

January 26, 2018

Dear BQLI Region Member,

Have you ever wondered why Jews sway, ***shuckle or shockel***, while we pray? While this practice can be traced back to at least the 8th century, and possibly even to Talmudic times, there isn't one definitive answer. King David suggested in Psalms 35:10 that when we praise God, we do so with all of our being. Through speech, we express the prayers of our minds and hearts. Perhaps the rest of the body does so by moving. An alternative explanation is found in Proverbs 20:27, "The soul of man is a candle of God." The flame of a candle constantly sways and flickers as it ascends on high. Maybe our souls are also attempting to reach God during prayer, this time of deep concentration on our relationships with God. Like the flame, our bodies mirror this effect as we move back and forth while striving upward.

Over the last couple of years, I have discovered a new joy from going to Shabbat morning services. I've written many times how I enjoy my rabbis' sermons. But, it is the music that Midway Jewish Center's Cantor, Adam Frei, fills our sanctuary with, which moves my soul. His voice stirs my voice and the voices of our congregation so that we become one entity aspiring to connect with God. Not only do we sway, we bob our heads in rhythm and tap our toes in time!

This Shabbat, we are focused on the power of song, both in the parashah, ***Beshallah***, as we learn of the Song of the Sea, and in the haftarah, as we hear Deborah's Song. The Israelites had crossed the Sea of Reeds, what we call the Red Sea, as the waters came crashing down on Pharaoh's pursuing army. "When Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; and they had faith in the Lord and His servant. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord." (Exodus 14:31) This was their celebration of God's might!

In almost all synagogues, congregations sing out loud, ***Mi chamocha ba-elim Adonai***, "Who is like you, God?" It is as if this moment of prayer attempts to recapture the original moment of prayer when the Israelites came together and sang as one people.

If by swaying, your ***kavannah*** (proper intent) is enhanced, then you should sway! Of course, the reverse is true, too. For me, every fiber of my being is involved in connecting to God. Let the music move you...mind, body, and soul!

B'Shalom,
Grace