וישמרו אותו שלא יברח. וכאשר יברה יהיה
קשה למצוא אותו. ובכוס ג' לא היה יכול לסבול, וקפץ ודלג מן הבית וברח.
ויבקשו אותו מעת לעת עד שמצאו אותו וריפא אותו.

4.) #225 Three Brothers

In one holy community there were three very learned and God-fearing brothers. Two of them were followers of the Besht¹⁰² and the third was opposed to him (a *Mitnaggid*). Every time the Besht was in that aforementioned community, he would stay at the home of the two brothers, and every time he asked about the welfare of the third brother. Once he came to that aforementioned holy community on a Thursday and before he entered the house, he asked the people of the town about the welfare of the third brother in the following words:

How is my opponent?

The community thought that this matter would be good news to him. They said that he was lying on a sickbed and that he no longer had the strength to speak. The rabbi [the Besht] said that it was necessary for him to go to his home and visit him [during] his sickness. And on Friday, the eve of the Holy Sabbath, he said to the two brothers in the words of a question: Would it be possible to pray there, at the house of their brother on the Holy Sabbath. And they said to him: If he were healthy, of course he would not allow the rabbi to pray at his home, but at this moment he is lying like a stone that one cannot lift. What will it bother him? Of course, it is certainly possible, because there is a special room there [in which] to pray.

And he [the Besht] ordered the holy ark and the Torah scroll to be brought there, and there he prayed *Minchah* and *Ma'ariv* on Friday, the eve of the Holy Sabbath. And

¹⁰² They turned toward the Besht's explanations and teachings. In other words, they were not *Mitnagdim*.

in the morning he prayed *Shacharit* and he lengthened the prayers until two o'clock in the afternoon. And before the Reading of Torah, he went into a passageway in order to cool himself. And he immediately heard a moaning voice [indicating that] the sick man was a *goses*¹⁰³. And he said to his people: Let us go to visit the sick man, and he sat by [next to] the sick man. And his mother said to him: Why do you not greet the rabbi? And he did not answer her at all. And she placed his hand into the rabbi's hand. The rabbi asked the sick man if he had studied Gemarrah – and he was silent. And many times [time after time] he asked him this, and he was silent until the rabbi scolded him: Where are your manners that I ask you [a question] and you do not answer me at all? Then he answered [the Besht]: I studied Gemarrah. And he asked: In what tractate is the expression: Are your sufferings pleasant to you? He said to him: in Tractate Brachot. And what is said there? He said to him: Neither them and nor their reward, etc.. The rabbi asked him: Are your sufferings pleasant to you? And he answered him: Neither them and nor their reward. The rabbi said: Give me your hand. And he gave him his hand and he stood up. And the rabbi instructed him to let his feet down from the bed, and he did this. And after that he instructed him to slowly dress himself and to wash his hands, and he did this, [he did] everything that he instructed him [to do]. And after that he went with him to the synagogue and he prayed *Musaf* with everyone and he became healthy with the help of God, may God's name be blessed.

103 A technical term used to indicate that the man is dying.

4.) #225 Three Brothers

בק"ק אחת היו ג' אחים לומדים מופלגים ויראי ה', שנים מהם היו סרים למשמעתו של הבעש"ט, והג' היה מתנגד נגדו. ובכל פעם שהיה הבעש"ט בק"ק הנ"ל היתה אכסניא שלו אצל שני האחים, ובכל פעם היה שואל ודורש לשלום האח הג'. פעם א' בא לק"ק הנ"ל ביום ה', וקודם שנכנס לאכסניא שאל את אנשי העיר על שלום האח הג' בזה"ל, וואש מאכט מיין מתנגד * . והעולם סברו שיהיו כמבשרים בעיניו, אמרו שהוא מוטל על ערש דוי וכוח הדיבור גם כן אין אתו. אמר הרב שצריכין לילך אצלו לבקר חוליו. וביום ו' עש"ק אמר לשני האחים בלשון שאלה, אם אפשר ויכול להיות להתפלל שם אצל אחיהם בשבת קודש. ויאמרו, אם היה בריא בוודאי לא היה מניח את הרב להתפלל אצלו, אבל כעת הוא מוטל כאבן שאין לו הופכים, מה איכפת ליה, בוודאי אפשר ואפשר, כי יש שם חדר מיוחד להתפלל. וציוו להביא לשם ארון הקודש וספר תורה והתפלל שם ביום ו' עש"ק מנחה ומעריב, ובבוקר התפלל שחרית והאריך בתפילה עד ב' שעות אחר חצות. וקודם קריאת התורה הלך לפרוודור בכדי לקרר את עצמו, ומיד שמע קול יללה איך שהחולה הוא גוסס. ואמר לאנשיו נלך לבקר את החולה, וישב אצל החולה. ואמרה לו אמו, מדוע אינך נותן שלום להרב. ולא ענה לה כלום. ונתנה ידו לתוך יד הרב. שאל הרב את החולה אם למד גמרא, ושתק. וכן כמה פעמים שאל ממנו, והוא שתק. עד שגער בו הרב, היכן הוא דרך ארץ שלך, שאני שואל ממך ואינך משיב לי כלום. אז השיב לו, למדתי גמרא. ושאל באיזו מסכת הוא מאמר חביבים עליך יסורים. אמר לו במסכת ברכות. ומה נאמר שם. אמר לו, לא הן ולא שכרן וכו'. שאל לו הרב, חביבים עליך יסורים. והשיב לא הן ולא שכרם. אמר לו הרב, הב לי ירך. יחב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה. אחר זה ציוה לו הרב שיוריד רגליו מן המטה, וכן עשה. אחר זה ציוה הרב שילביש את עצמו מעט מעט ויטול ידיו, וכן עשה, כל דבר אשר ציוהו. ואחר זה הלך עמו לבית התפילה והתפלל מוסף עם כולם והבריא בעזהשיית.

5.) # 231 The Blind Boy

In Istanbul there was a very rich man and he had an only son who was exceptional. And suddenly he fell blind in his eyes. They asked the doctors to heal him, and after all the machinations that they did, they did not help him at all and they became despondent about his healing.

And when the Baal Shem Tov was in the aforementioned holy community, he said to the aforementioned man that he would be able to render a complete healing. And he [the father] was very happy with his words. And he brought him to his house with great honor. But when the wife of the aforementioned leader, she despised him [the Besht], because he was not well dressed, because he wandered by the land and seas. And she became angry with her husband and said, "Why did you bring him to me? Were not all of the doctors unable to help him at all, and what help will that one bring with names?" And she spoke against the holy names.

And the Besht became angry about [the fact] that she did not believe in the active power of the holy names, and he said, "Where is the blind boy? Bring him to me and I will heal him so he will see immediately as the way of anyone." And it was in his speaking, [that] she became very hopeful, a liar promises only rewards, and he [the Besht] said that in this minute he [the boy] will see. Perhaps he would be able to make his words come true.

And suddenly they brought him the sick boy and he whispered something in his ear. And suddenly he [the Besht] ordered [them] to bring a Gemara to him, and he ordered him [the boy] to read, and he read in the manner as every one does. And there

was great joy among the members of the household. And immediately and suddenly, the rabbi passed his hand over his eyes, and they returned to [as they were] at first, and there was a great cry in the house. And they asked him with a curtsey and they bowed to him and he [the father] wanted to give him a huge sum of money. And the rabbi answered, "You are a wicked woman, that mocked the holy names, it is forbidden to you to enjoy them. Because from the beginning, I did not want to do [things] for my honor, God forbid, or for money. Only for the sanctification of God's name, blessed be God. You were shown with your [own] eyes the great power of the holiness of God's name, but you will not enjoy it." And he went from them so.

בסטאמבול היה איש אחד עשיר מופלג והיה לו בן יחיד מופלא ופתאום נעשה סומא מעיניו וביקשו מהרופאים שירפאו אותו, ואחרי כל התחבולות שעשו לא הועילו כלום ונתייאשו מרפואתו. ובהיות הבעש"ט בק"ק הנ"ל אמר להאיש הנ"ל שהוא ירפאנו רפואה שלימה, ומאוד שמח לדבריו והכניסו לביתו בכבוד גדול. וכשראתה אשת הנגיד הנ"ל ותבזהו בעיניה, כי לא הלך בבגדים חשובים מפני טלטול הדרך וימים, ותכעוס על בעלה ותאמר למה הבאת אותו אלי, הלא כל הרופאים לא הועילו כלום ומה יועיל זה בשמות, ותדבר על שמות הקדושים. ויחרה אף הבעש"ט על שלא האמינה בכוח פעולת שמות הקודש, ויאמר היכן הוא הילד הסומא, הביאהו אלי וארפאנו שיראה תיכף ומיד כדרך כל האדם. ויהי באומרו נתפעם רוחה, כי הדוצה לשקר ידחיק עדותו והוא אומר שבוזו הרגע יראה, יכול להיות שיאמת דבריו. ומיד הביאו לו החולה וילחוש באזניו איזה דבר, ומיד ציוה להביא גמרא לפניו וציוה לו לקרות, וקרא כדרך כל הארץ. והיה שמחה גדולה באנשי הבית. ותיכף ומיד העביר הרב ידו על עיניו וחזר לבראשונה, והיה בכיה גדולה בבית. וביקשו אותו בקידה ובהשתחויה ורצה ליתן לו מעות סך עצום. והשיב הרב את המרשעת, שלגלגת משמות הקדושים אסור לך ליהנות מהם. כי מתחילה לא רציתי לעשות לכבודי ח"ו או בשביל מעות, רק בשביל קידוש השם ית', הראיתך בעיניך גודל כוח קדושת השם, אבל לא תהני מהם. והלך מאתם כך.

6.) #244 The Besht Resuscitates A Boy

In the holy community of Medzhibozh there was a man who had no children and would always mention it. When he became old, he bothered the Besht many times. And with the help of God, his wife bore him a son remembering her at the time of her old age. Not many days passed and he died in the middle of the days (after) his birth. And suddenly he came to the Besht in anger and rage. "Why did you deceive me and give me something as this that would be immediately taken from me? It would have been better had I not had children at all."

And the Besht answered, "Did I not say that you would have children? Of course the boy will live."

The man waited a long time, and he [the boy] did not get up and the boy did not move and also he did not have the breath of life in him. And he could not face speaking with the Besht, after he had promised him a certain promise. And he came to the rabbi and he spoke to him in another way. And he asked of him if he should prepare himself for the *Bris* whom should he honor. And he ordered him to prepare himself according to custom, and to honor a well-known man as the *sandek* and another for the cutting and himself (the Besht) for the *metzizah*, and he did thus.

And they brought the boy to the synagogue and ritually cut him, but he did not bleed, it was as if the flesh was dead. And the rabbi began to say blessings that follow and *Bris*, and when he said the words: "Preserve this boy to his father and to his mother." He lingered a great deal until the boy's spirit returned to him, and blood from the

circumcision spurted up to the ceiling. And with the help of God, the boy completely lived.

ב"ק מעזיבוז היה איש אחד חשוכי בנים והיה מזכיר תמיד. כאשר בא בימים הטריח כמה פעמים את הבעש"ט, ובעזה"ש אשתו ילדה לו בן זכר לעת זקנותה, ולא ארכו הימים ומת בתוך ימי הלידה. ומיד בא להבעש"ט ברעש ודרוג, למה תשלה אותי ליתן לי דבר כזה שיופסק ממני מיד. והלא יותר טוב היה לי שלא היו לי בנים כל עיקר. והשיב הבעש"ט, הלא אמרתי שיהיו לך בנים, בוודאי יחיה הילד. והמתין עד בוש, ולא קם ולא זע הילד גם רוח חיים אין בו. ולא היה לו פנים לדבר עם הבעש"ט, אחרי שהוא מבטח לו בהבטחה נאמנה. ובא להרב ודיבר עמו מצד אחר, ושאל ממנו אם יכין את עצמו על הברית ואת מי יכבד. וציוה לו שיכין את עצמו כנהוג, וסנדק ציוה לו לכבד אדם ידוע, וכן חיתוך, ולעצמו מציצה, וכן עשו. הביאו את הילד לבהכ"נ ומהל אותו, ולא יצא דם, כחותך בשר מת, והתחיל הרב לומר ברכות שאחר המילה, וכשאמר תיבות קיים את הילד הזה לאביו ולאמו, שהה הרבה עד שחזרה נפש הילד אל קרבו וניתן דם מהמילה עד שמי קורה. ובעזה"ש חי הילד לגמרי לד.

7.) #162 The Demons

I heard from the Rabbi, Rabbi Gedaliah that the daughter-in-law of Rabbi Moses, the rabbi of the holy community of Kotiv, had the pains of parenthood, and employed Gentile sorceresses. They did their magic and they hid a castrated cock under the threshold of the house. Because of this sorcery, a demon became manifest in the house.

Once the aforementioned Rabbi Moses saw that pigs were walking on the ceiling at night, and he left the house. The preacher came and asked [a question] of the aforementioned rabbi and said, "I will stay with you at your house to stay in it." And he [the rabbi] answered him, "If I had a good dwelling, I would live in it. The preacher said to him, "Nevertheless, I will live in it."

Once the preacher was sitting in his small house in a *tallit* and in *tefillin* and his house was open, and his baby was walking in the corridor. The preacher saw that the demon was walking toward the boy, and he scolded it and said to him, "What are you doing here?" He [the demon] answered him, "And what are you doing here?" The preacher understood that he must leave the apartment, however since it was [already] evening he said, "I will leave [from] here tomorrow." And he asked three friends to lodge with him, and they sat and they studied. And after this the preacher asked to sleep a little bit, and he asked them and said, "I am going to lay down but, for Heaven's sake, do not [go to] sleep, but study."

And when he fell asleep, all of them slept over their books, and the candle extinguished. The demon poured a pile of dust from the attic on every book. And when the preacher awoke and saw that it was dark, he trembled greatly. And he entered the

house and the demon threw a plank from the attic at him. And had he not turned a little back into the room, he would have been injured, God forbid. And he stayed in one place in fear until he heard the voice of the cock. And he took the candle and went to light the candle. And in the house of the rabbi, the way was illuminated by the window, and he came to the house, by way of the window to light the candle. The rabbi recognized that he [the preacher] was filled with fear and he inquired of him, but he did not want to answer him until he grasped fire in his hand. As it is written in *Sefer Hasidim*. Then he recounted [the events] to the rabbi. And the rabbi said, "Didn't I tell you?" He [the preacher] came to the house and found all of them sleeping and upon every book [was] a pile of dust. And in the morning, when the house was drenched with scalding water to destroy it, he left the apartment. Each of the neighbors took: this one a bench and that one took a plank and a measure of wood, and the preacher also took [something]. That night the demon knocked on the wall and on the windows of everyone that took something from this house.

And on the third night the Baal Shem Tov said, "I will go to your place and he [the demon] will not knock anymore in the house. And I will lie down to sleep a little bit. And when you hear a song at the window or at another place, you should say, 'Israel ben Eliezer is here,' and he will not knock again." And so it was. Then the preacher said, "Since that name, Israel ben Eliezer, is a name, it means that he is a tzaddik." Therefore, he became a more faithful follower.

שמעתי מהרב ר' גדליה. ר' משה הרב דק"ק קוטיב יב, היה לכלתו
 צער גידול בנים ועסקה בנכריות כשפניות. ועשו בכשפיהם וטמנו תחת מפתן
 הבית תרנגול מסודס. ועל ידי כשפים נעשה לץ אחד בבית. פ"א דאה ר'
 משה הנ"ל שחזירים הולכים על הסטעליע * בלילה ויצא מן הבית. בא המוכיח
 וביקש מהרב הנ"ל ואמר, אכנס לבית שלכם לדור בתוכו. והשיב לו אילו
 היתה דירה טובה הייתי דר בה. אמר לו המוכיח, אף על פי כן אני אדור
 בתוכה. פ"א ישב המוכיח בבית קטן שלו בטלית ותפילין והבית היה פתוח
 ותינוק שלו הולך בפרוזדור. ראה המוכיח שהלץ הולך אל הילד, וגער בו
 ואמר לו מה מעשיך בכאן. השיב לו ומה אתה עושה בכאן. הבין המוכיח
 שמוכרח לצאת מן הדירה, אלא שהיה לעת ערב ואמר למחר אצא מכאן.
 וביקש שלושה חברים שילינו עמו וישבו ולמדו. ואחר כך ביקש המוכיח לישון
 מעט וביקש מאתם ואמר, אני אלך לשכב ואתם לא תישנו למעשה"ש ולמדו.
 וכשישן הוא ישנו כולם על הספרים והנר כבה. ושפך הלץ על כל ספר קופה
 עפר מן העליה. וכשנתעורר המוכיח וראה שחושך נרעד מאוד. ונכנס לבית
 וזרק הלץ עליו דף אחד מן העליה. ואלולי שחזר מעט לאחוריו לתוך
 האלקער ** היה מתנזק ח"ו. ועמר במקום אחד בפחד עד ששמע קול התרנגול.
 ולקח הנר והלך להדליק הנר. ובבית הרב האיר דרך חלון ובא לבית דרך
 חלון להדליק הנר. הכיר הרב בו שנתפחד מאוד ושאל אותו, ולא רצה
 להשיבו עד שאחזו אש בידו. כי כן כתוב בספר החסידים, וסיפר להרב.
 ואמר לו הרב הלא אמרתי לכם. ובא לביתו ומצא אותם ישינים ועל כל
 ספר קופה עפר. ובבוקר יצא מן הדירה. וכשנחלט הבית לחורבה לקחו
 השכנים זה ספסל וזה לקח דף ושאר עצים, וגם המוכיח לקח. ובלילה היכה
 הלץ בכותל ובחלונות לכל אחד שלקח מאומה מן הבית הזה. ובלילה השלישית
 אמר הבעש"ט, אני אלך אצלך ולא יכה עוד בבית. ואני אשכב מעט לישון.
 וכשתשמעו שידה בחלון או במקום אחר תאמרו ישראל בן אליעזר יש כאן.
 ושוב לא יכה. וכן היה. אז אמר המוכיח, כיון ששם ישראל בן אליעזר הוא
 שם שמע מניה צדיק הוא, ואז נדבק אליו היטב.

8.) #62 The Besht and the Maggid

I heard from the Rabbi of the holy community of Derazne who was the president of the court in the holy city of Pavlysh, the tale of how the rabbi, the great *maggid* approached the Baal Shem Tov. The *maggid* fasted seven or eight times from Shabbat to Shabbat consecutively and he was very ill. Once, Rabbi Mendel, from the holy community of Bar, came to the community of Tortchin and he stayed a month at the home of an elder of the community. The *maggid* lived a month in a small house attached to the elder's home, which was called *Untershtiebl* (courtyard of the house).

Rabbi Mendel entered the corridor of his host and he heard the words that the *maggid* taught to one student, and his words pleased him. And he went in toward him [the *maggid*] and he saw that he was very sick. And he said to him: Have you not heard that there is a Baal Shem Tov in the world? He lifted up his merit [so that] he will heal him. And he [the *maggid*] answered him: It is better to seek refuge in God than security from people.

And when Rabbi Mendel came to the Besht he recounted his praise of the *maggid*, and he said: I was in the community of Tortchin and I saw a beautiful vessel. And the Besht said: I saw it many years ago and I have a yearning for it to come to me. And there are several versions of how the *maggid* came to the Besht. But I heard that his relatives pressed him to go to the Besht. And when he came to the Besht, he found him sitting on his bed reflecting, and he greeted him. And the *maggid* asked the aforementioned Baal Shem Tov to heal him.

The Besht rebuked him and said: My horses do not eat Matzah! And he began

to sweat [from] weakness and he went outside. And he sat on the step in front of the house to rest, and he saw a man of tender years and he called to him and said to him: Please go to the Besht and say to him: Why do you not fulfill the passage, "You shall love the stranger?" And the aforementioned young man was Rabbi Ya'akov from Annopol. And he took pity on him. And he went to see the Besht. And he was afraid to speak with him, and with wisdom he made himself go to the end of the house and he went out to flee. And in his going he said, one melancholy man is sitting in front of the house, and he asked me to speak to, his honor, why have you not fulfilled, "And you shall love the stranger?" And he went out from the house. Immediately the Besht gathered ten men, and he went out to him to appease him and he wanted to heal him with words. And I heard from Rabbi Gershon, from the community of Pavlysh, that the Besht had gone to him for a couple of weeks, and sat facing him and recited psalms. And afterward, the Besht said to him: I wanted to heal you with words, because this is an enduring healing, but now I need to work with you medically. And he gave him an apartment, and he gave him twelve pieces of gold Shabbat after Shabbat for his expenses. And the aforementioned Rabbi Ya'akov and Rabbi Elijah constantly went to him to visit him. And there were times [when] they would debate an issue from the Gemarra and Tosefta, and he was not able to go to the Besht from weakness. And after a little time, he began to be healthy, and he would go to the Besht's table. Once he [the *maggid*] fainted and they tried to awake him for half of a day. And the Besht went three times to the *mikveh*, and he sent for a man three *persaot* (Persian miles). And bought from him a precious stone called a diamond for thirty gold coins, and they ground it and they gave it to him to drink.

And after this, Rabbi Ya'akov and his aforementioned companion came to visit him. They asked why he fainted, and he didn't answer them a word. And they asked the people of the house if he had not gone out that night. And they said that he went outside and stayed and came [back] to the house and he began to faint. And they asked him where he was. He said to them: The Besht sent his *gabbai* after me at midnight, and I found him sitting and a small candle was on his head, and he was dressed in the skin of wolves inside out, and he asked me if I had studied the wisdom of the Kabbalah, and I said yes. And a book was lying in front of him on the table, and he ordered me to recite from this book in front of him. And this book was written in short paragraphs, and every paragraph would begin: Rabbi Ishmael told me that the *Metatron*, Prince of the Countenance¹⁰⁴, told me. And I recited before him a page or half a page, and the Besht said: it is not like that, I will recite it for you. And he recited before me, and in the middle of it, he shook and stood up, and said, we are busying ourselves with *Ma'asseh Merkevah*, and I sat. And he [continued] to recite while standing, and in the midst of his words, he lay me down on the bed like a circle, I could not see him anymore, I only heard voices and I saw frightful flashes and torches. This was so for about two hours, and I was extremely afraid. And from that fear, I began to feel faint.

And I, the writer, will say that it appears to me that this was [the way in which] the Torah was received. Thus I heard from the Hasidic Rabbi from the Holy community of Polennah, that

¹⁰⁴ An angel accorded a special position in esoteric doctrine from the tannaitic period on. This word appears either in short (six letters) or long (seven letters with a *yud*) form. The Kabbalists regarded the different forms as two prototypes for Metatron. They identified one as the Supreme emanation with the *Shechinah*, dwelling since then in the heavenly world and the other form as Enoch, who ascended later to heaven and possesses only some of the splendor and power of the primordial Metatron.

he received the Torah that was connected to his soul, with voices and thunderbolts. Moreover, he said that this is the language of all kinds of musical instruments¹⁰⁵, as it is said in the holy Zohar¹⁰⁶. And I did not see in the Zohar: mention of all kinds of musical instruments at the receiving of the Torah. But, I heard from a rabbi this explanation: As all the Israelites received the Torah as one people that is the way the Besht received it as an individual.

Once, after the Besht's followers asked him the meaning of a sentence from the Zohar and he explained it and said to them, and they repeated [the question] and asked the *maggid*, may his memory be for a blessing, and his explanation amplified the answer of the Besht. They recounted this to the Besht. He said: Do you think that he learned Torah by himself?

When the *maggid*, may his name be remembered for a blessing, took leave of The Besht, the Besht blessed him. And afterward, the Besht bent his head for the *maggid* to bless him. [The story goes] as far as this.

שמעתי מהרב דק"ק דראזניץ שהיה אב"ד בק"ק פאוולויץ, המעשה
איך נתקרב הרב המגיד י"ג הגדול להבעש"ט. המגיד צם ז' או ח' פעמים
משבת לשבת רצופים וחלה מאוד. פ"א בא ר' מענדל מק"ק באר לקהילת
טארטשין ונתאכסן אצל הפרנס חודש. והמגיד היה דר בבית קטן סמוך
להפרנס חודש. הנקרא אונטער שטיביל **, ונכנס ר' מענדל לפרוודור לבעל
הבית שלו ושמע דברי המגיד שלמד עם תלמיד אחד, והוטב בעיניו הדיבורים
שלו. ונכנס אליו וראה שהוא חולה מאוד, ואמר לו, האם לא שמעתם שיש
בעש"ט בעולם, ויסע מעלתו אליו וירפא אותו. והשיב טוב לחסות בה'
מבטוח באדם. וכשבא ר' מענדל להבעש"ט סיפר בשבחו של המגיד, ואמר
הייתי בקהילת טארטשין וראיתי כלי יפה. אמר הבעש"ט. ראיתי אותו מכמה
שנים ויש לי געגועים אליו שיבוא אלי. ויש כמה נוסחאות איך שבא המגיד
להבעש"ט. אך שמעתי שקרוביו לחצוהו שיסע להבעש"ט. וכשבא להבעש"ט

105 According to Exodus 19:16-19, the moment of revelation was accompanied by the sounding of horns.

106 Mystical book composed ca. 1300.

מצא אותו יושב על מטתו ומעיין, ונתן לו שלום. וביקש המגיד הנ"ל שירפא אותו, וגער בו הבעש"ט ואמר, אין סוסים שלי אוכלים מצות. ונפלה עליו זיעה מחמת חולשה ויצא לחוץ, וישב על האצטבא שלפני הבית לנוח, וראה איש אחד רך בשנים וקרא אותו אליו ואמר לו, בבקשה ממך לך אל הבעש"ט ואמור לו, למה אינו מקיים הפסוק ואהבתם את הגר. ואיש בחור הנ"ל היה ר' יעקב מהאניפאלי, ונכמרו רחמיו עליו ונכנס לבעש"ט. והיה ירא לומר לו, ועשה בחכמה והלך עד קצה הבית וחזר לצאת ולברות, ובהליכתו אמר, איש אחד מרה שחורה יושב לפני הבית, וביקש אותי שאומר לרומע"ל למה לא קיימתם ואהבתם את הגר. ויצא מן הבית. מיד אסף הבעש"ט עשרה אנשים, יצא אליו לפייס אותו ורצה לרפאות אותו בדיבורים. ושמעתי מר' גרשון דקהילת פאוליק, שהבעש"ט היה הולך אליו כמו שני שבועות, וישב כנגדו ואמר תהילים, ואחר כך אמר הבעש"ט אליו, הייתי רוצה לרפאות אותך בדיבורים, כי היא רפואה קיימת, ועכשיו אני צריך לעסוק עמך ברפואות. ונתן לו דירה, ונתן לו י"ב זהוב בכל שבת ושבת על הוצאות שלו. והיו ר' יעקב הנ"ל ור' אליהו הולכים אליו בכל עת לבקרו. ופעמים היו מפלפלים בגמרא ותוספות, ולא יכול לילך להבעש"ט מחמת חלישות. ואחר זמן מועט התחיל להבריא, והיה הולך להבעש"ט לשולחנו. פ"א התעלף והיו מעוררים אותו עד חצי יום. והבעש"ט הלך שלושה פעמים למקוה, ושלח לארון אחד רחוק ג' פרסאות וקנה ממנו אבן טובה הנקרא דימאנט * בסך שלושים אדומים, וכתשו אותו ונתנו לו לשתות. ואחר זה בא אליו ר' יעקב וחבריו הנ"ל לבקרו. שאלו אותו מפני מה היתה לו התעלפות, ולא ענה אותם דבר. ושאלו לאנשי הבית, אם לא יצא הלילה, ואמרו יצא ושהה ובא לבית והתחיל להתעלף. ושאלו אותו היכן היה. אמר להם, הבעש"ט שלח אחרי הגבאי שלו בחצות לילה, ומצאתי אותו יושב ונר קטן על ראשו, ומלוכב בעור של זאבים מהופך, ושאל אותי אם למדתי חכמת הקבלה, ואמרתי הן. והיה ספר אחד מונח לפניו על השולחן, וציוה אותי לאמור לפניו בספר זה, ובספר היה כתוב במאמרים קטנים, וכל מאמר היתה התחלה אמר ד"י סח לי מט"ט שר הפנים. ואמרתי לפניו עמוד או חצי עמוד, ואמר הבעש"ט לא כן הוא, אני אומר לפניך. ואמר לפני, ובתוך כך נודעו וקם ואמר, אנחנו עוסקים במעשה מרכבה ואני יושב. ואמר בעמידה, ובתוך הדיבורים השכיב אותי במטה כמו עיגול, ושוב לא ראיתי אותו, רק שמעתי קולות וראיתי ברקים ולפידים נוראים. והיה כך ערך שתי שעות, ונתפחדתי מאוד. ומזה הפחד התחלתי להתעלף. ואומר אני הכותב, כמדומה לי שזו היתה קבלת התורה. שכן שמעתי מפי הרב החסיד דק"ק פולנאה, שקיבל מהבעש"ט תורתו השייכת לנשמתו בקולות וברקים. ועוד היה אומר זה הלשון בכל מיני כלי זמר, כנאמר בזוהר הקדוש. ואני לא ראיתי בזוהר שיוזכר בכל מיני כלי זמר בקבלת התורה. אך שמעתי מהרב זה הלשון, כמו שקיבלו ישראל התורה בכלל, כן קיבל הבעש"ט בפרט. ואחרי שפ"א שאלו אנשי סגולתו אותו מאמר זוהר ופירשו ואמר להם, וחזרו ושאלו את המגיד הנזכר ז"ל והיה הפירוש מכוון למה שאמר הבעש"ט, וסיפרו להבעש"ט. אמר, כסבורים אתם שהוא יודע מעצמו התורה. וכשנסע המגיד ז"ל מהבעש"ט בירך אותו הבעש"ט, ואחר כך הרכין הבעש"ט את ראשו שיברך אותו, ולא רצה. ולקח הבעש"ט את ידו ונתן על ראשו ובירך אותו. עד כאן.

9.) #26 The Besht and the Physician

And the *maggid* from the aforementioned holy community of Yisharim was famous and his name was Rabbi Abraham Podlisker, he was a great and famous tsaddik. Once, they [the people of the town], did not have a good enough slaughtering knife, and they sent for some *shochetim*¹⁰⁷ from several communities and they were not able to supply them with a knife that was good enough for them.

Once the Besht came to them, and said, "The guest is very dear to us, but do we have nothing to honor him?" And they recounted to him the occurrence. And he said that he would supply them with a knife, and he sent a suitable knife. And they slaughtered and they ate, and he promised to send them a *shochet*, and he sent them my father-in-law, may his name be remembered for a blessing, and he became rich there.

And my father-in-law, may his name be remembered for a blessing, told me that when he was there, the aforementioned rabbi, the pious one, [Rabbi Abraham Podlisker], lived there for several years before the moment of his death. And he [Rabbi Podlisker] sent for the Besht for he was very ill, and the Besht stayed with him a long time and occupied himself with his [the rabbi's] healing. And when the rabbi's son saw that there was no effect for him, they sent for a doctor in the holy community of Ostrog and he traveled to Whitefield. And the Besht understood the doctor traveled [was coming], and he said to the aforementioned rabbi, "I am going from here, because the doctor from the holy community of Ostrog is traveling to here. And the rabbi did not know about this and

¹⁰⁷ Men who perform the ritual slaughter of animals according to the Jewish dietary laws.

he entreated him greatly to not go away, and he [the Besht] stayed there because of his many pleas. And he said that the doctor lodged two Persian miles from the town.

And the doctor had already turned his hand against the Besht, and he said, "When I see the Besht, I will kill him with a torn reed that is in my hands."

And in the morning the Besht hurried himself to leave, but the sick rabbi detained him until the doctor came to town. And the Besht said, "Behold, the doctor came to town." And he said goodbye to the rabbi, climbed on his wagon, and left. And when he came across the doctor's inn, he climbed down from the wagon, entered the house, and greeted him [the doctor]. And he [the doctor] asked him from where did he learn the wisdom of healing? And he answered, "God, blessed be His holy name, taught me." And he went home.

And the sons of the sick rabbi brought him [the doctor] to their father, but all that the doctor said to do, they said to him, "The Besht already did that for him." And the doctor went away in disappointment. Then the sick rabbi complained to his sons, "What have you done? Even though the Besht did not heal me, at any rate, when the Besht entered my room, I would know that the *Shechina*¹⁰⁸ came with him. And when the doctor entered my room, it seemed to me that a priest entered my room."

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9.) #26 The Besht and the Physician

והמגיד מישרים דק"ק הנ"ל היה מפורסם ושמור ר' אברהם לב פודליס-קער, צריק גדול ומפורסם. פ"א לא הוטב בעיניהם שום סכין לשחיטה, ושלחו אחר כמה שוחטים מכמה קהילות ולא יכלו להעמיד להם סכין שיוטב בעיניהם. פ"א בא הבעש"ט להם, ואמר חביב עלינו האורח עד מאוד, אבל אין לנו במה לכבדו. וסיפרו לו המאורע. ואמר שהוא יעמיד להם סכין, והעמיד להם סכין והוטב בעיניהם. ושחטו ואכלו, והבטיח לשלוח להם שוחט, ושלח להם את חמי ז"ל ונתעשר שם. וסיפר לי חמי ז"ל שהיה חי הרב החסיד הנ"ל כמה שנים בפניו עד עת פטירתו. ושלח אחר הבעש"ט כי היה חולה גדול, ונתעכב הבעש"ט אצלו זמן רב ועסק ברפואתו. וכשראו בניו של הרב שאין לו פעולה, שלחו אחר דאקטער * לק"ק אוסטרעהא ונסע לשדה לבן. וראה הבעש"ט כי נסע הדאקטער, ואמר להרב הנ"ל אני נוסע מכאן, כי לכאן נוסע הדאקטער דק"ק אוסטרעהא. והרב לא ידע מזה והפציר בו מאוד לבל יסע, ולן שם מחמת רוב הפצרתו. ואמר שהדאקטער לן שני פרסאות מהעיר. והדאקטער הרים מכבר ידו נגד הבעש"ט, ואמר כשאראה הבעש"ט אהרוג אותו בקנה השריפה שבידי. ובבוקר זירז את עצמו הבעש"ט לנסוע, והרב החולה עיכבו עד שבא הדאקטער לעיר. ואמר הבעש"ט הנה בא הדאקטער לעיר. ואמר להרב שלום וישב על העגלה ונסע. וכשבא נגד האכסניה של הדאקטער ירד מן העגלה ונכנס לבית ונתן לו שלום. ושאל אותו מאין יודע דאקטעריי... והשיב השי"ת לימדני, ונסע לביתו. ובניו של הרב החולה הביאוהו אל אביהם, וכל מה שאמר הדאקטער לעשות אמרו לו כבר עשה לו זאת הבעש"ט. והלך הדאקטער בפחי נפש. או התרעם הרב החולה על בניו מה עשיתם. אף על פי שלא היתה לי רפואה מהבעש"ט מכל מקום כשנכנס אצלי הבעש"ט הייתי יודע שהשכינה באה עמו, וכשנכנס אצלי הדאקטער נדמה שנכנס אלי גלח אחד.

10.) #157 The Spiritual Cure

[There is] a tale of a sick man who caused a great Jewish doctor to despair and again, the sick man returned he was not able to speak. And the Baal Shem Tov came to that place and they called him to the aforementioned sick man. And he [the Besht] said to cook for him meat soup and then he would immediately [be able] to speak. And they gave him soup to eat and he [the Besht] treated him until he recovered.

The doctor asked him [the Besht] how he healed him, [saying], "I knew that the veins were bad, and it is impossible for these veins to be healed. The Besht said to him, "You approached the sick man corporally and I approached the sick man spiritually." Because a man has 248limbs and 365 veins, as corresponding to them are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. And when a man commits a crime, God forbid, his corresponding limb or vein becomes hurt. And when he does not observe many negative commandments, many veins become ill, the blood is not able to flow in them and the man is in danger. And I spoke with the soul [and said that] it will receive repentance, and it received it. And in this all the limbs and veins were repaired. And I was able to heal him.

מעשה בחולה אחד שיאש אותו דאקטער גדול יהודי, ושוב החולה
לא היה יכול לדבר. ובא הבעש"ט לאותו מקום וקראו אותו להחולה הנ"ל.
ואמר לבשל לו מרק של בשר ותיכף יתחיל לדבר. ונתנו לו מרק לאכול
ורפא אותו עד שהבריא. שאל אותו הדאקטער איך ריפא אותו. ידעתי
שנתקלקלו הגידין ואותן הגידין אי אפשר להיות להם רפואה. אמר לו
הבעש"ט, אתה השגת את החולה בגשמיות, ואני השגתי את החולה ברוחניות.
כי יש באדם רמ"ח איברים ושס"ה גידים, כנגדן יש רמ"ח מצוות עשה
ושס"ה מצוות לא תעשה, וכשאדם פוגם ח"ו נתקלקל האבר או הגיד שנגדו,
וכשיעבור הרבה לא תעשה נתקלקלו הרבה גידים ואין הדם נובע בהם ואדם
בסכנה. ודיברתי עם הנשמה שתקבל עליה תשובה וקיבלה עליה. ובזה נתקנו
כל האיברים והגידין ויכולתי לרפאות אותו.

11.) #245 The Doctor

Once a certain great and well-known doctor came to the duchess of the town. And the duchess praised the Baal Shem Tov highly, because he was great man who also was knowledgeable in healing.

The doctor said, "Send for him so that he will come here."

She said, "This is not befitting his honor. Because of this, send an honorable carriage for him, similar to those of magistrates, because he is such a great man. And she sent for him and he came before them.

And the doctor asked the rabbi if it was true that he was knowledgeable in healing. He [the Besht] answered, "Yes, it is true."

He [the doctor] said, "Where and with what expert did you study?"

He responded, "I studied with the Holy One, blessed be God." And this was a joke in the eyes of the doctor.

And he [the Besht] asked him if he could understand [an illness] by the pulse. The rabbi said, "I have a certain deficiency, diagnose [my ailment] by my pulse, and I will examine and take your pulse."

And the doctor took the rabbi's pulse. He understood there was a certain deficiency, but he did not know what it was. Because, in truth, he was lovesick for God, may God's name be blessed, and was beyond his [the doctor's] understanding.

After this, the rabbi took the doctor's pulse, and the rabbi turned his face to the duchess and asked her, "Were such and such expensive articles stolen from you?"

And she said, "Yes. It has been several years since they have been stolen, and I do not know where they are."

And the rabbi said, "Send [someone] to his inn and open his trunk and you will find all of the articles unharmed. And she immediately sent [someone] and she found [the things] according to his holy words. And the doctor left there in disgrace and contempt.

(The meaning is like the word *abba* backwards, the letters of pulse are *kaf, fay, dalet*, and backwards are *dalet, fay, kaf*, which means to be strict. And therefore, the tzaddikim were able to know by [reading] the pulse all of the sins [of a person]. As it is written in the holy *Zohar* and in the *Tikuneni ha-Zohar*.)

פ"א בא איזה דאקטער גדול ומפורסם לדוכסה שבעיר. ותתפאר הדוכסה בשבח הבעש"ט כי אדם גדול הוא וגם בקי ברפואות לג. אמר הדאקטער שלחי אחריו שיבוא לכאן. ותאמר אין זה כבודו, כי אם לשלוח אחריו עגלה כבודה כדרך השרים, כי אדם גדול הוא. ותשלח אחריו ויבוא לפניו. וישאל הדאקטער מהרב אם אמת שהוא בקי ברפואות, והשיב לו אמת הדבר. ויאמר באיזה מקום ומאיזה מומחה למד, ויאמר השי"ת לימדני. ויהי לצחוק בעיני הדאקטער. וישאל אותו עוד אם הוא מבין על הדפק. ויאמר הרב הנה אני יש לי איזה חסרון, תבין על הדפק שלי, ואני אראה ואבחין הדפק שלך. ולקח הדאקטער את הדפק של הרב, הבין שיש איזה חסרון אבל אינו יודע מה הוא. כי באמת היה חולי חולת אהבה להשי"ת, מה שזהו למעלה מהבנתו. אחר זה תפס הרב את הדאקטער בדפק שלו, והחזיר הרב פניו להדוכסה ושאל ממנה, הנגנבו לך חפצים יקרים אלו ואלו. ותאמר הן, זה כמה שנים שנגנבו ואיני יודע איה הם. ויאמר הרב שלחו לאכסניא שלו ותפתחו תיבתו ותמצאו את כל החפצים בשלימות. ושלחה תיכף ומצאה כדבריו הקדושים ונסע הדאקטער משם בחרפה ובזו (והענין כי אחורים דאבא הוא קפ"ד אותיות דפ"ק, ולכן היו הצדיקים מכירים בדפק על כל החטאים, כמו שכתוב בזהר הקדוש ובתיקוני זוהר).

12.) #27 The Besht Predicts a Need for bloodletting

And after his [Rabbi Abraham Polisker's] death, he was accepted by them [that community] as the head of the Rabbinic Court, Rabbi Aba of the aforementioned holy community of Kribush. I will write this tale for him, as well. It is a tale about the Baal Shem Tov, which I heard from a man from among the men of our community and he heard [it from] Rabbi Isaac Aizik the Hasid, the son of the rabbi of the holy community of Brahlin, who heard it from his father. And I did not want to write to anyone on behalf of my hidden [secret] matter.

Somehow the rabbi of the holy community of Brahlin was in Whitefield, at the home of the rabbi of Whitefield during the winter and he showed him letters from the Besht and this in his words in the aforementioned winter. "You will come from the road and you will find in the courtyard of your house a great upheaval. Men, women, and children, and you will be faint because of the fear. And when they awaken you, immediately order (them) to let blood from two of your veins. And immediately send a special messenger to inform me about the matter of the upheaval. Even though, thank God, I have eyes to see from afar, regardless, send me a letter by messenger. So said Israel Baal Shem Tov." So it was. And I do not want to reveal the root of the tale.

ואחר פטירתו נתקבל אצלם לאב"ד הרב ר' אבא דק"ק קריבוש הנ"ל.
ואכתוב בשבילו המעשה גם כן. מעשה מהבעש"ט אשר שמעתי מאיש אחד
מאנשי קהילתנו ושמע החסיד ר' יצחק אייזיק בן הרב דק"ק ברעהין אשר
שמע מפי אביו. ולא רציתי לכתוב גוף המעשה מטעם הכמוס אשר לי. איך
שהיה הרב דק"ק בריאהין בשדה לבן אצל הרב משדה לבן בחורף, והראה
לו איגרות מהבעש"ט וזה לשונו בחורף הנ"ל. תבוא מן הדרך ותמצא בביתך
על החצר שלך רעש גדול, אנשים ונשים וטף, ותתעלף מחמת הפחד.
וכשיעוררו אותך אז תצוה היכף להקין לך דם משני גידים. ותיכף תשלח
שליח מיוחד להודיע לי על דבר הרעש. אף על פי שתהילה לאל יש לי
עינים לראות מרחוק, אף על פי כן תשלח לי איגרת ע"י שליח. נאום ישראל
בעש"ט. עד כאן. ושורש המעשה לא רציתי לגלות.

13.) #119 The Besht Cures by Bloodletting

I heard [this tale] from the rabbi of our community. Once the Baal Shem Tov journeyed and he lodged in a certain place, and he heard [a voice saying]: Return quickly to your home because Rabbi Yosef is very weak. And he [the Besht] told his servants to return, but his servants did not want [to return] because they said, "Your Excellency, you have debts at home. So why should we return?"

But they returned and came home on Friday morning. And he [the Besht] went to the *mikveh* before services. And after services he called for the doctor and went with him to the sick person. And he saw that he was very weak and that he had lost the power of speech. And he [the Besht] said to the doctor to let his blood, but the doctor did not want to, saying that it is very dangerous to let his blood.

And the Besht said to him, "Don't you understand that unless you let his blood he will live? The doctor said, "No."

"Why are you afraid to let his blood?"

The Besht immediately ordered to let his blood, and everyone gossiped about the Besht concerning the bloodletting. And the Besht also returned home, and in about half an hour, the sick person wanted them to give him water to drink and, thanks be to God, he recovered.

שמעתי מהרב דקהילתנו. פ"א נסע הבעש"ט לדרך ולן במקום אחד ושמע, מהרה תחזור לביתך כי ר' יוסף חלש מאוד. ואמר למשרתיו לחזור, והמשרתים לא רצו כי אמרו רומע"ל בעל חוב בביתו ולמה לנו לחזור. וחזרו ובאו לביתו ביום הששי בבוקר. והלך למקוה קודם התפילה, ולאחר התפילה קרא לרופא אחד והלך עמו לחולה, וראה שהוא חלש מאוד אישתקל מלוליה •, ואמר להרופא להקין דם, והרופא לא רצה, באמרו שמסוכן הוא מאוד להקין לו דם. ואמר לו הבעש"ט, האיך אתה מבין, שאם לא תקין לו דם וחי. אמר הרופא לא. ומפני מה יראת להקין לו. וציוה הבעש"ט תיכף להקין לו דם, וכל העם ריגנו על הבעש"ט על הקות הדם. והבעש"ט גם כן הלך לביתו, וכמו ערך חצי שעה ביקש החולה שיתנו לו מים לשתות ותהילה לאל שהבריא.

14.) #203 The Besht Chokes on His Food

I heard that once the Baal Shem Tov, may his name be remembered for a blessing, was sitting at the festive meal celebrating a *Pidyon Haben* ceremony, and at the end of the meal, the Besht took a piece of bread and he chewed. His face became red and he became agitated. They thought that he was choking and they wanted to save him. Rabbi Ze'ev Kotzes looked at his face and said, "Leave him alone."

He [the Besht] was such for a long time, and he returned to normal, by himself. They asked him, "What was the matter?"

He answered, "When I ate the piece of bread, was I intent on eating and when I experienced a connection with what Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, [experienced when] Tziporah gave him a meal for the first time. And when I concentrated on this *Yichud*, Moses our teacher, of blessed memory came here, and that it what happened."

שמעתי שפ"א היה הבעש"ט ז"ל יושב על סעודת פדיון הבן, ובסוף
הסעודה לקח הבעש"ט חתיכה לחם ולעס, ונעשו פניו אדומים ונשתנו
הרגשותיו והיו סבורים שנחנק ורצו להצילו. והביט ר' זאב קוציעס בפניו,
ואמר הניחו לו. והיה כך עד בוש, וחזר מעצמו לאיתנו, ושאל אותו מה היה
דבר. והשיב כשאכלתי חתיכה לחם כיוונתי כוונות האכילה, והשגתי עם
כוונה אחת מה שכיון משה רבינו ע"ה כשנתנה לו צפורה לאכול בפעם
הראשון, וכשכיוונתי יחוד זה בא משה רבינו ע"ה לכאן, והיה מה שהיה.

15.) #84 The Besht Banishes Demons

I heard from the rabbi of our community and also from the rabbi of the holy community of Polonnoye that in the holy community of Zbarazh two demons were seen in the women's [section of the] synagogue. And the women were so fearful that they had to leave the synagogue. And Rabbi Chayim, the *maggid* of our community, went and sat in the synagogue and studied there and drove away the two demons. And they went and took hold of [possessed] two of his children.

And he sent after the Baal Shem Tov, and he [the Besht] lodged in the house, his isolation with the scribe, Mr. Tzvi. And he ordered that they bring the children to him, to the place where he slept, and they did this. And when they lay down to sleep, the Besht's couch was at the head of the table, and the scribe lay down across from the Besht's head. They were not yet asleep [when] the two mischief makers came to the house, and they stood at the doorway and mocked the way the Besht sings *L'cha Dodi*. And the Besht got up and sat on his bed and said to the scribe, "Did you see?" And the scribe also saw them and he tucked his head under the Besht's pillow, and he said, "Leave me [alone]." And when he was finished speaking they went to the children.

The Besht jumped from the couch and reprimanded them and said to them, "Where are you going?" And they were not afraid and they said, "What concern is it of yours?" And they began for a second time to mock and sing *L'cha Dodi* in the Besht's melody. And he [the Besht] did whatever he did . . .

And the two demons fell to the ground and they were not able to get up. And they began to appeal to him. And he said, "You will see that the children will be well,

immediately!" And one said, "What is done is done, because their internal organs were damaged, and now we came to finish damaging them, therefore it is their luck that you, sir, [were] here. He asked them, "How and what and why did you come to the synagogue?" And they answered, "Because the cantor would pray in the synagogue, and he, the singer who led in a bass [voice], was a great adulterer. And the moment of his singing it was his intention [to fare] well in the eyes of the women. And he had thoughts, and also the women had thoughts about him, and from two of these thoughts we two demons were created, a male and a female. And our life is in that synagogue. Therefore the Besht gave them place in a pit, a place where no human beings are found.

שמעתי מהרב דקהלתנו וגם מהרב דק"ק פולנאה שבק"ק איובארז
נדראו בבית הכנסת של נשים שני לצים. והיו מפחדות הנשים עד שהוכרחו
לעזוב את ביהכ"נ. והלך הרב ר' חיים מ"מ דקהלתנו וישב בבהכ"נ ולמד
שם וגירש משם את הליצנים. והלכו והחזיקו שני הילדים שלו. ושלא אחר
הבעש"ט ולן בבית התבודדותו עם הסופר מ' צבי. וצויה שיביאו את
הילדים אצלו למקום לינתו, ועשו כן. וכששכבו לישון והיה המשכב של
הבעש"ט בראש השולחן, והסופר שכב בעבר השני לראש הבעש"ט. ועד
שלא ישנו באו שני המזיקים לבית ועמדו אצל הפתח ולצצו מן הבעש"ט.
איך הוא מזמר לכה דודי. והבעש"ט קם וישב על מטתו ואמר להסופר, הראית.
והסופר גם כן ראה ותחב את ראשו תחת הכר של הבעש"ט. ואמר הניחה לי.
וכשגמרו לדבר הלכו אל הילדים. קפץ הבעש"ט מן המשכב וגער בהם ואמר
להם, להיכן אתם הולכים, והם לא פחדו ואמרו מה איכפת לך. והתחילו פעם
שניה להתלוצץ ולזמר לכה דודי בניגון של הבעש"ט. ועשה מה שעשה ונפלו
השני מזיקים לארץ ולא יכלו לקום. והתחילו להתחנן לפניו. ואמר תיכף
תראו שהילדים יבראו. ואמר האחד, מה שעבר אין, כי הזיקו איברים
פנימיים, ועכשיו באנו להזיק אותם עד גמירא, אך שמולם שרומע"ל בכאן.
שאל אותם איך ומה ולמה באתם לבהכ"נ. השיבו כי החזן היה מתפלל
בבהכ"נ, והיה לו משורר שקורין באס, והיה נואף גדול. ובעת מזמרותיו היתה
כוונתו שיוטב בעיני הנשים. והיה לו הרהור, וגם הנשים הרהרו עליו, ומשני
ההרהורים הללו נבראו אנחנו שני מזיקים, זכר ונקבה. וחיינו הוא בבהכ"נ.
אז נתן להם הבעש"ט מקום אצל באר אחד, מקום שאין בני אדם מצויים שם.

16.) #20 The Besht Exorcises a Madwoman

Once he [the Besht] came to a town and there was an insane woman, and she revealed to everyone his [the Besht's] shameful vices and his virtues. And when the Besht, of blessed and holy memory, may he abide in paradise, came to town, Rabbi Gershon asked the aforementioned righteous rabbi, the head of the rabbinic court of the holy community of Kotiv, the righteous rabbi, the Luminary of the Exile, our master and teacher, Rabbi Moses, that he will bring him, the Besht, to that very woman. Perhaps he will receive from her chastisement and he will return her to goodness, and they all went [to see her].

When the rabbi of the holy community of Kotiv entered [the room to see her] she said, "Welcome holy and pure one." And she did thus [welcomed], each one according to his merit. And the Besht entered last, and when she saw him, she said, "Welcome Rabbi Israel," because he was still of tender years. She said to him, "[Do] you suppose that I am afraid of you? No, because I knew that they warned you from the heavens not to engage in the holy names until you turned thirty-six years old."

And he [the Besht] was shy, and the aforementioned people asked her, "What are you saying?" And she repeated her words to them until the Besht reprimanded her and said to her [the demon within her], "If you are not quiet, behold I will convene a rabbinic court and they will allow me to drive you out from this woman." She began to beg him, "I will be quiet." And the Hasidim that came with him begged him to free him [the demon] and they exorcised it from the woman. And the Besht asked that they not free him, because it was very dangerous, and they did not stop him.

Therefore the Besht said, "Look what you [the demon] have caused. Because of this, my advice is that you go easily from this woman, and we, all of us, will study on your behalf." And he asked him [the demon] his name, and he said to him, "I will not be able to reveal [my name] before so many others. Let the people leave from here and I will reveal [my name] to you." For it [would be] a disgrace to his children [the demon's] that were in this town. And when the people left from there, he [the demon] revealed his name to him [the Besht]. And also my father-in-law, may his name be remembered for a blessing, knew him, and he only became a demon, in order to mock the Hasidim of the holy community of Kotiv. And that same moment, the demon separated himself from this woman with ease.

From here on, they did not allow him [the Besht] to stay in that aforementioned village. And one tax collector took him in order to teach his sons. My father-in-law, may his name be remembered for a blessing, also told me that this tax collector who accepted him as a teacher told him that he only had one house in which to take him in and it was not pure. The Besht said that he would live there. And when the demons played in the attic, he reprimanded them and they were quiet.

פ"א בא לעיר והיתה שם אשה אחת משוגעת, והיתה מגלה לכל אחד ואחד תועבותיו וטובותיו. וכשבא לעיר הבעש"ט זצלה"ה, ביקש ר' גרשון הנ"ל מהרב החסיד אב"ד דק"ק קוטיב הרב החסיד המאה"ג מוה"ר משה שיליכו הבעש"ט לאותה האשה, אולי יקבל ממנה איזה מוסר ויחזור למוטב, והלכו כולם. וכשנכנס הרב דק"ק קוטיב אמרה, ברוך הבא קדוש וטהור. וכן לכל אחד ואחד כפי מעלתו. והבעש"ט נכנס באחרונה, וכשראתה אותו ואמרה ברוך הבא ר' ישראל. כי היה עדיין רך בשנים. אמרה לו, אתה סבור שאני מפחד ממך. לא כי, אני ידעתי שהזהירו אותך מן השמים שלא לעסוק בשמות הקדושים עד שישתלמו לך ששה ושלושים שנים. והוא היה נחבא אל הכלים, והאנשים הנ"ל שאלו אותה מה את אומרת. והיא כפלה בדבריה לפניהם. עד שגער בה הבעש"ט ואמר לה, ולא תשתוק הנה אני מושיב על זה בית"דין אחד ויתירו לי, ואותך אגרש מן האשה הזאת. התחילה היא להתחנן אליו, אני אשתוק, והחסידים שבאו עמו הפצירו אותו שיתירו לו ויגרשנו מן האשה. והבעש"ט ביקש מהם שלא להתירו, כי מסוכן הוא מאוד, והם לא הרפו ממנו. אז אמר הבעש"ט, ראה מה שגרמת. על כן עצתי שתלך בטוב מן האשה, ואנחנו כולנו נלמד בעבורך. ושאל אותו שמו, ואמר לא אוכל לגלות לפני הרבים, ילכו מכאן האנשים ואגלה לך. כי חרפה היא לבניו שיש בעיר הזאת. וכשפנו משם האנשים גילה לו מי הוא. וגם חמי ז"ל היה מכירו, ולא נעשה רוח אלא בשביל שלצץ מהחסידים דק"ק קוטיב. ואותו הרוח הפריד את עצמו מן האשה הזאת בטוב. ומכאן ואילך לא הניחו אותו לישב בכפר הנ"ל, ולקחו מוכסן אחד למלמד בשביל בנים שלו. גם סיפר לי חמי ז"ל, שזה המוכסן שקיבל אותו למלמד אמר לו שאין לו כי אם בית אחד שמחזיקין אותו שאינו טהור. אמר הבעש"ט שידור בו, ויחד העליה לחיצונים ר"ל, וכשהיו משחקים היה גוער בהם ונשתקו.

17.) #98 The Besht Combats a Witch

I heard from my father-in-law, and also from the rabbi of our community, while the Baal Shem Tov was still dwelling in an inn in the village, they once needed rain and they prayed for the rain. And there was a witch there who had a demon, and she did sorcery so that it would not rain, but the Baal Shem Tov's prayers spoiled her sorcery.

And that demon said to her that he [the Besht] spoiled her sorcery. The witch came to the Besht's mother and said to her, "Tell your son to leave me alone and let me be, for (if not) I will put a spell on him."

His mother thought that the fight with her was about liquor, and his mother said to him, "My son, leave that gentile woman be, because she is a witch."

He said to his mother, "I am not afraid of her." And he acted in his usual way and he prayed for rain.

And the witch came to his mother for a second time. And afterward she sent her demon after him, but when it came to him, it was not able to enter [within] four steps. And the Besht told him, "How dare you come to me! Go immediately and harm that gentile woman through that small, glass window. And so he did. And afterwards he [the Besht] seized him [the demon] and [put him] in jail in the forest, and he would never be able to move from there.

And when the Besht became famous, he traveled with people through the forest. He stood and went to the forest and he saw that he [the demon] was sitting in prison, and he [the Besht] laughed a great deal. And they asked him to tell them the aforementioned tale.

17.) #98 The Besht Combats a Witch

שמעתי מחמי וגם מהרב דקהילתנו, כשהיה יושב הבעש"ט עדיין
בשיינק בכפר, היו פ"א צריכים לגשמים והתפלל על הגשמים. והיתה שם
מכשפה אחת שהיה לה שד אחד, ועשתה כשפים שלא ירד גשם, והבעש"ט
בתפילתו קילקל כשפיה. ואמר לה אותו השד שהוא מקלקל כשפיה. באה
המכשפה לאמו ואמרה לה, אמרי לבנך שיעזוב וינוח ממני, כי אני אעשה
לו כישוף. סבדה אמו שהריב עמה על עסק חוב של י"ש, ואמרה לו אמו בני
עזוב מן הגויה הלז, כי היא מכשפה. אמר לאמו, אין אני חושש לה. ועשה את
שלו והתפלל על גשמים, ובאה הכשפנית פעם שניה לאמו, ואחר כך שלחה
עליו השד שלה, וכשבא אליו לא היה יכול לכנוס לד' אמותיו. ואמר לו
הבעש"ט אתה העזת לבוא אלי, תיכף תלך ותזיק הגויה דרך חלון קטן של
שאוב * אחת, וכן עשה. ואחר-כך תפס אותו בבית הכלא ביער, ואינו יכול
לזוז משם עד עולם. וכשנתפרסם הבעש"ט נסע עם אנשים דרך יער. עמד
והלך ליער והציץ בו שהוא יושב בתפיסה, ושחק מאוד. ושאלו לו וסיפר להם
המעשה הנ"ל.

18.) #197 Competing for the *Arrendeh*¹⁰⁹

And from the observation of our teacher and our rabbi, Alexander, I heard this tale: That there once was a man that wanted to take land from a widow. And the Baal Shem Tov reprimanded him but he [the man] did not listen to him [the Besht]. And he rode on horseback to the Besht's home and he knocked on the window, and he said, "Look, I am going to rent the land, and I will see what God will do to me. And the Besht shed tears. And when he came to the land he rented the estate at a great profit. And the owner thought about writing him the contract, and in the middle of this, his [the owner's] head began to ache. And he [the man] said to the owner, "My head hurts me very much." He said, "Sit, and I will not delay in writing [the] contract, and he waited a little bit. And he said for the second time, "My head hurts me very much." And he said, "Lie down on the bed." And saliva began to go from his mouth that is called *shom*. And the owner ordered his servants to throw him among the pigs. As it is said, "There is no man near him except in the hour of pleasure and no one stands near a man in the hour of his distress."

And they brought him to his house, and his hands and legs were lacking [paralyzed] and also his tongue was lacking for him [paralyzed]. And they called for the Besht to heal him, and he began to speak a little. And in the middle of this, the Besht sensed that the children of his house hired gentile sorceresses to heal him, and after that he did not want to go to him. And he [the man] was only able to speak but a few words.

¹⁰⁹ "A leased estate or revenue derived from taxation and collected on a contractual basis by other people," Ben-Amos and Mintz, 262.

ומחמי מוה"ר אלכסנדר שמעתי מעשה כזה, שהיה איש אחד שרצה ליקח כפר מיד אלמנה אחת, והוכיח אותו הבעש"ט והוא לא שמע אליו. ורכב על סוס אצל בית הבעש"ט והיכה בחלון, ואמר ראו שאני הולך לשכור את הכפר, ואראה מה יעשה לי אלקים. והזיל הבעש"ט דמעות. וכשבא לכפר שכר את הארענדי בהוספה גדולה. וחשב האדון לכתוב לו הקאנטראקט, ובתוך כך התחיל לכאוב ראשו. ואמר אל האדון, ראשי כואב לי מאוד. אמר שב, אני לא אתמהמה לכתוב קאנטראקט, והמתין מעט. ואמר פעם שניה ראשי כואב לי מאוד. אמר שכב על המטה, והתחיל לילך מפיו האשקומה שקורין שום. וצויה האדון לעבדו שישליכו אותו בין החזירים. כנאמר אין נקרבים לו לאדם אלא בשעת הנאתם ואין עומדים לו לאדם בשעת דחקו. והביאו אותו לביתו, והיו נטולים ידיו ורגליו וגם הלשון ניטל ממנו. וקראו להבעש"ט לרפאות אותו, והתחיל לדבר קצת. ובתוך כך הרגיש הבעש"ט שבני ביתו עוסקים בנכריות כשפניות לרפאותו, ומאז לא רצה לילך אליו. ולא היה יכול לדבר רק מעט דברים.

¹¹⁰ "A leased estate or revenue derived from taxation and collected on a contractual basis by other people," Ben-Amos and Mintz, 262.

19.) #117 The Sick Woman

I heard from my friends who heard from Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl. Once the Baal Shem Tov was in the holy community of Chmielnik, and there was a proofreader whose wife was sick, and the Besht's inn was near the house of the rabbi, the head of the rabbinic court, the father-in-law of the man who declares the new month. The proofreader came to the Besht to ask him to heal his wife, and he [the Besht] did not want to do so. And more than that the Besht was angry with him and said unkind words to him. And this matter irritated the aforementioned rabbi, the head of the rabbinic court. And in the evening when everyone went, the rabbi asked the Besht, "Why did he not want to heal the aforementioned woman?" And he answered because she is a righteous woman and because of her weakness she protects the city from the robbers that are in the forest. And when the robbers are done in the forest, her health will return. And he asked why he was angry with the proofreader. And he answered him, "[It was because] I saw that there were charges against him, and because of this, I cancelled the judgment against him."

שמעתי מחברי ששמעו מר' נחום מטשארנאביל. פ"א היה הבעש"ט בק"ק חמערלניק, ושם היה בעל מגיה אחד ואשתו היתה חולה, ואכסניא של הבעש"ט היתה סמוך אצל הרב אב"ד חתן הפרנס-חודש. ובא הבעל-מגיה לבעש"ט לבקש ממנו שיתן רפואה לאשתו, ולא רצה. ולא עוד אף שרגז עליו ודיבר אליו דברים לא טובים. והוקשה הדבר להרב אב"ד הנ"ל. ולערב כשהלכו כולם שאל הרב את הבעש"ט, מפני מה לא רצה לרפאות את האשה הנ"ל. והשיב כי היא צדקניית ומחמת חולשתה מגינה על העיר מן הלסטים שביער. וכשיכלו הלסטים מיער ממילא תוחזר לבריאותה. ושאל אותו מפני מה רגז על הבעל-מגיה. והשיב, שראיתי ששורה עליו דינים, ובזה הרגז ביטלתי הדינים ממנו.

20.) #22 The Besht Cures a Madman

Afterwards the Baal Shem Tov moved to the holy community of Tlust, and there was a teacher there, as well. And he was not able to assemble [make] for himself a *minyan*¹¹¹ in his home. And so he gathered around him a group of people and prayed with them. He would only wear a short coat of wool and his toes stuck out through the holes in [his] shoes, because he was very poor. Before he went to services, he would go to the *mikveh*, even in the [winter month of] Tevet. And at the moment of his prayers, beads of perspiration the size of beans would fall from him. Later on, several sick people came to him, but he did not want to receive them. Then once a madman or madwoman [came to see him] and he did not want to receive him [or her]. That night they told him that he was already thirty-six years old, and in the morning he calculated and thought about it, and so it was. And he saw him [the madman] and healed him. And [thereafter] people would travel to [be healed by] him from everywhere.

אח"כ קבע דירתו בק"ק טלוסט, והיה שם גם כן מלמד, ולא היה ביכולתו לעשות לו מגין בביתו, וקיבץ אצלו אנשים והתפלל עמם. והיה לבוש רק בטווליק של קומייא * ואצבעות הרגלים היו יוצאות דרך חורי המנעלים, כי היה עני מאוד. והיה הולך קודם התפילה למקוה, אפילו בתקופת טבת. ובשעת התפילה היו נוטפים ממנו טיפות זיעה כמו פולין. אחר-כך נודמנו לו כמה חולאים ולא רצה לקבל אותם. עד שפעם אחת הביאו משוגע או משוגעת ולא רצה לקבל אותו, ובלילה הגידו לו שמלאו לו ששה ושלושים שנה, ובבוקר חשב חשבונו והיה כן. וקיבל אותו משוגע ודיפא אותו, ועזב את המלמדות וקיבל את חמי ז"ל לסופר, והיו נוסעים אליו מכל המקומות.

¹¹¹ A group of ten men necessary for communal prayer.

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