

Teach us to Number our Days - Words of Wisdom on the 260th Yahrzeit of the Ba'al Shem Tov

Shavuot 2020 / 5780

“The Ba'al Shem Tov”

(Deathbed Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters)

On the eve of Shavuot, the final night of his life, the Ba'al Shem Tov's students were gathered close to him as he taught about the giving of the Torah. In the morning he requested that all of them should gather, and he gave them instructions on how to care for him after his departure. Afterward he instructed them to give him his prayer book, and he said, "I will now spend some time speaking with the Kadosh Barukh Hu - the Holy One Blessed is He."

From the Ba'al Shem Tov's chamber his students heard him saying, "I concede those two hours to you. Do not bother me." They asked him with whom he was speaking, and he said to them, "Don't you see the Angel of Death that was always fleeing from me? And now that he has been given permission over me, his wings are spread and it is a great joy for him."

The Ba'al Shem Tov then offered his students a sign, that when his soul would be released, the two clocks of the house would stop. He washed his hands and the big clock stopped and the people turned it around so that it could not be seen, and he said to them, "I am not worried about myself, because I know clearly, that I will leave through this door and immediately enter through another door - the entrance to Olam Haba - the world-to-come." The Ba'al Shem Tov once again sat up on his bed and instructed his students to stand around him as he spoke words of Torah and said: "Now I finally know the purpose for which I was created." He instructed them to recite verses of Psalms as he lied down and sat up, directing his prayers towards God, until they did not hear him articulating words any longer. He told them to cover him with a sheet and he began to shake and tremble, and then he rested. They noticed that the small clock had stopped. They waited a few moments, and then witnessed his soul depart. The day was Shavuot 5520 - May 16, 1760.