

Baruch the Holy Drunkard **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

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Purim

In the time of the Baal Shem Tov, it happened that a harsh decree threatened the Jews of a certain town. The people came to the Baal Shem Tov to ask that he pray for them. He responded by sending them to another small town seeking a certain "Reb Baruch" for a blessing that would ensure their safety.

The townsfolk spent several days looking for this Reb Baruch. Finally, they found a man named Baruch, but he seemed to them to be far from a holy man or a sage. Indeed, brief inquiry revealed that Baruch spent almost all the day almost every day in a drunken stupor. The townsfolk, however, with faith in the Baal Shem Tov's instructions, kept him from drinking until he was sober enough to fulfill their request for a blessing, after which he promptly fell asleep.

On returning home and hearing that the decree against their town had been nullified, the townsfolk asked the Baal Shem Tov how a common drunk – as they perceived him – could give such a powerful blessing.

*"Baruch," the Baal Shem Tov responded, "once risked his life to save another. In return, G*d decreed he would be able to bless others. Unfortunately, Baruch misused this privilege in some way (I cannot reveal the details), and, in order to minimize the chance that this might happen again, G*d decided to keep him perpetually drunk. If, however, someone seeking a blessing has the patience to wait for him to sober up, Baruch is still able to bestow a blessing."*

Commenting on this story, the *Hiddushei HaRim* (Rebbe Yitzhak Me'ir of Ger, 1799-1866) says that Purim, like Reb Baruch, has the power to fulfill our wishes, if we are able to transcend the material diversions of the festival – the food, the drink, the costumes. Just as Reb Baruch was a most holy individual, capable of granting a blessing to anyone who could penetrate beyond his drunkenness, so Purim can give blessing to those who can penetrate beyond its materiality.

And, just as G*d's Presence in Baruch is hidden by Baruch's drunkenness, so G*d hides G*dself in Purim, for the Book of Esther, the story of Purim, is one of only two Books of the Bible (the other is the Song of Songs) in which G*d's Name is not explicitly mentioned.

May we find within ourselves the insight to see past the materiality to the holiness of Purim.