

Circle Dancing

Let them praise His name with the dance.

Psalm 149:3

During the Festival of *Succoth* (Feast of Tabernacles) 1996, some of our Brethren had an opportunity to participate in a wonderful worship experience called 'Davidic Dancing.' For some it may have seemed to be just another display of spiritual emotionalism, but for many others it was an intense form of total worship towards the God in heaven who has created us. So what is one to believe? Is dancing a legitimate form of worship or is it all just another show?

One brother wrote: "I have been reading the Bible for 28 years and I don't remember anything said about having to dance at God's feasts. Guess what? I read the meanings of a few Hebrew words, and I promise you, you won't believe what I am about to tell you.

"Moses' message to the Pharaoh was, '...Let my people go, that they may hold a feast (*chagag*) unto me in the wilderness.' For some reason I don't remember, I checked Strong's Concordance to see what the Hebrew word for 'feast' meant in Strong's words."

Like many others, this brother was shocked to learn that the Hebrew word *chagag* (hah-gahg' Strong's #2287) means much more than '*that they may hold a feast*,' as it is translated in the King James Bible. The mental picture of many who have attended the Feast in the past, is of people sitting quietly in chairs listening to a speaker expound upon the scriptures. However, following is the definition as found in Gesenius' *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*:

"chagag (kindred to the root *chuwg* [hoog]) to go round in a circle, hence-- (1) *to dance*, I Sa. 30:16 (2) *to keep a festival*, from the idea of leaping, and dancing in sacred dances, Ex. 5:1; Lev. 23:41; especially of a public assembly, Psal. 42:5. ... (3) *to reel, to be giddy*, used of drunkards, Ps. 107:27; ..."

Now let us look at the 'kindred' root word *chuwg* (#2328): "TO DESCRIBE A CIRCLE, TO DRAW A CIRCLE, as with a compass."

Two other related words also yield the same basic theme: Strong's # 2329 is spelled and pronounced the same as #2328, *chuwg* (hoog): "*a circle, sphere*, used of the arch or vault of the sky,"

Finally there is the Hebrew word *chagah* (hah-gah' Strong's #2283). According to Strong it means: "from an unused root mean.(ing) to *revolve* (compare to 2287 *chagag*) prop. *vertigo*, i.e. (fig.) *fear*;--terror).

Another, more common word associated with the festivals is also derived from *chagag*. It is Strong's #2282 and is the Hebrew word *chag* (hahg). (Please note that is very difficult for people who speak only English to correctly pronounce the "ch" sound. It is very similar to the German "ch" sound as in the

name of the famous composer Bach. It is far easier just to use an "h" sound when it occurs at the beginning of Hebrew words. For those who are more daring, you may want to try adding the "ch" by slightly clearing your throat, as though you had a piece of popcorn husk caught in the back of the throat, and adding an "h" to it. Nice trick if you can do it. (Those who speak German, Russian or some of the Slavic languages will have no trouble with it.)

Gesenius defines *chag* as: (1) "*a festival, to keep a festival* (2) "*a festival sacrifice, a victim.*"

Most of the words translated as 'feast' in the Hebrew Scriptures come from this word, *chag* rather than from *chagag*.

In some instances the English translators inserted what really amounts to their personal commentary into the scriptures by adding words that just are not there, but failing to put them into italics. For example:

"Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose..." (Deut. 16:15a KJV)

Here the entire phrase, "shalt thou keep a solemn feast," is derived from the one Hebrew word, *chagag*. The passage could just as easily be translated; "Seven days you shall circle dance before YHVH, in the place which YHVH will choose..." There is absolutely no reason at all to insert the word "solemn" into this verse, it is merely the opinion of the translator.

Continuing, our brother wrote: "The Hebrew words *chagag* and *chag* have a root meaning 'circle;' which primarily means circle dancing, i.e. typical Jewish traditional dancing as preserved from antiquity.

"My thesis is this: Circle dancing (singing and joyfulness, not solemnity as a major theme) is the basic intention of God's ancient verbal description of his High Days."

~ Dancing Before YHVH ~

Now having this concept that *chagag* literally means 'dancing' or most probably 'circle dancing,' let us explore some of the other scriptures that use this word and see for ourselves what new information they might hold for us.

Chagag makes its first appearance in scripture in the book of Exodus, when Moses and Aaron go and ask Pharaoh to let the people go into the wilderness to hold a feast.

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast (*chagag*) to Me in the wilderness." (Ex. 5:1 NKJV)

While the English word "feast" is probably a good choice here, the problem is that it does not convey the true meaning of what constituted an Israelite Feast. In Hebrew it is understood that *chagag* includes singing and circle dancing. To quote our brother: "No wonder the Pharaoh didn't like that idea."

How is the Passover to be kept? Try this on for size:

"... this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it (*chagag*) as a feast (*chag*) to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast (*chagag*) by an everlasting ordinance."

(Ex. 12:14 NKJV)

The phrase "you shall keep it" is translated both times from the Hebrew word *chagag*; to dance, to reel, to be giddy. Maybe it would be better translated "You shall celebrate the feast (*chag*) forever."

What God is saying here is that He wants His people to rejoice. After all, this is the night that the Lord passed over the children of Israel because the blood of the lamb was on the doorposts. (Ex. 12:21-29) How much more should we as Believers celebrate the blood of *Yeshua*, our Passover lamb, which saves us from the second death?! (Rev. 20:11-15)

Is Passover the only time we are commanded to *chagag*?

"Three times you shall keep a feast (*chagag*) to Me in the year;

"You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread ... the Feast of Harvest ... and the Feast of Ingathering, ... Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God." (Ex. 23:14-17 NKJV)

All three festival seasons, Passover, Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles are mentioned as being times to *chagag*, circle dance and be giddy before YHVH.

How can we be sure that *chagag* means to dance? Two other uses of the word confirm that it does. In one case it literally means to dance, in the other it signifies great motion similar to dancing.

The first example is found in I Samuel chapter 30. It concerns a story about the town of Ziklag being destroyed by the Amalekites. David, who is not yet king, came with his men to Ziklag and found the destruction. All of the women and those with them had been taken captive. Included among the captives were two of David's wives, Ahinoam and Abigail. Apparently Ziklag was a community where the families of those men who followed David were staying.

David inquired of God through the ephod of Abiathar the priest, and was told by God to pursue the Amalekites. David and four hundred of his men pursued them until they came across an Egyptian who had been a servant of an Amalekite but had been abandoned because he became sick and could not continue traveling with them. It was this abandoned Egyptian servant who led David and his men to where the Amalekites were camped, and the following is what David saw when he peered into their camp:

"So when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing (*chagag*), because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah." (I Sam. 30:16 NKJV)

David let them party and *chagag* that night but the next day he attacked and recovered both the people and their belongings.

The second example is found in a beautiful song about how people should give thanks to God for all of the wonderful blessings and protection that He bestows upon them. Several examples of His works are given in Psalms 107; the following speaks of those who sail ships on the sea:

**"Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters,
They see the works of the LORD,
And His wonders in the deep.
For He commands and raises the stormy wind,
Which lifts up the waves of the sea.
They mount up to the heavens,
They go down again to the depths;
Their soul melts because of trouble.
They reel to and fro (*chagag*) and stagger like a
drunken man." (Psalm 107:23-27 NKJV)**

Again we see the word *chagag* used to convey the concept of exaggerated motion similar to that which would be used to describe circle dancing.

~ Round Dancing Too ~

As if it were not enough to learn that God wants his people to 'circle dance' before Him during the three pilgrimage festivals, it is also clear that 'round dancing' was also common. Exactly what the difference was between 'circle dancing' and 'round dancing' is not clear. They may have, in fact, been one and the same. Nevertheless, another Hebrew word, *machol* (mah-coal' = Strong's #4234) was also used several times in scripture. It means: "a (round) *dance*" which comes from another root word (#2342) *chul* (hool) which means: "to *twist* or *whirl*, to *dance*."

Maybe round dancing had more whirling than circle dancing.

**"Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
And His praise in the congregation of saints.
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise His name with the dance; (*machol*)
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel
and harp.
For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation."
(Psalm 149:1-4 NKJV)**

**"Praise the LORD!
Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!**

**Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; (*machol*)
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD!"** (Psalm 150 NKJV)

Here we have two direct commands to praise YHVH through dance. Dancing will be a part of the Kingdom of God during the Millennium as evidenced in the following scriptures:

"'At the same time,' says the LORD, 'I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.'

"Thus says the LORD: ...

**'Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!**

**You shall again be adorned with your tambourines,
And shall go forth in the dances (*machol*) of those
who rejoice.' ...**

Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, (*machol*)

And the young men and the old, together;

For I will turn their mourning to joy,

Will comfort them,

And make them rejoice rather than sorrow."

(Jer. 31:1-2,4,13 NKJV)

Machol or round dancing was the very type of dancing that was done by Miriam and the women of Israel after they crossed the Reed Sea.

"Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. (*macholah* = mah-coal-ah' = the feminine form of *machol*):

"And Miriam answered them:

'Sing to the LORD,

For He has triumphed gloriously!

The horse and its rider

He has thrown into the sea!'"

(Ex. 15:20-21 NKJV)

Apparently, dancing was an integral part of the worship of God during the time of Moses and Aaron.

~ Is Worship Dancing Appropriate Today? ~

Several questions come to mind concerning the appropriateness of dancing as a form of worship in today's congregations.

Is dancing an acceptable form of worship?

This question has been answered in the affirmative by the scriptures quoted above, which indicate that dancing is a totally legitimate, even commanded, form of worship, just like singing praises to God.

How can we know what Miriam's dancing was like?

Of course, we do not know. Neither do we know what her song sounded like. Does that stop any of us from worshipping in song? We can be sure the singing of *Yeshua's* time did not sound like the nineteenth century hymns that are still so popular in many church denominations today. Does that mean it is wrong to sing those kind of songs? Of course not, and dancing, like the songs we sing, needs to be done in a manner that praises and draws our attention to God and not to the people doing the singing or the dancing. The following is an example of dancing being perverted:

"And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. ... And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, 'There is a noise of war in the camp.' But he said:

*'It is not the voice of those who shout in victory,
Nor is it the voice of those who cry out in defeat,
But the voice of those who sing that I hear.'*

"So it was as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing (*macholah*). So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain."

(Ex. 32:15,17-19 NKJV)

Notice, the children of Israel were not only round dancing (*macholah*), they were also singing. Now, if their dancing was perverted then would not their singing also be perverted? Does that stop us from worshipping God in song? Of course not. Neither should the perversion of worship dancing stop anyone from the proper practice of worshipping in dance today.

Some might ask: Don't people that dance at worship services just do it to show off? There may be some that do feel a certain amount of vanity in their heart when they turn a good step, just as there are fine singers who, either in solo performances or even in congregational singing, can also have a wrong attitude of vanity as they sing because of their beautiful voices. Hopefully, in time that attitude will be completely replaced by one that is totally focused on worshipping God, for the true dance worshipper, like the true song worshipper, does not have self or another person in their mind when they are dancing.

Is it necessary to dance in order to properly worship God?

Certainly we do not have to dance in order to worship God, although we may be missing a very beautiful and extremely moving form of worship if we do not dance. There are many ways to worship God, including sitting quietly by a river's edge watching a bald eagle circle in the sky and praising Him for His magnificent creation. However, the problem that must constantly be faced, whenever a group of people come together to worship, is that of judging one another. In Paul's day, all Believers observed the Sabbath and the Festivals, and he wrote:

"Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." (Col. 2:16-17 NKJV)

What Paul was really addressing, in the above passage from Colossians, was the attitudes of those Believers from the strict schools of the Pharisees, who wanted everyone to do things according to the their traditions. What Paul was saying, is to not let anyone judge you about how you observe the festivals, new moons and sabbaths. In other words, Paul was telling the Colossians that if some of the Jews wanted to continue their super strict observance of these days, fine and dandy, but they were to observe them as commanded in the scriptures, and they should not worry about what others think.

We might do well to recall the famous dance of the "man after God's own heart," King David:

"So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.

"And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. ...

"And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, 'How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!'

"So David said to Michal, '*It was* before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD over Israel. Therefore I will play *music* before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor.'

"Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death." (II Sam. 6:15-17, 20-23 NKJV)

This passage, more than any other, shows the attitude that we must have to properly worship God in dance, as well as the attitude we must not have towards those who do make a public display of their worship. David's whole mind, heart and body were caught up in one great form of worship of the Great God of the universe. He was not dancing or singing or leaping or praising to attract attention, he was doing it because he loved his God and wanted to express that love in a full and complete way.

We do not have to dance in order to worship God, but it does not please God if we condemn or look down our nose at those who do.

~ How Does One Get Started? ~

If you would like to experience 'Davidic Dancing' or 'Praise Dancing' or 'Worship Dancing,' (whatever you wish to call it), here are some helpful suggestions:

If you can find a local church or Messianic Synagogue that has a worship dance program, ask them if you may attend their very beginning class. The fastest way to learn is to actually see others do the steps and practice by joining in with them.

If that is not an option for you, there are books and video tapes available that will teach you the basic steps to a few of the simple dances. Again, it helps if there are other people that can join you. Perhaps a small group of people from your fellowship would be willing to share the cost of acquiring the necessary DVDs. Set a specific time each week when all of you can get together and spend a good solid hour just practicing following the video. Do not hurry the process. It takes time to learn the dances and to begin to feel the freedom to get your mind off of the steps and into an expression of total worship.

You may also find instructional dance videos on the Seasons of Our Joy (SOOJ) website at <https://www.sooj.org/DanceVideos.html>.

To once again quote our brother: "God wants his people to CIRCLE DANCE and rejoice for the right reasons and during the right times of the year as an expression of love and obedience to as well as a memorial to God's past and future miracles.

"Specifically the dancing is described in the translation of the Hebrew word *chagag* as being done in a circle which is amazingly just the way that Jews have preserved in their traditional dances.

"I don't remember how I got started on this research, but this revelation is quite iconoclastic, even shocking to this very conservative and dignified old man."

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