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The two giants of modern European Jewish history, the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon each had strong opinions on the practice of medicine. It is told that once the Vilna Gaon went to visit his brother, Reb Yissachar Dov, who was sick. Two doctors happened to be present. The Gaon turned to his brother and asked, "Why do you need doctors, surely Ha-Shem heals the sick?" One of the doctors interjected, "Did Ha-Shem create doctors and medicines for nothing?" "And why did Ha-Shem create pigs," retorted the Gaon, "Not for consumption by Jews! So too with doctors: maybe the gentiles go to them, but for the Jews, Ha-Shem is the Healer of the sick and Creator of remedies".

On the other hand, the Baal Shem Tov was recognized as both a spiritual healer as well as a physician.

It is recorded in [Shivchei HaBesh"t](#), that a prominent doctor came to visit a countess. The countess lavishly praised the Baal Shem Tov as a great man and an expert healer. The doctor asked the countess to send for the Baal Shem Tov. When he came, the doctor asked him if it was true that he was an expert physician.

"True" answered the Baal Shem Tov.

"From where did you learn. Who was your professor?" asked the doctor.

"Ha-Shem taught me" answered the Baal Shem Tov.

The doctor laughed heartily, and asked if he knew how to take pulses.

The Baal Shem Tov answered that "I myself suffer from a certain problem. You take my pulse, and see if you can determine what it is, and I'll take yours and we will see what it reveals."

The doctor took the Baal Shem Tov's pulse, and could tell that there was some kind of problem, but he didn't know what it was. The truth was, that the Baal Shem Tov was sick-- he was "love-sick" for Ha-Shem, (Shir Hashirim 2:5), but this was beyond the doctor's understanding. Subsequently, The Baal Shem Tov took the doctor's hand to examine his pulses. The Baal Shem immediately turned to the countess and asked her if they had had a burglary. He went on to mention a number of precious items.

"Yes" answered the countess, "it's some years since they were stolen, and I have no idea where they are."

"Send to the doctor's lodgings and open his chest. You will find everything there, because I can feel the theft in the doctor's pulse."

The countess sent to search the doctor's lodgings and found all the stolen goods, exactly as the Baal Shem Tov had said. The doctor left in disgrace.