

Dance As A Part of Jewish Life

Source Sheet compiled by Rabbi Shari Shamah

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Dancing goes all the way back to Biblical Times!

Miriam leads the people in dancing after leaving Egypt

| <i>Exodus 15:20</i> | שמות ט"ו:כ' |
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| Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, picked up a hand-drum, and all the women went out after her in dance with hand-drums. | תָּקַח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחָת אֶת־הַתֵּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתֵּצֵאנָה כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתֻפִּים וּבַמְּחֹלֹת: |

King David was known for dancing, and playing musical instruments

| <i>II Samuel 6:14</i> | שמואל ב ו':י"ד |
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| David whirled with all his might before GOD; David was girted with a linen ephod. | וַדָּוִד מְכַרְכֵּר בְּכָל־עֹז לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַדָּוִד חָגֹר אֶפֶוד בָּד: |

The Psalms (written by David) mention dancing

| <i>Psalms 30:11-12</i> | תהילים ל':י"א-י"ב |
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| You turned my lament into dancing, you undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy | הִפַּכְתָּ מִסָּפְדִי לְמַחֹל לִי פָתַחְתָּ שְׂקִי וַתִּצְרֹנֵנִי שִׂמְחָה: |

| <i>Psalms 149:3</i> | תהילים קמ"ט:ג' |
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| Let them praise God's name in dance; with timbrel and lyre let them chant God's praises. | יְהַלְלוּ שְׁמוֹ בְּמַחֹל בַּתֵּף וּבְנֹר וְזָמְרוּ־לוֹ: |

And in Ecclesiastes...

| <i>Ecclesiastes 3:4</i> | קהלת ג':ד' |
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| A time for weeping and a time for laughing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing; | עֵת לְבָכּוֹת וְעֵת לִשְׂחֹק עֵת סֹפֹד וְעֵת רִקְדּוֹד: |

- As you think about the span of Torah, did the idea of dancing jump out at you as a theme?
- Why do you think dancing is repeated throughout Torah?
- What emotion does the Ecclesiastes text bring up?
- Sadness turned to joy is repeated a few times, can dancing erase sadness?

Dance As A Part of Jewish Life

The Baal Shem Tov embodied dancing with joy

The Dancing Jews by Eliezer Steinman

The Baal Shem Tov (Besht, a 17th century Rabbi and founder of Chasidic Judaism) was known for breaking into dance and was once asked why. “‘Chassidim,’ concluded the Baal Shem Tov, ‘are moved by the melody that issues forth from every creature in Gd's creation. If this makes them appear mad to those with less sensitive ears, should they therefore cease to dance?’”

- Have you danced with reckless abandon?
- Have you seen someone dancing with pure joy?
- Is dancing spiritual?

Dancing to The Hora

Gleaned from The Secret History of Hava Nagila

By Edwin Seroussi and James Loeffler

- Generally, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1882-1938) is credited with writing Hava Nagila.
- He was born in Latvia and settled in Jerusalem in 1907. He set out to create a modern Hebrew song to represent the rebirth of Jewish life in Israel. He presented Hava Nagila at a mixed choir concert in Jerusalem sometime in 1918.
- The words, “Hava nagila, hava nagila/ Hava nagila ve-nismeha”—“Come, let us rejoice, let us rejoice, let us rejoice and be happy.” Are reminiscent of Psalm 118.
- He said he based the melody on something he learned in 1915 from Hasidim from the Sadigura court living in then Palestine.
- Is he truly the composer? Descendants of Cantor Moshe Nathanson, who was a student of Idelsohn, said that he set the words to the tune as part of a class assignment.
- Idelsohn's works have been preserved in the Klau library of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, where he later worked, and have been studied. While it appears as though the work belongs to Idelsohn, it is still contested.

- Dancing the Hora is iconic at Jewish weddings, simchas, gatherings and at summer camp. When you see a Hora at a function how do you feel?
- In what way does this dance represent Judaism for you?
- What do you think people think who aren't Jewish and see the Hora?
- Would you consider the Hora to be a tribal ritual?

Dance As A Part of Jewish Life

Israeli folk dancing tradition

Dan Ronen, in [Israeli Folk Dance](#)

Community dances were brought to Israel in all 3 of the first waves of Aliyot (pilgrimage) to Israel. 1882-1923.

Between 1923-1943 Israeli Choreographers began to compose original dances for festival pageants mostly on Kibbutzim.

The Israeli folk dance “movement” was born between the years 1944 and 1948. In folk-dance circles, the history of this movement is chronicled according to the dates of the national dance festivals, the first of which was held at Kibbutz Daliyyah in the hills of the Ephraim region in July, 1944.

- Do you enjoy Israeli dancing?
- Israeli folk dancing used to be associated with the Kibbutz movement and was “old time” Israel. Have you seen Israeli dance evolve?
- Did you know that there are more than 4000 Israeli folk dances on Israelidances.com
- Do you think that most Israelis today do Israeli folk dancing?