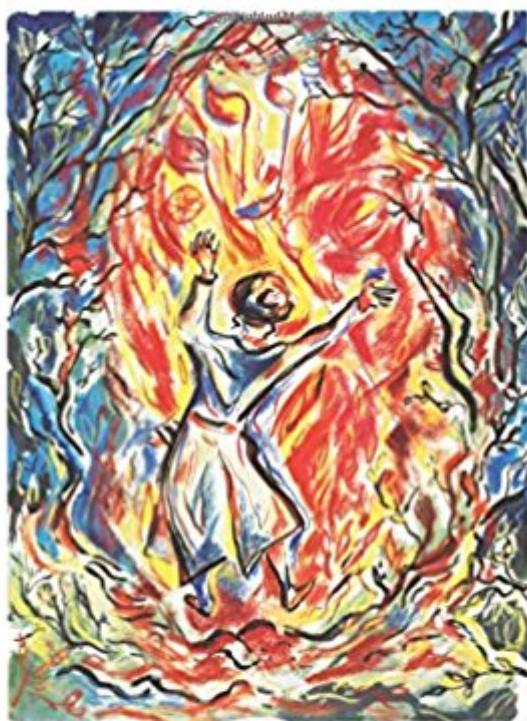


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The Light And Fire Of The Baal Shem Tov



*The Light and Fire
of the Baal Shem Tov*

Yitzhak Buxbaum

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Synopsis

This is a life, in stories, of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), the founder of Hasidism. The Baal Shem Tov, or the Besht, as he is commonly called, led a revival in Judaism that put love and joy at the center of religious life and championed the piety of the common folk against the rabbinic establishment. He has been recognized as one of the greatest teachers in Jewish history, and much of what is alive and vibrant in Judaism today, in all denominations, derives from his inspiration.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was descended from several illustrious Hasidic dynasties, wrote: "The Baal Shem Tov brought heaven to earth. He and his disciples, the Hasidim, banished melancholy from the soul and uncovered the ineffable delight of being a Jew."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Yitzhak Buxbaum's book is the scripture that should have been written about the Baal Shem Tov two-hundred-and-fifty years ago, but wasn't. No one who wants to draw from the wellsprings of Hasidism should be without this book. If you don't have enough money to buy it, pawn your shoes and run to the bookstore barefoot.

Zalman Schachter-Salomi, Buxbaum has put his finger on the pulse of the values that lie at the heart of the Baal Shem Tov's message and conveys them in words that speak to the heart of our generation.

Arthur Green, Wow! What a feast for those who love stories of the Baal Shem Tov! Yitzhak is a master storyteller, who has devoted a life time to the discovery of stories that quicken the heart and inspire us to live with ever more joy, amazement, and holy integrity.

Marcia Prager, The finest collection of

Baal Shem Tov stories ever amassed in any language. • Miles Krassen

"Reading this book is sure to uplift, inspire, and shift one's modern-day perspective in a most radical way." • Tirzah Firestone "This extraordinary work brings together stories and teachings from Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), the mystical founder of Hasidism. Those familiar with quotations by this sage will rejoice in the chance to discover more from his deep well of insights into the presence of God in the warp and the woof of our daily lives. Those who know nothing about this storyteller and controversial Jewish leader will savor the deluge of material presented on these pages. Buxbaum has done us all a wonderful moral service by revealing the depth dimensions of a warm heart. Reading this master work, one bows down in praise of the Father of Hasidism whose legacy has not diminished with time, but only grown more expansive and profound." • Spirituality & Health (Spirituality and Health) "A wonderfully, enchanting compilation of stories from the Baal Shem Tov that captures the essence and Yiddishkeit of chassidut. A fabulous tome for the old and young, for those who are liberal or those who are traditional. Buxbaum's compilation is enjoyable for bedtime reading for adults and children, as well as an outstanding source for scholars and rabbis." - Shamash, February 22, 2006 (Shamash) "A fabulous tome for the old and the young, for those who are liberal or those who are traditional. Buxbaum's compilation is enjoyable for bedtime reading for adults and children, as well as an outstanding source for scholars and rabbis." • Shamash Book of the Month, July

2006 Yitzhak Buxbaum's "The Light and Fire of the Ba'al Shem Tov" is a beautifully put together, easily accessible treasury of these tales. Its uniqueness lies in his efforts to place the tales, as best as he can, in chronological order and so paint for us a sophisticated biography of the Ba'al Shem Tov.... This fine work is user-friendly with useful endnotes, a glossary of Jewish terms and a bibliography to aid further study. • Jewish Chronicle, Rabbi Demant, 8th September 2006 "This book does something that happens only occasionally in the field of scholarship: It replaces every other book ever published in English on the subject of the Baal Shem Tov. And it is a delight to read from cover to cover. Each tale is wonderful, every teaching is deep and rich, each page feels holy. I predict that this rare and amazing book will be a classic. It is not just a book. It's a holy book."

• Arthur Kurzweil, Parabola (Parabola) "Buxbaum has used all the hasidic and scholarly sources, but I love the way he tells the Besht's story 'from within.' He has his finger on the pulse of the values that lie at the heart of the Baal Shem Tov's message and conveys them in words that speak to the heart of our generation." • Rabbi Arthur Green "These Baal Shem Tov tales restore my faith in the power of love and simple, wholehearted devotion." • Estelle Frankel, Tikkun "The Baal Shem Tov is the progenitor of Hasidism, and therefore, also, the papa of

American Jewish spiritual renewal. So, in a sense, Buxbaum's book about him is our primary 'source' book. Buxbaum's devotion to, passion for, and faith in his material glisten on every page." • Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, The J. "As a work of Jewish storytelling or an inspiration to draw one closer to God, this collection of teachings and parables provides a deep inspiration." (Aaron Howard, Jewish Herald Voice, December 7, 2006)"It is said that a tzadik's story is like a prayer. If that is true, then Yitzhak Buxbaum's The Light and Fire of the Baal Shem Tov is one long prayer and, like a prayer, it can heal. If you're depressed, distressed, ailing or just want balm for your soul, this remarkable book will transport you to a place where miracles do occur. "The genius of the Besht has long been known and celebrated, but the genius of Buxbaum is a revelation as he passes on the story of the Besht's life through these thought-provoking and humorous stories."- Judith Fein, Hadassah Magazine, March 2007 (Hadassah Magazine) "This extraordinary work brings together stories and teachings from Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), the mystical founder of Hasidism. Those familiar with quotations by this sage will rejoice in the chance to discover more from his deep well of insights into the presence of God in the warp and the woof of our daily lives. Those who know nothing about this storyteller and controversial Jewish leader will savor the deluge of material presented on these pages. Buxbaum has done us all a wonderful moral service by revealing the depth dimensions of a warm heart. Reading this master work, one bows down in praise of the Father of Hasidism whose legacy has not diminished with time, but only grown more expansive and profound." • "Spirituality & Health (Spirituality and Health)" "A wonderfully enchanting compilation of stories from the Baal Shem Tov that captures the essence and Yiddishkeit of chassidut. A fabulous tome for the old and young, for those who are liberal or those who are traditional. Buxbaum's compilation is enjoyable for bedtime reading for adults and children, as well as an outstanding source for scholars and rabbis." • Shamash, February 22, 2006 (Sanford Lakoff)"A fabulous tome for the old and the young, for those who are liberal or those who are traditional. Buxbaum's compilation is enjoyable for bedtime reading for adults and children, as well as an outstanding source for scholars and rabbis." "Shamash Book of the Month, July 2006" "This book does something that happens only occasionally in the field of scholarship: It replaces every other book ever published in English on the subject of the Baal Shem Tov. And it is a delight to read from cover to cover. Each tale is wonderful, every teaching is deep and rich, each page feels holy. I predict that this rare and amazing book will be a classic. It is not just a book. It is a holy book." • Arthur Kurzweil, Parabola (Parabola)"Buxbaum has used all the hasidic and scholarly sources, but I love the way he tells the Besht's story 'from within.' He has his

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I had extensively read & studied Martin Buber's book on the same subject so i was hesitant to purchase this one. Now i wish i had bought it sooner. This is more a life-in-stories (tales & teachings) than a biography. You can read this book on more than one level. The first would be for entertainment. The second would be for the moral and spiritual teachings. The third would be to draw closer to your god. If you are a prayer warrior this book can be very edifying. Be sure not to miss the appendix and notes which are rich with applicable information.

To fully enjoy this book, begin by reading aloud. The "story-teller" sets the mood so that the soul may enter into another realm -- the realm of the mystical within the most simple aspects of life. Gradually the reader steps into the rhythm of the anthology of tales of the Baal Shem Tov, who is widely held to be the progenitor of the Chassidic movement. If the reader resists total immersion into this vision, perhaps a review of the crises of the era from which the Baal Shem Tov arises would help. Programs have physically devastated the Jews. The false messiahs Shabtai ben Zvi and Jacob Frank have dashed the hopes and damaged the faith of the people. Jewish leaders attempt to

protect the flock from further ravages by focusing upon the intellectual pursuit of Torah, which tends to leave the poor and under-educated masses in the dark and cold. Onto the stage steps a charismatic figure. Like fire, charisma can be a danger or it can be a blessing. In the Baal Shem Tov, this charismatic energy is the light and fire of Torah, which both illuminates and warms all Jewish souls. As I read this book, I found myself slowly warming up, then enjoying the light and fire found within the tales of the Baal Shem Tov. Toward the end, the fire cools as the story follows through to the death of the Besht. It behooves the reader to review the middle parts to regain the light and warmth.

Although I grew up with Martin Buber's tales of the Baal Shem Tov, this volume has a richness and depth which makes it invaluable. My only fault--and it's strictly a personal one--is that there are too many "God, blessed be He"'s and other religious phrases I could personally do without. But it all fits with the Baal Shem Tov's personality, if not Yirzhak Buxbaum's. If you have any interest in the father of Hasidism, you will find this volume a delight from beginning to end (and it should be read chronologically, even though you could pick a story from anywhere to read).

This is one of my favorite books on my bookshelf. When this book came to me, it was much thicker than I thought. For some reason I thought it was going to be a small book. My fiance and I are only a quarter way through this book. We usually read the stories to each other when we're driving. Every story has such a good moral and makes you think about your own life and those around you. There's a few stories in there I could read over and over again. Great book.

This collections of parables about the Baal Shem Tov (obm) was extremely enlightening and filled my heart with joy. Although I have read the entire book, I still go back and re-read many sections to ensure my heart and mind fully understand what we are being taught. This book is definitely a must-read, and has become a treasure among my book collection.

Short stories from the Baal Shem Tov, leader of the Hassidic movement and how he amassed thousands of followers.. the stories are very inspirational.

.com! Thanks! I got The Light and Fire of the Baal Shem Tov ahead of schedule and am delightfully reading and enjoying the stories of his life, times, verses, thoughts and prayers. Again, thanks for your good and timely service.

How can it not be excellent? I pick this up every week and read a story or two - it speaks to the soul.

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