



Loui Tucker*



It Helps to Stay in Sync

Moving together through folk dance creates social bonds and makes us feel good!

***Preface:** This article is in response to the article by Nir Orion that appeared in Rokdim-Nirkoda issue 112, "Fallow the Fallow (Shmitat Shmitut)", specifically to the section in which he wrote: "I don't find any basis for the claim that the enjoyment and satisfaction of dancing comes from moving together. The way I see it, the satisfaction of most of the dancers comes from the movement itself, and not necessarily from the uniform movement of all the dancers."*

What do folk dancing, crew rowing, and being in a marching band have in common? What is it about them that builds strong social ties and creates an enhanced sense of well-being? The answer is that they all involve doing things **in sync**!

A Let's Dance! reader tipped me off to an article that was in the October issue of Scientific American written by **Marta Zaraska** entitled, "Moving in Sync Creates Surprising Social Bonds among People – Dancing, rowing and even finger tapping in unison unleash powerful forces in the brain that drive good feelings". [<https://bit.ly/47nmP6R>]

The title fascinated me. It acknowledges that we humans are, for the most part, social creatures that like to form groups – from book clubs and sewing circles to houses of worship and political parties. We tend to hang out with people who are like us and enjoy what we enjoy. However, what this article seems to indicate is that, when we do whatever it is we do in our group in a **synchronized fashion**, it enhances the sense of well-being, connectedness, belonging, and loyalty to the group. If we don't know the group members well to begin with, our brain and body chemistry actually encourages us to bond with them.

It starts with the fact that our bodies are flooded with endorphins when we move strenuously.

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Anyone who runs, plays tennis, or has danced for a couple of hours knows that warm, fuzzy feeling you can get. The studies mentioned in the article seem to indicate that, when these activities involved **synchronized movements**, the effect of the endorphins is **enhanced**. If you run alone, or run in a group that moved randomly, the endorphins flow. If you run in sync with someone or with a group, you get a boost! Athletes who row with a crew get more of a boost than solo rowers. Dancers in a group that move together get more of a boost than solo dancers. (No mention was made of dancing alone in your home while you watch people dancing in Zoom squares). One experiment in particular showed that, when it comes to dancing, synchrony boosts the effects of endorphins far more than dissonant movements around the floor.

It was also noted that brain activity is different when synchronized activities are involved. Brain analysis in one study showed that non-synchronous activity activated just the **left** side of the brain, whereas synchrony activated both hemispheres of the brain. This suggests that synchrony is a far more complex behavior than simple movements and perhaps leads to a greater commitment to that activity. The camaraderie that is built is more than just "we share a common belief" (religion) or "we're working toward a common goal" (political parties). It binds us as a group wordlessly, effortlessly!

It is well-known how our bodies react to conflict and stressful situations: headaches, insomnia, ulcers, increased blood pressure, chest pain, even PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Those reactions are part of the body's "fight or flight" response. If our body and brain react negatively to stress and conflict, it appears that they also reward and reinforce our efforts to build bridges and connect with others. When we are in sync – literally in step with others – we build a better, stronger community. 🙌



Yaron Meishar in a family dance session at the Jewish school, Laude-Reut, in Bucharest, Romania