

One more post dealing with my memory book before moving on to other things. I thought readers of the blog might be interested in the following passage, where I talk about a famous Jewish teacher who was known, on the basis of eyewitness reports, to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. No, I'm not talking about Jesus. I'm talking about the an 18th century holy man, who founded Hasidic Judaism. Here is what I have to say, in the course of my chapter 3. (The following is a relatively unedited draft: it is not polished yet for style or typos, so don't worry about those.... The discussion occurs in the middle of a chapter on the value of eyewitness testimony; I include the preceding paragraph to give some context)

To sum up the situation, consider the words of one of the world's leading experts on distorted memory, Daniel Schacter, "Numerous experiments have demonstrated ways in which imagining events can lead to the development of false memories for those events."[\[1\]](#)

But does such research have any bearing on the memories about Jesus, a great teacher and miracle worker, by eyewitnesses or by those who later were told stories by eyewitnesses - or even those told stories by people who were not eyewitnesses? Can imagining that a great religious leader said and did something make someone remember that he really said or did these things? It might be interesting to address that question by looking at another famous Jewish teacher. For my example I have chosen a person from the modern period known as the Baal Shem Tov. He was the 18th century founder of Hasidic Judaism.

Memories of the Baal Shem Tov

The name Baal Shem Tov is Hebrew for "Master of the Good Name." It was bestowed on various Jewish holy men who were thought to have special, mystical insight into the nature and reality of God (who was called, reverentially, "the good name"). Even though the designation was given to others, "the" Baal Shem Tov refers to a Jewish teacher named Israel ben Eliezer (1700-1760 CE) who was known for his compelling teachings and mystical powers. The designation is often shortened into an acronym, so sometimes he is simply called "the Besht."[\[2\]](#)

Even though he was not just like Jesus - very, very far from it! - the Besht was remembered in some intriguingly similar ways. He was thought to be...

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