Jewish Folklore and Ethnology

Volume 2 | Issue 1 Article 3

2023

The Besht as Ba'al Shem: Magic in the Life and Legacy of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov

Elly Moseson
Columbia University, cmoseson@bu.edu

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ELLY MOSESON

Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (the Besht), the purported founder of the Hasidic movement, achieved renown during his lifetime as a holy man and a *ba'al shem*—a magician and folk healer. This paper surveys the sources containing evidence pertaining to the Besht's medico-magical activities, presents the variety of recipes and rituals that have been preserved in his name, and explores the implications these hold for understanding his life and legacy. It further argues that the centrality of magic we find in the life of the Besht did not disappear with his death but was maintained within the Hasidic movement that developed in his wake.

While today famous as a great mystic and the purported founder of the Hasidic movement, during his own lifetime Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (d. 1760; commonly referred to with the acronymic moniker "the Besht") was primarily known as a folk healer and miracle worker, that is, as a *ba'al shem* (Etkes 2004; Rosman 2013; Scholem 2008, 106–38). *Ba'alei shem* have a long history in Jewish culture and were especially prominent among the Jewish communities of both eastern and western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Etkes 2004, 7–45; Grözinger 2002; Hundert 2004, 142–153; Oron 2020; Petrovsky-Shtern 2004; 2011, 13–54; Rosman 2013, 13–26; Zinger 2017). The term *ba'al shem* or *ba'al shem tov* is usually translated as "Master of the Name" or "Master of the Good Name," alluding to the sacred names of God that such figures employed in their incantations

Jewish Folklore and Ethnology, 2, Fall 2023, pp. 48–84.

and amulets (Rosman 2013, 13). In practice, however, the expertise of the *ba'alei shem* usually extended beyond the use of divine names and included a broad range of medical and magical procedures in which the natural and supernatural were rarely differentiated.[1] Indeed, in the nature and scope of their activities, *ba'alei shem* are comparable to the magicians and folk healers known from other cultures under various titles such as wizard, soothsayer, cunning man, or wise woman (cf. de Blécourt 1994; Smith 1977;Thomas 1971, 212–52).[2]

Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, the Besht, probably began his career as a *ba'al shem* in the 1730s, and it remained his vocation and primary source of income until his death in 1760 (Etkes 2004, 173–74; Scholem 2008, 112–18). Although the fact that the Besht functioned as a typical *ba'al shem* is widely recognized, the origins of his knowledge, the particular techniques he employed and the legacy of this aspect of his activities remain largely unexplored.[3] An important source of information about the Besht's activities as a *ba'al shem* is the hagiographical collection *Shivhei ha-besht*. Composed during the 1790s and first printed in 1814, this book recounts many stories about the Besht's saintliness and magical abilities. Despite the difficulties of determining the historicity of individual narratives, the collection remains a rich resource for understanding the Besht, especially in his function of *ba'al shem*.[4]

The various narratives in *Shivhei ha-besht* depict the Besht engaging in a vast array of magical and medical practices for an equally broad range of purposes. These include amulets for protection; healing with medicines or with bloodletting; exorcising people and homes; telling the future; identifying thieves and finding lost cattle; communicating with the dead, with angels, and demons and with plants and animals; traveling with impossible speed; becoming invisible; and fighting witches and werewolves (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970).[5]

As this far from exhaustive list makes clear, the Besht functioned in all respects as a typical *ba'al shem* and indeed a highly active and successful one. However, while *Shivhei ha-besht* and other similar sources highlight the centrality of these activities in the Besht's life, they do not generally preserve the particular techniques, recipes, or procedures that he employed. What exactly, one might wonder, did his magical and medico-magical knowledge comprise, and did he bequeath any of it to his colleagues and disciples? Before turning to these questions, I first

address another related one: Where had he learned the particular skills of his chosen profession?

The extant sources do not offer clear information about the origins of the Besht's medico-magical knowledge, but they do suggest a number of possibilities, including both oral and textual traditions. According to *Shivhei ha-besht*, on more than one occasion a local doctor inquired of the Besht where had he obtained his medical knowledge, to which he replied, "God, blessed be He, taught me" (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 41, 253).[6] While it is difficult to know how much credence to give such an answer, it should be noted that such claims of divine tutelage are not uncommon among practitioners of folk magic (Davies 2003, 94–95; Thomas 1971, 266–67; Wilby 2010).

Other accounts in *Shivhei ha-besht* mention a manuscript containing magical traditions that the Besht possessed and apparently used (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 13, 15–18, 31–32). According to these narratives, the manuscript originated with a certain *ba'al shem* by the name of Adam and was subsequently transmitted to the Besht by this man's son.[7] While scholars have established the legendary character of Adam Ba'al Shem, there is some, apparently independent, evidence for a manuscript attributed to this figure that was believed to have been in the Besht's possession. In a late eighteenth-century magical compendium, an elaborate ritual treatment for a sick patient is described as taken "from the writings of Rivash [Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem], which were transmitted to him by Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem who received from [Judah Loew (d. 1609), the author of] *Gur aryeh*" (Gross Family Collection Ms. EE.011.039, 118b).[8] While the authenticity of this particular attribution remains to be confirmed, books of medico-magical recipes, in both manuscript and print, were popular in the Besht's milieu, and it is reasonable to suppose that he was familiar with such collections and consulted them.[9]

Indeed, medico-magical knowledge and practices were ubiquitous in the daily life of eighteenth-century eastern Europe, and so it is likely that the Besht garnered at least some of his knowledge directly from people in his immediate vicinity, both Jews and Gentiles and both experts and laypeople.[10] It is also worth noting that according to *Shivhei ha-besht*, the Besht's mother, Sarah, was a midwife and he was referred to with the moniker "Israel the midwife's son" (Ben-Amos and Mintz

1970, 7, 159). As is well known, midwives often functioned as wise women (Park 1998, 138; Thomas 1971, 259), and the possibility exists that the Besht's mother played a role in her son's choice of career or at least served as a source for some of his medico-magical knowledge.[11]

The Besht's Magical Legacy

What, now, of the legacy of his special expertise? Did the Besht teach medico-magical recipes and formulae as he taught his pietistic and mystical ideas, and, if so, do any of them survive? The vast printed corpus of Hasidic literature does in fact preserve a number of such recipes attributed to the Besht. A significant example is found in the earliest known document relating to the Besht and one of the few he composed himself: a letter he sent to Moses, the rabbi of Kuty, sometime before the latter's death in 1738.[12] This letter concerns certain unspecified matters that the Besht had undertaken on Moses's behalf and concludes with what appears to be a medical prescription:

> And do not be concerned about something that issues from a tree. Take the twigs, sir, and grind them well and fine, and place them in water and cook them well until they dissolve, in other words boil them, and add just a little bit of sugar. This does not cause weakness or diarrhea but only strengthens the mind and gladdens the heart for the worship of the Lord, blessed be He. Drink this each morning on an empty stomach and do so each and every morning until it is finished (Barukh of Medzhibizh, 1880, unpaginated [30a–30b, counting from the title page]).[13]

Unfortunately, the letter does not identify the particular "twigs" to be used, which had presumably been sent along with the letter. Nor does it reveal the exact purpose for which this tisane was prescribed. Still, this rare document vividly depicts the Besht in his role as a *ba'al shem*, with the knowledge and authority to recommend medicinal remedies to a well-respected communal rabbi (Etkes 2004, 174; Rosman 2013, 121–22).

Later Hasidic sources preserve various recipes, formulae, taboos, and health recommendations attributed to the Besht, including behaviors to avoid, such as giving a knife as a gift or eating raw onions, as well as charms and remedies for toothache, nightmare, or difficulty in childbirth (Geiman 1928, 4b; Hochman 1906, 33a; Nahman of Breslov 1995, 14, 304; Sobelman 1937, 15b). However, a near exhaustive list culled in the early twentieth century from the printed corpus of Hasidic literature gives a total of slightly more than a dozen such remedies or recommendations, a relatively small number given the extent of the Besht's preoccupation with such matters (Simon Menahem Mendel of Govartchov 1938, II:147a–147b; cf. Wacks 2006, 200n7, 201n9). How should one understand this apparent paucity? One possible answer would be that the Besht did not share many such recipes, or if he did, that most were not transmitted to subsequent generations or at least never recorded. However, when one looks beyond the printed corpus to the extant manuscripts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a different picture emerges. Not only do these manuscripts preserve many medico-magical recipes and formulae in the name of the Besht but they also underscore the important role played by the manuscript medium itself in the formation, preservation, and transmission of this type of esoteric lore (see Abrams 2013; Paluch 2021).

The manuscripts that contain medico-magical traditions in the name of the Besht are of two general kinds. The first consists of manuscripts of works of Hasidic literature, that is, treatises and collections of discourses and pietistic practices composed by Hasidic leaders and their followers. Given the more individual and intimate nature of manuscripts, authors, copyists, and owners often supplemented their primary content with additional kinds of information, such as dates of births and deaths of family members, financial transactions, personal correspondence, and a wide variety of types of practical knowledge including medico-magical recipes (Harari 2011, 58; Olsan 2013; Paluch 2019, 101–102; Shoham-Steiner 2010, 53–59). In the case of manuscripts of Hasidic works, they often functioned in addition as a natural repository for traditions of one kind or another pertaining to important figures in the Hasidic movement, including the Besht. When these works were printed, however, such elements were generally deemed extraneous according to established conventions of publishing and simply omitted.[14] In other

words, the preservation of recipes attributed to the Besht in Hasidic works was largely due to scribal practices tied to the nature of the manuscript medium rather than by being incorporated into these works as such.

A second type of manuscript containing recipes attributed to the Besht is the vast corpus of Jewish magical handbooks. These handbooks constitute a distinct literary tradition concerned with practical recipes of all sorts but particularly those of the magical and medico-magical variety. While commonly copied from earlier collections, such handbooks were often supplemented with additional texts and local oral traditions as these became available. As a *ba'al shem* of great renown, it would be only natural for the Besht's recipes to be incorporated into this literary tradition and indeed they were. Just as the Besht's mystical and pietistic teachings were preserved in Hasidic works, and his Kabbalistic *kavanot* (formulae of theurgic intentions) are found in Lurianic prayer books, some of his medico-magical recipes duly appear in magical compendia.[15]

Before turning to some examples of recipes attributed to the Besht, two methodological observations are in order. The first concerns the problem of determining the target of a given attribution. Some of the acronyms with which the Besht was referred to are identical to those used for other *ba'alei shem*, both his predecessors and contemporaries. More specifically, two of the most famous *ba'alei shem*, a grandfather and grandson, who were responsible for a particularly influential magical corpus, in both manuscript and print, were both named Joel Ba'al Shem.[16] Israel Ba'al Shem and the two Joel Ba'al Shems are thus frequently designated with the orthographically identical acronym *Rivash*—i.e., Rabbi Y. Ba'al Shem—an ambiguity that could easily result in misidentification.[17] In such cases, one must rely on external clues to determine if it is in fact Israel Ba'al Shem who is being specified or one of the others. Even when the name is explicitly given as Israel, the possibility exists that a scribe had found the ambiguous moniker in his source and rendered it incorrectly.

Second, it is necessary to distinguish between the question of attribution and that of origination. The determination of originality in magical lore is an exceedingly difficult task since even after a comprehensive analysis of the entire corpus of the Jewish magical traditions, one would still need to consider the possibility of

lost works or oral traditions that were never recorded. Thus, even when the attribution of specific recipes or rituals to the Besht is authentic, it might simply reflect his adoption or adaptation of earlier practices and/or his role in their popularization rather than indicate that they originated with him.[18] However, the fact that a given recipe is attributed to the Besht is significant in and of itself even if it is found to predate him, since it suggests that it was something he recommended or used. Furthermore, given the originality and creativity exhibited by the Besht in other areas, as well as the malleability of this type of lore as it was applied in practice, it seems probable that the Besht did in fact originate or at least modify some of the recipes or rituals he employed or shared.

Recipes and Rituals

A large compendium of medico-magical recipes copied in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century preserves instructions for making a plaster to get rid of worms that was "received from someone treated by the *ba'al shem* of the holy community of Medzhibizh (*kibalti me-ha-menuseh mi-b"sh de-k"k mezibuz*)" (Gross Family Collection, Ms. EE.011.018, 163a; repeated on 200a).[19] As is well known, the Besht's place of residence for the last two decades of his life was the Podolian town of Medzhibizh, and there is little reason to doubt that the *ba'al shem* referred to here is none other than Israel Ba'al Shem Tov.[20] Furthermore, the absence of any of the usual epithets used to refer to someone who had already passed suggests that this recipe might well have been recorded during his lifetime. Be that as it may, this example not only exhibits the Besht in his function as a *ba'al shem*, offering rather prosaic medical services to clients, but also how some of the procedures he employed were transmitted orally and subsequently recorded by those interested in this type of information.

Among the pages of a magical compendium written in 1788, an entry with a set of instructions for constructing an amulet on behalf of a woman whose irregular menstrual cycle made it difficult for her to become ritually pure is explicitly attributed to "Rabbi Israel Besht" (National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°600, 72b).[21] Another manuscript collection from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth

century preserves an amulet for a woman whose children have been dying young, which is similarly attributed to the Besht (Eytan Kessler Ms., 17b). Finally, a collection from the nineteenth century contains instructions for constructing a protection amulet to be hung at the doorway to one's house, which is also attributed to him (Library of the Admor of Karlin-Stolin Ms. 35, 71b).

These sources indicate that instructions and formulas for composing amulets attributed to the Besht circulated widely and his extensive use of amulets is, in fact, well documented.[22] For example, in a letter sent to the Besht, his brother-in-law Gershon of Kuty requested one of his amulets: "Were it possible to send me a general-purpose amulet (*kame'a klalit*) so that I will not need a new one each and every year, it would be very good and pleasing to me" (Barnai 1980, 39). Indeed, an anecdote recorded in *Shivhei ha-besht* suggests that he considered himself particularly adept at constructing them:

> The Rabbi of the holy community of Polnoye had an amulet from Rabbi Naftali and he showed it to the Besht. The Besht recognized (*hikir bah*) that it had been written in a ritual bath (*mikveh*) and while fasting, and he said: "And I say that I could have written such an amulet after eating and while sitting on a bed" (Rubinstein 2005, 253; cf. Ben-Amos and Mintz, 1970, 196–97).

According to this passage, the Besht boasted that he could produce an amulet as effective as the one made by Naftali Katz of Posnan (d. 1718), one of the most respected rabbis and kabbalists of the preceding generation with a widespread reputation as a *ba'al shem*, and with considerably less effort.[23]

A remarkably elaborate ritual, or rather series of rituals and procedures, for the protection of a new house is preserved in the name of the Besht in a large compendium of medico-magical recipes from the late eighteenth-century (Gross Family Collection Ms. EE.011.039, unpaginated [verso preceding the first paginated page]). The performance of such magical rituals for new homes with the goal of protecting its future inhabitants from all manner of harm was common in traditional societies, and it is not surprising that the Besht engaged in them as well.[24] In fact, *Shivhei ha-besht* preserves a lengthy story recounting how the Besht was

invited for this very purpose to the Lithuanian town of Slutzk by the wife of Samuel Itzkowitz, one of the wealthiest Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 211–213).[25] The text of the ritual reads as follows:

> A protection (*shemirah*) for a house from Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov. Take the holy names written on the margins of this page and place them at every doorway of the house; the names written on the side place on the same side of the doorway and the names written above place above the doorway, in other words, at its head—along with some salt and a slice of bread.[26] And do not complete the building in less than a year from the day you begin. However, you are permitted to live in it during that year.
>
> Forty days before you move into the house take specifically a black rooster and a black hen and place them in the house for forty days. During these forty days you should say: "I hereby transfer this house to these fowl, from the abyss of the earth up to the sky, along with all exits and entrances, and I shall have no rights to it—any claimant should approach them directly." And they should be watched over for forty days so that they are not lost and if they are lost you should take others in their stead. And if they are lost after the forty days that is no matter. However, you may never slaughter them. You should then give them something to eat and throw before them a small silver coin and say: "I hereby lease the house from them for seven years." Then take the coin from before them and go together with your wife to the river and you should stand with your backs to it and throw the coin backwards into the river and say: "We give this coin to the evil spirits [*hitzonim*] so that they will not have any sovereignty over the house, just like with the biblical scapegoat."
>
> Then take a pack of needles and count out nine times nine. Place each nine down separately and then, when you have finished counting, mix them all together. The uncounted remainder you should discard in a place where people do not go. Then take an awl and make holes in the frames of the doors and windows of the house. These holes should be made without forethought, and you should fill the holes with the needles similarly without forethought but rather randomly, with the heads of the needles in the hole and the points

> facing out. And you should recite the biblical chapter about the commandment to make a fence around a roof (Deuteronomy 22:8) and say: "I hereby make an iron fence so that the evil spirits will have no sovereignty over this house." And the remaining needles you may discard wherever you wish.
>
> After this, and before you enter the house, take small jars and place in each of them a bit of quicksilver. Then seal them with wax and bury them under the threshold of each doorway of the house and under the four corners of the house. And while you are burying them recite seven times Psalm 90:17, "May the favor of the Lord," as well as Psalm 127, "A song of ascents; Of Solomon. Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it" also seven times.
>
> And each day for the entire year you should recite Psalm 90:17, "May the favor of the Lord," before sunrise and envisage encircling the house and your household to protect them from all manner of evil eye and all illness and all suffering and all mishap and all injury and poverty and scarcity and oppression. And when you place the amulets in the doorway place them at the top third, opposite the Mezuzah, and seal them with aspen wood.[27]

Although the text presents the ritual as a single unit, at least six distinct components can be discerned within it: (1) the construction and installation of two amulets; (2) time constraints on the completion of the building of the house; (3) a ritual involving a pair of black fowl; (4) a procedure involving needles; (5) the preparation and burial of jars containing mercury; (6) the recitation of Psalm 90:17 accompanied by an act of mental visualization to be performed daily before daybreak for an entire year.

Many of the elements of these rituals are rooted in traditions that predate the Besht, and it would be difficult if not impossible to determine which, if any of them, originated with the Besht. Nevertheless, as far as I was able to determine, the particular configuration of elements presented in this text is not found in the magical collections circulating before the Besht's lifetime. On the other hand, various versions of this ritual were subsequently known and circulated within Hasidic communities, at times anonymously but at others explicitly attributed to the Besht.

Thus, in a manuscript containing an only recently published work by Judah Leib of Linitz, the son of Dov Ber of Linitz, the compiler of *Shivhei ha-besht*, there is an alternate version of this same protection ritual introduced with the heading, "A magic ritual (*segulah*) for building a house that I received from the mouth of the late rabbi, Rabbi Joseph Kaminker, who received it from the Besht" (Victor Klagsbald Ms., 80a and 77b; cf. Judah Leib of Linitz 2020, 284–85).[28] While this version is remarkably similar to the one quoted above, it exhibits significant variation as well. It includes the components of the ritual involving the needles (4), the jars of mercury (5), as well as one of the two amulets (1), but lacks the time constraints on construction (2), the ritual involving the pair of black fowl (3), and the ritual recitation of Psalms 90:17 at daybreak (6). Furthermore, many details found in the first version are absent in the second and vice versa.[29] Such discrepancies among versions of a given spell are rather common in magical literature, and they could be due to different formulations given by the Besht at different times or to different people, the result of corruption that occurred in the process of oral and/or textual transmission or modifications made in the course of their performance.[30]

The same manuscript of Judah Leib of Linitz's work preserves another recipe presented as having been received from the Hasidic preacher Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl (d. 1798) and as "stemming (*nove'a*) from the Besht of blessed memory" (Victor Klagsbald Ms., 101b; cf. Judah Leib of Linitz 2020, 284). This elaborate ritual is for someone whose children have been dying in infancy and involves the formation and burial of male and female wax figurines, periodic bloodletting, herbal baths, and the strategic deployment of rue. Finally, in a now lost manuscript from the mid-nineteenth century containing material from the Hasidic sects of Koretz and Chernobyl, a magic recipe for fever (*kadahat*) is recorded and described as having been transmitted by Samuel Kaminker in the name of the Besht (Avigdor Rudi Ms. 148b [photocopy in National Library of Israel PH Scholem 351]).[31]

Other magical rituals employed by the Besht drew less on his medico-magical knowledge than on his Kabbalistic expertise. The magical and mystical traditions in Judaism were never entirely distinct, and by the early modern period a significant amount of Kabbalistic material had been incorporated into Jewish magical practices, especially those of the *ba'alei shem* (Chajes 2017; Harari 2019; Idel 1983;

1997; Paluch 2019; Scholem 1978, 182–89). Thus, an elaborate magical ritual for the "sweetening of the judgments" (*hamtakat ha-dinim*) drawing heavily on the tradition of theurgical intentions (*kavanot*) of the Lurianic Kabbalah circulated in the name of the Besht.[32] The "sweetening of the judgments" is a Lurianic concept with earlier Kabbalistic roots referring to the amelioration of divine wrath to restore harmony within the godhead, but it eventually came to be applied to both the divine and human planes.[33] In this case the term appears to be used to refer to the broad aim of removing any perceived threat to, or evil influence over, an individual or group.[34] The ritual, which is to be performed over a period of seven days by a principal operator in concert with three other people who are to convene a "court," involves circumambulations with Torah scrolls and the recitation of a series of biblical verses accompanied by meditations on specific Kabbalistic theurgical intentions and magical names (cf. Horen 2021, 209–216; Kallus 1997, 162–163). Despite the explicitly noted Lurianic basis for much of the ritual, its decidedly practical aims distinguish it from the more cosmic goals of its Kabbalistic sources.

The Besht also recommended other, more devotional ritualistic activities with the similar magical goal of "sweetening the judgments." For example, the Besht's disciple Jacob Joseph of Polnoye quotes his master as saying that "if a person perceives that there are [divine] judgments upon him he should study in the morning with attachment and passion and attach himself to the inner light of the Infinite that is contained within the letters" (Jacob Joseph of Polnoye 1780, 201b; see also 24a).[35] The technique of "sweetening the judgments" through ritual study is also found in a letter that the Besht wrote to Jacob Joseph, in which he emphatically forbids his disciple to fast and recommends instead that "each morning, when you study, attach yourself to the letters with absolute attachment, for the worship of God, blessed be His name, and with this the judgements will be sweetened at their roots, and they will be eased from upon you" (Rubinstein 2005, 105; cf. Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 65).[36] Another ritual practice circulating in the name of the Besht that was often described as having the effect of "sweetening the judgments" in its magical sense was ritual immersion (*mikveh*) accompanied by specific Kabbalistic intentions (cf. Horen 2021, 73–103; Kauffman 2012).[37]

Another magical protection ritual attributed to the Besht was intended to be

performed on the occasion of expanding a cemetery (Sagiv 2013).[38] This ritual involves seven circumambulations and the recitation of various prayers, Psalms, and other biblical passages by a collective of at least ten people. The text of the ritual also includes the specific instructions not to begin the construction of the fence surrounding the new plot or place the first grave at its northern side, and that the first person interred should not be of priestly descent. While this ritual lacks the more expressly magical kinds of elements found in some of the other recipes and rituals attributed to the Besht, it is clearly an extra-legal custom undertaken with the goal of protecting the local community from the threat presented by the realm of the dead. As Gadi Sagiv has shown, this ritual, typically performed by a Hasidic leader, became extremely popular in the nineteenth century, especially among the Hasidic communities of Galicia, Hungary, and Ukraine (Sagiv 2013).

As the above examples make clear, various magical recipes and rituals attributed to the Besht circulated among his acquaintances and disciples and were transmitted to subsequent generations. Some recipes even made their way far beyond the borders of eastern Europe. For example, a version of another ritual with a somewhat similar goal to that of "sweetening the judgments" known as "a redemption of the soul" (*pidyon nefesh*) is preserved in a manuscript composed in a nineteenth-century oriental script. It is described by its transcriber as a tradition he received from a certain Abraham Ashkenazi, who received it from an unnamed teacher who received it, in turn, from his own teacher, the Besht (Ben Zvi Institute Ms. 2214, 6b, 6a).[39]

A sense of the great value attributed to such oral traditions can be gleaned from a fascinating passage in an unpublished Hasidic work written in the final decades of the eighteenth century by the little-known figure Joseph Judah Leib of Balta.[40] The only surviving copy of this work is heavily damaged and the text is faulty in many places, but enough of it survives to follow the gist of the relevant passage. In a discussion of the spiritual roots of the efficacious properties of herbs, with which the work concludes, the author writes:

> All the world knows of the great holiness of the Besht, who accomplished awesome things with medicines (*samim*) . . . [He was asked by] gentile

> doctors, "from whence do you know this" . . . [and he replied] "I know it from the wisdom of the holy Torah" . . . And I received from the holy mouth of Rabbi Moses, the preacher of the holy community of Ladyzhyn, who received from the mouth of the Besht, of blessed memory . . . [who received from] Ahijah the Shilonite, various kinds of medicines and specific species that are very efficacious (*mesugalim*) for healing . . . [someone stricken] with epilepsy, heaven forbid. These medicines are dependent upon the terrifying archons of the divine chariot . . . [and] I tried and tested these matters and I gave them to several people who were stricken, and all of them . . . [were helped] and not one was lost, for it has been tried and tested extensively. Since these are of those matters that . . . [should not be] written down . . . [I decided not to do so] . . . but I transmitted them orally to my son, the pious . . . Fishel of Poland. May the Lord protect me and my son and all of Israel from every illness and disease (Isaac Wallach Ms. 377, 217b).

Joseph Judah Leib mentions learning a medico-magical recipe for epilepsy from Moses of Ladyzhyn (a figure who might be identified as the son of the Besht's brother-in-law Gershon of Kuty), who had learned it from the Besht, who purportedly claimed to have had it revealed to him by his heavenly mentor, the biblical prophet Ahijah the Shilonite.[41] Joseph Judah Leib further states that he successfully treated a number of people with the recipe but deemed it too esoteric to record in writing and only allowed himself to transmit it orally to his son Fishel of Stryków (d. 1825), a figure who later achieved renown as one of the most revered Hasidic saints in Central Poland (Dynner 2006, 48, 132).

As the passage by Joseph Judah Leib vividly illustrates, rituals and recipes in the name of the Besht were highly esteemed by his contemporaries and were transmitted orally over generations. It is likely that many, if not most, were never written down. When they were, they were either recorded in the magical handbooks and absorbed into the preexisting magical tradition or else preserved and circulated among Hasidic communities by being included either individually or as small collections within manuscripts of Hasidic works.[42] Only rarely, however, did any of them make it into print. It appears that due to a combination of the

perceived esoteric nature of magical lore and the ideological goals and generic conventions of Hasidic printing, the Besht's magical rituals and recipes were treated differently than his mystical and pietistic teachings and followed different avenues of transmission and dissemination.[43]

Magic in Hasidism

The centrality of magic seen in the life and career of the Besht did not disappear with his death but was maintained within the Hasidic movement that developed in his wake. Magical and medico-magical recipes are thus attributed to many of the Besht's colleagues and disciples, such as Moses of Kuty, Judah Leib, the Admonisher (*mokhiah*) of Polnoye, and Phineas Shapira of Koretz (d. 1791).[44] Indeed, many of the figures who become prominent within the Hasidic movement functioned not merely as saints who offered spiritual guidance and blessings for material success, which is how they are usually portrayed, but as typical *ba'alei shem*.[45] As Dov Ber of Bolechow, writing in the final decades of the eighteenth century, observed, in his day "the *ba'alei shemot* have changed their name to Hasidim" (Hundert 2009, 242, 257–59).[46] Such well-known Hasidic figures as Elimelekh of Lizhensk (d. 1787), Israel, the Maggid of Koznitz, and Levi Isaac of Berditchev all engaged in magical and folk-healing practices in a manner indistinguishable from the Besht and other *ba'alei shem*.[47]

The nature and extent of such activities are vividly illustrated by two letters dating from 1809, one by Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta (d. 1825) and the other by Israel, the Maggid of Koznitz (Gutman 1953, 220–241; Gutman 1967, 13).[48] Both letters are addressed to Jehiel Mikhel Daniel, a wealthy and learned member of the Jewish community of Jassy, and respond to his desire for a son and his anxiety over building a new house. In the first letter, Abraham Joshua informs Jehiel Mikhel that he had discussed the latter's concerns with Israel of Koznitz, that he should go ahead with the construction of the new house, and that he will personally instruct him on how to perform a protection ritual upon its completion. In his own letter, Israel gives Jehiel Mikhel a blessing for a son and mentions an accompanying amulet that would assist with this.[49] He then instructs him in

a protection ritual for his new house, which turns out to be a variant of the same ritual we found attributed to the Besht:

> When, God willing, you do complete the house, keep a rooster and hen in the house continuously, and if they die take others and if one of them dies take a mate for the other. And place a pot under every threshold and in each pot place seven needles and some quicksilver. And also under your wife's bedding place such a pot.

Israel goes on to note that he is also sending along some amber for him to burn, and he instructs him to inform the fowl used in the ritual that he, the Maggid of Koznitz, commands them to serve as an expiation and a charm.[50]

As this exchange shows, Hasidic leaders dispensed amulets and recommended magical recipes to specific individuals either directly or via written correspondence. The origins of their knowledge of this lore were no doubt varied, stemming from earlier Jewish magical traditions in both oral and written form, as well as local Jewish and non-Jewish folk traditions. Some Hasidic leaders possessed magical compendia, upon which they drew in their magical activities, while others composed their own, and such collections were at times transmitted within particular Hasidic dynasties over generations.[51] As was the case with the magical rituals attributed to the Besht, those of the later Hasidic leaders also circulated orally among their followers and were often incorporated into existing magical compendia, and beginning in the late nineteenth century, they were even occasionally printed.[52]

While not every Hasidic leader is known to have engaged in magical practices, the extant sources indicate that a great many of them did. Indeed, such practitioners can be found in virtually every major Hasidic school or dynasty, which suggests that those who did not engage in such practices did not generally do so out of ideological opposition but rather due to personal proclivity or lack of the requisite expertise.[53] Moreover, even those who did not dispense amulets and recipes were still sought after for the perceived magical efficacy of their verbal blessings, the remnants of their meals, or their personal effects.[54]

Conclusion

As the evidence presented above shows, not only did the Besht communicate magical recipes but such recipes also circulated widely, were transmitted over generations both orally and in manuscript, and were incorporated into the preexisting Jewish magical tradition. Furthermore, subsequent Hasidic leaders similarly functioned as *ba'alei shem*, employing, recommending, and transmitting magical recipes, including many stemming from the Besht. The recognition of the important place of magic in the activities of the Besht and those of later Hasidic leaders can help to better situate these figures within their specific cultural context and elucidate the various roles they played within it. As suggested by David Frankfurter's analysis of similar figures, one might describe them as "ritual experts," who combined both religious and folk elements, the great and little traditions (see Redfield 1956, 67–104), in new and creative ways (Frankfurter 2002). Frankfurter offers a taxonomy of such figures that can serve as a fruitful framework for analyzing the multiple, complex, and often differing functions of the various Hasidic leaders, such as local versus peripheral and institutional versus communal. The Besht embodied several of these categories at various points in his career, but overall, he appears closest perhaps to the category of the prophet:

> The amulets they dispense and efficacious gestures they cast carry the prestige not of tradition so much as of some new ideology . . . *prophet-figures articulate a new frame of reference: a new scheme of the cosmos and of social relations. But more importantly, they place themselves in the middle of these ideologies as thaumaturges*—miracle-workers, ritual experts, mediators of the supernatural world. They develop new rituals, new protective amulets . . . and new healing rites. Thaumaturgy and the ritual expertise that brings it are so central to the roles prophets occupy because they dramatize the new ideology and its promises (Frankfurter 2002, 171; emphasis added).

As Frankfurter stresses, the ritual expert is above all a *bricoleur*—someone with the skills to make use of whatever happens to be available to accomplish the task

at hand (Frankfurter 2002, 166–167; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1962, 16–33). By drawing on elements and vocabularies from both the great and little traditions, the Besht and many of the subsequent Hasidic leaders embodied a particularly rich set of ritual expertise that gave them the authority, creativity, and versatility to better address the particular needs of their contemporaries.[55]

The magical activities of the Besht and subsequent Hasidic leaders reflect a broad range of beliefs, practices, and social functions, and further analysis can help clarify their impact on the emergence of the Hasidic movement, its internal dynamics, and its extraordinary versatility. The spread of the Hasidic movement coincided with the rise of the Jewish Enlightenment, and magic offers a particularly rich lens through which to observe the ways some of the challenges modernity posed to traditional societies were negotiated.[56]

I conclude this study by noting that Hasidic saints, especially in their role as magicians and miracle workers, were often referred to in colloquial Yiddish as *gute yiden*, that is, "good Jews."[57] While the precise origins of this epithet remain obscure, its vernacular character suggests the need to consider these figures alongside folk healers, cunning men, and wise women as one particular manifestation of what was essentially a European-wide, if not universal, cultural phenomenon.[58]

Notes

1. The difficulties involved in defining the category of magic and differentiating it from those of science and religion are well known. For general overviews of the problem, see, for example, Bailey 2006, 1–23; Frankfurter 2019, 3–20. I employ the term magic here heuristically to refer to rituals or procedures, other than the normative performance of liturgical or petitionary prayer or rituals mandated by the Jewish legal (*halakhic*) tradition, that are undertaken with the aim of bringing about change in the natural order by supernatural means (cf. Bohak, 2008, 65–67). While there is evidence that *ba'alei shem* might have differentiated at times between natural and supernatural causes and treatments, especially in the realm of healing, the boundary between the two was never absolute, nor, it should be borne in mind, do they coincide with our own notions of these concepts. See Etkes 2004, 64–67; Petrovsky-Shtern 2011; Zinger 2009. On the difficulty of distinguishing between medicine and magic historically, see, for example, the remarks in Jones and Olsan 2019, 299–300. I therefore treat the various types of healing practiced by the Besht as aspects of his expertise

and activities as a *ba'al shem*. For some representative studies of magic in Jewish culture, see Chajes 2011; Bohak 2008; Harari 2017; Idel 1989; Trachtenberg 1939.

2. These are by no means homogenous types of figures. The closest East European analogue to the *ba'al shem* would appear to be the *znakhar* (see Petrovsky-Shtern 2004, 241–42), but there are important differences in their respective methods and functions, and it would be a mistake to view the two as equivalent. On *znakhari* and other practitioners of magic in Eastern Europe, see, for example, Ramer 1991; Ryan 1999, 68–86.

3. An important exception is the work of Moshe Idel who has explored the deep influence of talismanic magic, deriving from medieval Arabic and European Renaissance sources, on the Besht and on the Hasidic movement more generally. In addition to this more "learned" tradition of magic, Idel has also repeatedly noted the existence in Hasidic culture of more popular forms of magic as well. See, for example, Idel 1989, 100–6; 1995, 65–81, 209–25; 2006; 2011, 80, 88–90.

4. On the *Shivhei ha-besht* and the debate over its historicity, see Etkes 2004, 203–48; Rosman 2013, 143–55. The scholarly consensus is that, while deeply problematic in many respects, it remains of historical value and indeed an indispensable source for understanding the Besht and his cultural milieu (see Dynner 2009). I have avoided using it as the basis for any substantial argument but have largely drawn on it alongside other independent sources.

5. The above, and many additional, aspects of the Besht's activities as a *ba'al shem* can be found by consulting the general index to Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, as well as their Index of Motifs, which attempts to categorize the elements of the tales according to Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–1958).

6. The Besht also attributed the source of some of his teachings to revelations in dreams or visions. See, for example, Jacob Joseph of Polnoye 1780, 56b and 64a, and the Besht's famous letter to his brother-in-law Gershon of Kuty, where he mentions "three efficacious things (*devarim segulot*) and three holy names" that he learned during an ascent to heaven (Jacob Joseph of Polnoye 1781, 100a). On this letter see Etkes 2004, 79–91, 272–88; Moseson 2021; Rosman 2013, 99–113. The Besht also claimed to have a heavenly mentor and guide, identified as the biblical prophet Ahijah the Shilonite, to whom he also attributed some of his teachings. For teachings attributed to the Besht's "teacher," see, for example, Jacob Joseph of Polnoye 1780, 13a (and cf. 47a), 201a and 1782, 62b, 83a. See also Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 136–37. The identification of this teacher as Ahijah the Shilonite is given in Jacob Joseph of Polnoye 1780, 156a. For more on Ahijah as the teacher of the Besht, see Meir 1997; Rubinstein 1978. See also the passage from Joseph Judah Leib of Balta quoted below.

7. On the legend of Adam Ba'al Shem, see Shmeruk 1963. For a summary of the scholarship on the legend in relation to the Besht, see Assaf 2008, 60–63.

8. I thank William Gross for graciously sharing his invaluable collection of magical texts with me. Although the moniker *Rivash*, especially in books of magic, typically designates Rabbi Joel Ba'al Shem I (d. b. 1706) or his grandson Rabbi Joel Ba'al Shem II (d. c. 1755), the reference to Adam Ba'al Shem along with the fact that elsewhere in this manuscript a magical ritual is explicitly attributed to the Besht suggest that it is Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem that is being referred to here (on the two Joel Ba'al Shems and the problem of determining reference and attribution, see the remarks below). For a connection between the legend of Adam Ba'al Shem and Judah Lowe (Maharal) of Prague, see Shmeruk 1963, 89–90. An alternate possibility is that we have here a misconstrual on the part of the scribe of the acronym *Ra* as Rabbi Adam instead of Rabbi Elijah, referring to one of two famous sixteenth-century *ba'alei shem* with that name, one of whom (Elijah ben Moses Loanz; d. 1636) was a disciple of Judah Lowe (Etkes 2004, 25). I thank Gideon Bohak for sharing this suggestion made to him by David Assaf. Despite the advisability of refraining from drawing any firm conclusions on the claimed provenance for the magical ritual preserved in this manuscript, it remains plausible that it does indeed represent an independent testimony to the oral traditions regarding the Besht's possession of writings attributed to Adam Ba'al Shem, in which case it would suggest the possibility that the Besht not only possessed magical writings but allowed at least some of it to be copied and that at least one such passage still survives.

9. On Jewish medico-magical compendia, see Harari 2011, 56–65; 2020; Matras 1997; Petrovsky-Shtern 2011; Paluch 2019.

10. On the absorption of non-Jewish magical traditions in Jewish society in early modern Europe, see Petrovsky-Shtern 2011; Tuszewicki 2015; cf. Idel 2011, 80, 88–90.

11. On the transmission of magical knowledge through family tradition in pre-modern eastern Europe, see Dysa 2013; Ramer 1991, 210, 217; cf. the case of the two Joel Ba'al Shems mentioned below.

12. On this letter, see Etkes 2004, 174; Gellman 2011; Rosman 2013, 119–22. The letter was first published in Barukh of Medzhibizh, 1880 (unpaginated) and then again, apparently independently, in Saadya Gaon 1885, 108b. A manuscript of the letter, possibly the Besht's autograph, was listed along with photographs in the auction catalogue of Christie, Mason & Woods International 1984, 35–6 (Lot #65).

13. All translations from Hebrew into English are my own.

14. On the kinds of magical lore that might nevertheless at times be incorporated into Jewish ethical and pietistic literature more generally, see Bar-Levav 2003.

15. The Besht's teachings were initially transmitted orally among his associates and subsequently recorded within later Hasidic works. The majority of the extant teachings attributed to the Besht were recorded by his close disciple Jacob Joseph of Polnoye (d. c. 1783) and incorporated into the latter's own homilies. See Moseson 2017, 150–209, 380–85.

On the Kabbalistic *kavanot* attributed to the Besht, see Horen 2021; Kallus 1997; Moseson 2017, 200–5.

16. On these figures, see Etkes 2004, 25–26, 33–42; Hundert 2004, 144–46, 150–52; Matris 1997, 83–84.

17. Solomon Maimon (d. 1800), for example, appears to have confused Israel and Joel II in his account of the emergence of the Hasidic movement (Melamed and Socher 2018, 90).

18. For a nineteenth-century example of a possibly spurious attribution to the Besht of a much older amulet, see Meir 2012.

19. The phrase *me-ha-menuseh mi-b"sh* ("from someone treated by the *ba'al shem*") could also be rendered "from someone who tried it themselves and it had been received from the *ba'al shem*." Another possible rendering is "from the experienced one, from the *ba'al shem,*" i.e., referring solely to the Besht. However, in light of the grammar of the sentence as well as the use of the term *menuseh* elsewhere in the manuscript (cf. for example, 123a), it seems that a particular patient or sufferer is being referred to here.

20. On the Besht's move to Medzhibizh, which apparently took place around 1740, see Dubnow 1991, 35; Rosman 2013, 168–69.

21. On the menstrual laws underlying this predicament, see *Shulhan arukh, Yoreh de'ah,* 189–90.

22. According to *Shivhei ha-besht*, the Besht employed scribes who aided him in his work producing amulets (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 32, 36–37). A number of amulets attributed to the Besht began to appear as broadsides in the mid nineteenth century, but their historical connection to the Besht has yet to be confirmed. See, for example, Jewish Theological Seminary of America Special Collections, B K53; National Library of Israel Amulet Collection, V 183 02 34 and cf. Meir 2012.

23. The Besht's belief in his own unique abilities, however, went beyond the construction of amulets, and he is reported to have employed his own name as a sacred name of power and, according to some traditions, even in amulets (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 181; Bodek 1866, unpaginated [18a–19a]). On the idea that the name of a saint can serve as a sacred name of power, see Idel 1989, 93–94, 101–2, 114n73. On Naftali Katz, see Etkes 2004, 26.

24. Taboos surrounding the building of a new house and around new constructions in general appear in many cultures throughout the world (Hoggard 2019; Jütte 2015, 142, 152–63; Trumbull 1896, 45–57). For Eastern Europe, see Leher-Lenda 1981, 105–12; Ryan 1999, 200. A number of taboos relating to building a new house were popularized in the series of ordinances attributed to the medieval Jewish pietist Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (d. 1217) and promulgated under the title *Tzava'at rabi yehudah he-hasid* (Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg, 2007, 15–16). On the reception of this work, and particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Kahana 2010, 223–62.

25. Cf. the alternative account by the anti-Hasidic preacher David of Makow (d. 1814) in Wilensky 1990, II: 242. On the Besht's visit to Slutzk and on the careers of Samuel Itzkowitz and his brother Gedaliah, see Teller 1999; 2016, 73–105. For further accounts of the Besht offering protection for houses or exorcising demons from them, see, for example, Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 35, 37, as well as the house protection amulet mentioned above.

26. The text refers to a series of divine names recorded on the upper and right margins of the manuscript page.

27. I thank Magdalena Zatorska for her help identifying the particular wood referred to in the text.

28. The text is preserved in two parts apparently out of order. For more on this manuscript, see Meir 2021, 102–103. I thank Jonatan Meir for bringing this manuscript to my attention and for kindly sharing the manuscript of his article with me prior to publication. Joseph Kaminker was a close associate of the Besht (cf. Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 89–90, 127–28, 169 and 177) and died sometime after 1792.

29. In addition to a second amulet, the former version includes the use of salt and bread, while the latter notes certain stipulations regarding the purchasing of the needles as well as the inclusion of rue in the jars. They both also differ from each other in some of the details of the instructions for constructing the amulet and for discarding leftover needles.

30. A third version of the ritual, this time comprising only components 3 and 4, was preserved without attribution among the writings of Meshulam Feivush Heller of Zbarazh (d. 1794) (1905, 10a). Here, too, the close similarity and yet significant difference in detail to the other versions are striking. Elements of these rituals are also preserved in a magical compendium attributed to David Solomon Eibeschutz (d. 1813) (Anonymous 1865, unpaginated), while others are found attributed to Abraham of Stretin (d. 1865) (Lifshitz 1905, 11a). The use of fowl is also mentioned as a popular practice in a responsum of the non-Hasidic legal authority Moses Sofer (d. 1839) (1851, II:47b [#138]). On this responsum, see Kahana 2010, 241–43.

31. This may refer to either Samuel I (d. c. 1779), an associate of the Besht and relative of Joseph Kaminker mentioned above or to his great-nephew Samuel II (d. 1843). On the Kaminker family, see the material collected in Kaminker and Kaminker, 2008, 1–28.

32. I have identified three different witnesses to the text of this ritual. The first is found in a collection of spells appended to an 1840 manuscript of a necromantic work titled *Hokhmat shelomo* (sometimes given the Latin subtitle *Sapientia Salomonis*) (Joseph Nehorai Ms. 9, 58a–58b). On *Hokhmat shelomo*, see Sofer 2014, 144n69, as well as the remarks in 143n62; 2022, 129–72. The second witness is found in the book *Tiferet yisrael* by Israel Harif of Satinov (d. 1781) (1865, 46b). The attribution to the Besht appeared only in the second edition (1871, 80a). Cf. the comments in Moseson 2017, 205–6, and especially

n576; Horen 2021, 205–7 (as noted by Horen, a list of errata in this work is mentioned by Wachstein 1911, 80 [#406] as having been published [separately!] in 1867; however, as of yet, this list has not been located, and it is not known if the attribution of the ritual to the Besht was already given therein). The third witness is a highly corrupt fragment preserved anonymously in *Or ha-emet* a collection of early Hasidic material attributed to Dov Ber of Mezritsh (1899, 98a–98b; and cf. as well the immediately preceding fragment). A further, and apparently independent, version of this ritual (possibly fragmentary and lacking attribution) was identified by Roee Horen in the manuscript Lurianic prayer book copied by Jacob Joseph of Polnoye's son Abraham Samson of Rashkiv (d. 1799), completed in 1760 (Horen 2021, 207; cf. Abraham Samson of Rashkiv 1995 [unpaginated; page prior to Sabbath section]).

33. On the origin of the term "sweetening the judgments," see Scholem 1941, 165, 388n44. Cf. Avivi 2008, 1238–239; Horen 2021. For its appearance in relation to exorcism, see Chajes 1997.

34. However, the witness preserved in *Tiferet yisrael* concludes with the instruction to have in mind "the features of those people and the names of those opposing" (*ha-tzurot shel otan anashim ve-ha-shemot ha-menagedim*), which suggests that it might have had a more specific aim.

35. Following this sentence, Jacob Joseph cites a further procedure in the name of the Besht, which appears to be a version of the theurgic ritual discussed above (and cf. as well Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 202–3).

36. On this letter, first printed in *Shivhei ha-besht*, see Etkes 2004, 180–81; Moseson, 2017, 117–26; Rosman 2013, 115, 251n11. On the Besht's technique of attaching oneself to the letters of the words of prayer and study, see Etkes 2004, 147–50; Idel 2020.

37. The Besht was reported to have undertaken frequent ritual immersions, often for explicitly magical goals. See, for example, Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 18, 79–80, 83, 130, 206.

38. This ritual, too, appears to have circulated primarily in a single textual version for which I have identified three witnesses. The first is preserved in the same manuscript containing the ritual for "sweetening the judgments," Joseph Nehorai Ms. 9, 56a. The second is found in *Ner yisrael*, a collection of Kabbalistic works with a commentary by Israel of Koznitz (n.d., 21a). The third appeared as a fragment in the work *Degel mahaneh efrayim* by the Besht's grandson Moses Hayim Ephraim of Sadilkov (d. c. 1800) (1810, 113b). An unattributed version of the ritual was copied in 1790 into the ledger of the burial society of the town of Ladyzhyn by Benjamin Ze'ev Wolf of Balta (d. 1822) from a text sent by Levi Isaac of Berditchev (d. 1809), while another was reported to have been recorded in the ledger of the burial society of the town of Linitz (Anonymous 1993, 148). Cf. the western European parallel in Gittos 2002.

39. In the early twentieth century, this nineteenth-century manuscript was in the possession of the Chief Rabbi of Athens Joseph de Chaves; however, its place of composition remains unclear. The earliest appearance in print of a version of the soul redemption ritual appears to be the book *Avodat bore* by Simon Akiva Ber ben Joseph (1688, unpaginated [50a-b counting from the title page]) followed by its apparently independent appearance in the popular collection of cemetery prayers *Ma'aneh lashon* (Anonymous 1691, unpaginated [section 21]), but it likely circulated in manuscript for some time before then (cf. Pedaya 1995, 331). In addition to the version in the above manuscript, there is another version attributed to the Besht in a manuscript collection of Hasidic material composed in the 1780s (National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 38°5198, 82b–83a). On this manuscript, see Moseson 2017, 302–5; Zucker 1974. A somewhat similar version to this last one was included anonymously in the early Hasidic collection *Likutim yekarim*, attributed to Dov Ber of Mezritsh (1792, 25a). It is noteworthy that while based on similar principles as its predecessors, the versions connected to the Besht are distinct in that they incorporate the Kabbalistic schema of the four worlds, an element lacking in the other known versions. On the popularization of the soul redemption ritual in Hasidism, see Pedaya 1995 (Ben Zvi Institute Ms. 2214 is mentioned on p. 331); Rubinstein 1962, 92–94. For additional instances of early oral transmission of traditions pertaining to the Besht to Jewish communities outside of Eastern Europe (in this case North Africa), see Meir 2022.

40. On this work, its author, and its sole surviving manuscript witness, see Yoskowitz 1964, 90–94, reprinted in 1982, 412–20 and then again in 2007. The manuscript was saved from destruction during World War II by being buried and sustained considerable water damage as a result. Furthermore, it appears that the manuscript from which it was originally copied was itself damaged (or censored) in places, and the text contains a considerable number of lacunae marked with the word "lacking" (*haser*). The manuscript itself, formerly Israel Wallach Ms. 377, was recently put up for auction, but a microfilm copy is held by the National Library of Israel, Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, F75043. Cf. the auction catalogue of Kestenbaum and Company 2015, 41 (Lot #82).

41. On the identification of Moses of Ladyzhyn as the son of Gershon of Kuty, see Yoskowitz 1964, 92 (cf., however, the anonymous editorial comment in 2007, 164n9). On the identification of the Besht's teacher as Ahijah the Shilonite, see n6 above.

42. See, for example, National Library of Russia Ms. EVR IV 172, 6b; Schocken Institute for Jewish Research Ms. 70074, 98b; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°3547, 103b; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°3550, 301a; Isaac Wallach Ms. 91, 25b; Moses Gedaliah Roth Ms. 1, 96b.

43. On the reluctance to print magical material in Jewish culture, see Chajes 2012; Gellman 2021, 192. Interestingly, the converse, in which the Besht's printed mystical teachings were incorporated as recipes in manuscript compendia of magic, could occur as well,

as in the case of two passages in National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°600, 8b, 185b. Both of these passages originate in the works of Jacob Joseph of Polnoye, where they are explicitly attributed to the Besht (1780, 12b–13a; 1781, 6b). The immediate basis for at least one of them appears to have been a collection of the Besht's teachings excerpted from Jacob Joseph's writings and first printed in Bloch 1792, 96a–96b (though this collection may well have circulated in manuscript before being printed). On the circulation of collections of the Besht's teachings in manuscript and print, see Moseson 2017, 384–85.

44. See, for example, Gelernter 1908 (introduction), which mentions an amulet attributed to Moses of Kuty. Joseph Nehorai Ms. 9, 59a preserves instructions for a magical array composed of a combination of divine names that is to be contemplated while engaging in supplemental prayer attributed to Judah Leib of Polnoye, while in another magical compendium, a photocopy of which is preserved among the Abraham Joshua Heschel Papers at Duke University (Box 297, Folder 3; it is labeled "*Segulot ve-refu'ot tolna*" and shall henceforth be referred to as Duke University–Tolna Ms.), there is a recipe attributed to him to rid oneself of worms (192b–193a). A number of narratives in *Shivhei ha-besht* describe Judah Leib's interest in magic and divination, which appears to have played a significant role in his relationship with the Besht (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 31–32, 138, 143, 180–82, 236–38. Phineas Shapira of Koretz is reported to have engaged in many and varied magical practices and to have claimed to have mutually exchanged magical knowledge with the Besht (Rabinowitz 1926, 9b). There exists a large corpus preserving Phineas's teachings and practices, and this veritable treasure-trove of mystical, magical, and general folk traditions offers a fascinating illustration of the inseparability of religion, mysticism, and magic in early modern East European Jewish culture. On this corpus, see Amshalem 2022. For the most comprehensive compilation from this corpus in print, see Shapira 2003, and for medico-magical material, see especially I:435–41. Similar engagement with magic is also reported for other members of the Besht's circle. Cf. Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 67–69 (Jacob Joseph of Polnoye), 108–10 (Dov Ber of Mezeritsh). Doner 1898, 38b records a recipe for fever attributed to the Besht's disciple Jehiel Mikhel of Zolochiv (d. c. 1780s). Jehiel Mikhel's father, Isaac of Drohobych (d. 1750), whose own mother was known as Yentel the Prophetess, was also famous as a miracle worker (cf. Ben-Amos and Mintz 1970, 87–89; Heschel 1985, 152–81).

45. While scholars have occasionally noted the fact that some Hasidic saints employed magical objects, such as amulets or potions, or engaged in magical rituals, such as exorcism, discussions of their magical abilities have typically focused on their personal charisma and the miraculous power attributed to their verbal blessings (cf., for example, Elior 2008, 126–51). Indeed, there has been a marked tendency to dismiss, ignore, or suppress the place of magic within the movement. However, the vast literature of Hasidic tales contains innumerable accounts of the magical activities of Hasidic saints (Nigal 2012, especially 114–29,

172–79, 212–33). For more nuanced treatments of the place of magic in the Hasidic movement, see Biale et al. 2017, 173–74; Dynner 2006, 140–47; Gellman 2021.

46. While Dov Ber describes the change in title as accompanied by a shift in emphasis from magic to mysticism, there is little evidence of any widespread decrease at this time in magical beliefs and practices among the Hasidim or the general Jewish population of Eastern Europe, a conclusion also supported by the appearance of a slew of anti-Hasidic satires and polemical works by members of the Jewish Enlightenment in eastern Europe that specifically targeted the magic beliefs and "superstitious" practices of the Hasidim. On the attitude toward magic and superstition among the Jewish Enlighteners in eastern Europe, see Etkes 2004, 259–71; Meir 2012, 37, 47; Verses 1995. Meir argues that the spread of Hasidism was actually accompanied by an increase in magic.

47. For example, an elaborate healing ritual involving wax pouring is attributed to Elimelekh of Lizhensk in Library of the Admor of Karlin-Stolin Ms. 35, 38b, while a recipe for an herbal bath for swelling is attributed to him in Duke University–Tolna Ms., 186a. A wide range of magical recipes and rituals circulated in the name of Israel, the Maggid of Koznitz. See, for example, Anonymous 1996, 130–32; Duke University–Tolna Ms., 186a; Menahem Mendel of Rymanów, 1908, 11b; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 8°4204, 17a, 26a, 43a; and Israel's own work *Nezer yisra'el* (1864, 12a, 12b). For recipes and rituals attributed to Levi Isaac of Berditchev, see Duke University–Tolna Ms., 185b, 188b–189a; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°8601, 15b, 18b. In 1913, a member of the ethnographic expeditions led by S. An-ski was informed that a manuscript dating to 1811 and including remedies attributed to Levi Isaac was in the possession of one of the latter's descendants (Deutsch 2011, 51–52). Similar traditions can be cited for a great many other prominent Hasidic leaders.

48. While only the first letter is explicitly dated, the fact that they both appear to relate to the same subject matter suggests that they were written in close succession.

49. Other extant letters of Israel of Koznitz also refer to accompanying amulets or magical recipes (2011, 251 [#8], 252 [#9], 253 [#11]).

50. This form of self-reference appears in several of the rituals and recipes attributed to Israel of Koznitz (Anonymous 1996, 130–132; Duke University–Tolna Ms., 186a; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 8°4204, 26a. It is also common among those attributed to Levi Isaac of Berditchev (Duke University–Tolna Ms., 188b–189a; and National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°8601, 15b, 18b). On the Besht's use of his own name for magical purposes, see above n23.

51. A magical compendium attributed to David Solomon Eibeschutz was included in Anonymous 1865. Judah Tzevi of Stretin (d. 1844) was known to have possessed a medico-magical handbook, which according to one account he received from his teacher Uri of Strelisk (d. 1826), who reportedly learned this lore from his own teacher Solomon of Karlin

(d. 1792), while another tradition maintains that Judah Tzevi received the handbook from Isaac Eizik of Kaliv (d. 1821) (Judah Tzevi of Stretin, 1957, 12–13). An alternative source claims that these traditions are not mutually exclusive and that he possessed two such books (Judah Tzevi of Stretin, 2012, 13–14). On magic in the circle of Solomon of Karlin (who was sometimes referred to as "the little Ba'al Shem Tov"), see Shor 2009. For a recently printed manuscript magical compendia compiled by Eliezer Hayim of Yampol (d. 1916) primarily from printed handbooks, see 2014, 92–198. Cf. the remarks in Gellman 2021, 192–93.

52. Manuscript magical compendia containing recipes attributed to Hasidic figures include Duke University–Tolna Ms.; Gross Family Collection, Ms. EE.011.039; Library of the Admor of Karlin-Stolin Ms. 35; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°8601; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 8°4204. This last manuscript cites a number of earlier manuscripts, including one attributed to the Hasidic figure Barukh of Chekhov, a disciple of Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin (cf. Gellman 2021, 195–96; Levenbron 1993). Printed examples include Kanarvogel 1888, 17b–21b (second pagination); Lifshitz 1905; Rosenberg 1911; Shalom of Svirzh 1888, unpaginated (appendix containing a series of recipes attributed to Abraham, the son of Judah Tzevi of Stretin mentioned in the previous note); Rubinstein 1932; Sperling 1928 II:39b–64b. Magical or medico-magical recipes are also occasionally mentioned in works of other genres such as collections of homilies or books of pietistic instruction (as, for example, the voluminous writings of the Hasidic figure Tzevi Elimelekh of Dinov [d. 1841], especially 1858), or the numerous Hasidic varia that began to be printed in the second half of the nineteenth century. On such nineteenth-century magical collections and other printed sources, see Gellman 2021.

53. This applies to even those Hasidic schools with a more cerebral or sober reputation such as Habad or Przysucha (cf. the remarks in Gellman 2021, 190–91). Thus, in addition to the fact that many manuscripts of Habad literature preserve magical recipes (as, for example, the manuscripts listed above n42, all but the last two of which are connected to this school), it appears that some of its leaders recommended such recipes themselves. See, for example, University of California Library Los Angeles Ms. 828 bx. 3.12, 422b; Russian State Library Ms. 182:284, 345a; National Library of Israel Ms. Heb. 28°8601, 16b–18a. An outstanding example from the school of Przysucha is Jacob Aryeh of Radzymin (d. 1874) who was renowned for his medico-magical activities. Surviving correspondences he carried on with his colleagues (including, most prominently, Isaac Meir of Gur [d. 1866]) printed in his *Bikurei aviv* offer a vivid picture of some of his methods and influences (1948, 79a–82b). The final page of the first edition of the work (1937) presents a sacred name for protection described as having been found among the remedies he used to record in the blank pages of "an ancient manuscript by a particular Kabbalist" that he possessed (later printings omit the reference to the Kabbalist). For more on this figure and some of his activities, see Tuszewicki 2017.

54. On the perceived magical power of objects with which the Hasidic saint has come into contact, see Biale 2018, 202–209; Goldman-Ida 2007, 15–16. On the ritual dispensing of "leftovers" (*shirayim*), see Biale 2018, 195–97; Nadler 2005.

55. In the words of Moshe Idel, "By becoming the embodiment of the ideals of the community [the Hasidic saint] is also able to fulfill, according to the ideology of Hasidism and the expectations of its followers . . . a broad range of its needs" (Idel 1995, 214). Cf. Sharot 1982, 163–64.

56. While this study has argued for the ubiquity of magic in Hasidic culture, one may still discern a great variety of attitudes toward particular aspects of what we have been subsuming under this category. This is particularly so in the case of healing practices, in which Hasidic leaders had to negotiate not only the inherent tensions between medicine and magic but also the new challenges posed by the spread of modern medicine as well. For specific examples reflecting some of these complexities, see Assaf 2002, 95, 261–64; Brill 2001; Green 1979, 234–40; Nigal 2012, 172–79; Segal 2011, 237–47.

57. The term has received surprisingly little attention. To the best of my knowledge, the only scholar to have referred to it directly was Gershom Scholem, who commented on it in passing (2008, 94n11). Its earliest written attestation appears to be in the corpus of traditions connected to Phineas Shapira of Koretz (mentioned above n44). See, for example 2003, I:326, 340, 484, 490, 491; II:119. The reference to wielders of magical power as "good Jews" further suggests that one should probably view the meaning of the terms *ba'al shem* and *ba'al shem tov* not solely as "master of the (good) name" (as argued by Rosman 2013, 13) but as connoting, in addition, "someone with a (good) reputation."

58. Carlo Ginzburg has suggested that epithets with the adjective "good" that are frequently used to name such figures contain "an ambiguous nuance of a propitiatory character" (1991, 100). The appearance of the title "good Jews" to designate Hasidic leaders further suggests the possible connection of these figures and their activities to the kinds of indigenous archaic folk traditions exemplified most famously by the case of the *benandanti* ("good walkers") described in Ginzburg 2011.

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