

Shayla: Are the Ransomed allowed to dance?

Meforshim:

Dancing and worship have a long history together. The people of Israel already associated dancing with worship before they received the Sinaitic Law.¹ They were not the only culture that associated dancing with worship. The false prophets of Baal danced, but not particularly well!² Because the Hebrew word “pasakh” can be translated “to limp or to be lame”, the HCSB describes their dancing as lame!

There is a time and a place for everything. If we dance, we should be sure that we do it at an appropriate time, an appropriate place, in an appropriate manner and for the appropriate reasons.³

Dancing is an appropriate response to great victory.⁴ The ladies of Israel danced when Pharaoh’s armies drowned in the Red Sea, when Jephthah subdued the Ammonites and when David killed Goliath. However, what greater victory could there be than the one the Ransomed celebrate over their Messiah’s victory?

Dancing is appropriate to praise and worship. Those who condemn the practice of dancing should be very careful. David’s wife Michal despised David for dancing as he worshipped Hashem but God judged her for it and she was barren for the rest of her life.⁵

It is appropriate to dance when a lost one finds his way home.⁶ After telling us that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who don’t need repentance”, the Master went on to illustrate that process of acknowledgment, confession, repentance, restitution and restoration with the story of the Prodigal. That story ended in feasting, singing and dancing. Again I ask, who has more to celebrate than the Ransomed in this regard? It is only right that we should respond to God’s forgiveness and grace with joyful dancing.⁷

That is why the Psalmist repeatedly encourages us to dance in celebration of God’s forgiveness and our return to the Father’s household. It is right that we should sing, dance and clap in joy over the Son’s great victory over death and sin.⁸

It is also appropriate to quit dancing and to mourn over our sin.⁹ Just as victory over sin and gratitude for God’s great salvation should provoke joy and dancing, sin should cause us to mourn and weep. This is because Hashem is seeking passionate people. However, He does not condone hypocrisy. Dancing must be the result of a heart-felt passion rather than simple mechanical gyrations. That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t dance when we don’t feel like it, but rather that we should get our attitudes adjusted and start feeling like it!¹⁰

It is interesting that dancing before the Lord is associated with humility. Perhaps it is because the dancer must completely abandon himself to his joy and forget about those who may be judgmentally watching?¹¹

We must be careful to not force our joy upon others. Just because we are ready to dance doesn’t mean everyone in the congregation must join us.¹² We must be careful to not abuse our right to dance, allowing it to become an occasion to stumble in other brothers and sisters in Christ who may have been raised differently from us. Further, the style of dancing must not invite sensuous or lewd thoughts in the minds of others. What a husband and wife do in the sanctuary of their own home is their own affair, but public dancing must be maintained well within the boundaries of decency.¹³

¹ Exodus 32:18-21

² 1 Kings 18:26-27

³ Ecclesiastes 3:4

⁴ Exodus 15:19-20; Judges 11:33-34; 1 Samuel 18:6-7

⁵ 1 Chronicles 15:29; 2 Samuel 6:13-23

⁶ Luke 15:7, 21-25

⁷ Jeremiah 31:3-4, 13

⁸ Psalm 30:11-12; 149:2-4; 150:3-6

⁹ Lamentations 5:14-16

¹⁰ Revelation 3:15-16; Deuteronomy 28:46-47

¹¹ 2 Samuel 6:21-22; Psalm 149:3-4; Luke 15:21, 25

¹² Matthew 11:16-17; Luke 7:31-32

¹³ Matthew 5:27-28; Mark 9:42; 1 Corinthians 8:11-13; 1 John 2:9-10