

## ***A Large Glass of Strong Wine***

It happened that the Baal Shem Tov was sitting around a table and talking with a group of his followers at the home of a wealthy supporter in the State of Walachia.

The conversation turned to a wine made from an extraordinary type of grape that could only be found in the valley where they lived. This special grape wine was so strong that it was only served by mixing a very small amount of it into a large glass of water.\* And they all agreed that even then, it was still almost too strong to drink.

The Baal Shem Tov asked if he could try the wine, but not mixed with anything else. Of course the host, a faithful chasid, obliged, but he filled only a very small glass with the wine. When he served it to him, everyone watched nervously as the Baal Shem slowly sipped and savored the wine, and then drank the remainder in one swallow.

When he finished, the Baal Shem Tov said in a surprised voice, "This wine is so delicious, why did you serve it in such a small glass?"

The host answered: "Because Rebbe, it is so strong that it is actually dangerous to drink a large amount."

"I am not afraid of strong wine," the Baal Shem Tov replied. "In fact, I would like another glass of that wine. And this time, please serve me a large glass."

The host filled a large glass with the special strong wine and handed it with trepidation to his Rebbe. Without hesitation, the Baal Shem Tov quickly drank the whole glass.

They all stared at him in fright as the Baal Shem Tov's face turned beet red, and his hair stood straight up from his head as though it were on fire. Both the host and his guests were so afraid that they could not move or even speak.

But before anything more happened, the Baal Shem Tov passed one of his hands across his face and at once he returned to normal.

There wasn't a sound in the house. The host and his guests could barely breathe.

The Baal Shem Tov broke the silence, saying: "Our holy Sages of the Talmud (mentioning them should be for a blessing) taught: 'Wine is strong but fear removes its effect.' When we really see the greatness of the Holy One Blessed be He, we are struck by fear and trembling, and that completely counteracts the effects of even the strongest wine!"

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of Tzvi-Meir HaCohane (Howard M. Cohn. Patent Attorney) on // baalshemtov.com.

\* *Editor's note:* Like the wine of Talmudic times that had to be diluted 3 parts water to 1 part wine.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer** [of blessed memory: 18 Elul 5458 - 6 Sivan 5520 (Aug. 1698 - May 1760 C.E.)], **the Baal Shem Tov** ["Master of the Good Name"—often referred to as "the *Besht*" for short], a unique and seminal figure in Jewish history, revealed his identity as an exceptionally holy person, on his 36th birthday, **18 Elul** 5494 (1734 C.E.), and made the until-then underground Chasidic movement public. He wrote no books, although many works claim to contain his teachings. One available in English is the excellent annotated translation of *Tzava'at Hariwash*, published by Kehos.

*Connection:* Weekly Reading -- "*He [Noah] drank of the wine and became drunk.*" (Gen. 9:21)