

# SHABBOS DANCING

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

**Question:** Why did the Rabbis restrict clapping and dancing on Shabbos and Yom Tov?

**Discussion:** The Talmud<sup>1</sup> records that the Rabbis prohibited playing musical instruments on Shabbos and Yom Tov because musical instruments often need to be tuned, a potential violation of the Shabbos Labor of Makeh b'patish.<sup>2</sup> Not only did they prohibit all different types of musical instruments, but they also included all other noise-making objects, such as bells, whistles and rattles.<sup>3</sup>

The Rabbis of the Talmud<sup>4</sup> went even further. They decreed that certain actions which could lead to the playing of musical instruments should also be restricted, even if at the moment there are no musical instruments present or even available. Apparently, they were concerned that such an atmosphere could lead a creative individual to forget that it is Shabbos, and fashion a makeshift musical instrument on the spot.<sup>5</sup> Thus they banned clapping and dancing as well, since these are activities which generate an atmosphere in which music is played.

**Question:** Nowadays, does the Rabbinic injunction against clapping and dancing on Shabbos and Yom Tov still apply?

**Discussion:** While all authorities agree that the original edict against playing any kind of instrument remains in effect nowadays,<sup>6</sup> there are conflicting opinions whether or not the additional decree against clapping and dancing is also in effect. Some argue that nowadays we no longer have the ability or talent to fashion a musical instrument on the spot, so we should not prohibit activities that could lead to the fashioning of musical instruments.<sup>7</sup> Others hold that the original Rabbinic decree applied only to dance movements which required musical accompaniment, not to the unstructured and informal circle dancing popular today.<sup>8</sup> For whatever reason, the fact remains that it became customary for people to clap and dance on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and the poskim did not strenuously object to this behavior.<sup>9</sup> While it behooves a ba'al nefesh (a person who is especially meticulous in his mitzvah observance) to refrain from clapping and dancing<sup>10</sup> on Shabbos and Yom Tov (except on Simchas Torah<sup>11</sup>) especially for non-mitzvah purposes<sup>12</sup> and many people are

careful about it,<sup>13</sup> the basic halachah follows the opinion of the poskim who hold that nowadays, the Rabbinic decree against clapping and dancing<sup>14</sup> is no longer applicable.<sup>15</sup>

**Question:** When the Rabbis restricted clapping on Shabbos and Yom Tov, was applauding also included?

**Discussion:** No, it was not. The original injunction against clapping only included clapping to a specific rhythm or beat, since that type of clapping may lead to the fashioning of musical instruments. Applause, clapping to wake someone from his sleep or any other type of clapping not done to a specific rhythm, is permitted.<sup>16</sup> The same halachah applies to banging on a table top with one's fist or fingers. If it is done in order to silence a crowd or catch someone's attention, it is permitted, since it is not a rhythmic beat. Beating on the table top to a specific beat, however, is included in the Rabbinic injunction against clapping and dancing, and should be avoided by those who do not clap and dance on Shabbos even nowadays. Tapping a bottle or a glass with a spoon or a fork to a specific rhythm or beat should be avoided by everyone, since this is similar to using non-musical instruments (such as a rattle) to produce a musical sound, and may have been included in the original injunction against playing musical instruments which applies nowadays as well.<sup>17</sup>

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1. *Eiruvim* 104a.
2. As explained by Rambam, *Hilchos Shabbos* 23:4.
3. Rama, O.C. 338:1.
4. *Beitzah* 30a.
5. As explained by Sha'ar Efrayim, O.C. 36, quoted in *Minchas Elazar* 1:29.
6. *Beur Halachah* 339:3, s.v. *lehakel*.
7. *Tosafos*, *Beitzah* 30a. See also *Ritva*, *Shabbos* 148b.
8. *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 339:9; *Lev Avraham* 42.
9. Rama, O.C. 338:2, 339:3.
10. Clapping with a *shinui* is permitted according to all opinions; O.C. 339:3; *Mishnah Berurah* 338:1.
11. *Mishnah Berurah* 339:8.
12. *Mishnah Berurah* 339:10.
13. *Kaf ha-Chayim* 339:13-14 and *Yechaveh Da'as* 2:58.
14. Certainly merely walking around in a circle while singing is permissible according to all views; *Devar Yehoshua* 2:42-4; *Yechaveh Da'as* 2:58 (footnote).
15. *Minchas Elazar* 1:29; *Igros Moshe*, O.C. 2:100. Even those who do not dance on Shabbos are permitted to do so during *bein ha-shemashos*; *Eishel Avraham*, *Tanina*, O.C. 299:10.
16. *Mishnah Berurah* 338:1, 339:9; *Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasah* 28:36.
17. Based on *Beur Halachah* 339:3, s.v. *lehakel*.

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