



Snapping Fingers on Shabbat

Note: While this article contains *halachic* content, no practical conclusions should be drawn from this analysis. Consult your local Rabbi if you have any questions.

Can one snap or click their fingers on Shabbat? Behind this question is the rabbinic prohibition of playing instruments on *Shabbat*. Since musical instruments are likely to break or require fixing, the *Chachamim* were concerned that one might fix an instrument that breaks in the course of its playing. Such an act constitutes the *melacha* of *makeh b'patish*. Encompassed in this prohibition was dancing and clapping in tune.¹ Is clicking one's fingers also included?

The *Rambam* writes (*Shabbat* 23:4) that clicking one finger against the other, like in the manner of singers, is indeed prohibited. In contrast, the *Trumat HaDeshen* uses a *Mishnah* learnt this week as proof that snapping with one's middle finger and thumb is permitted. We learnt that the *kohen gadol* would stay up the entire night of *Yom Kippur*. The *Mishnah* (1:7) taught that if the *kohen gadol* started to fall asleep, the *kohanim* would snap their fingers (*etzbah tzarada*) to wake him. It is therefore permitted.

He pre-empts the following argument against his proof. The prohibition is rabbinic (*shevut*) and we know that such prohibitions were allowed in the *Beit HaMikdash*. Consequently no proof can be brought from our *Mishnah* when determining the law outside the *Beit HaMikdash*. The *Trumat HaDeshen* answers that when the *Gemara* (34b) discusses the *Mishnah* (3:5) that details how they would heat the *mikveh* for a frail *kohen gadol*, it brings this explanation that *shevut* is permitted in the *Beit Mikdash*. The *Gemara's* silence on our *Mishnah* seems to prove that snapping fingers is not even prohibited on a rabbinic level.

The *Beit Yosef* feels that the *Trumat HaDeshen's* proof is inadequate to contend with the *Rambam*. The *Tosefet Shabbat* notes that the *Beit Yosef* did not address the *Trumat HaDeshen's* proof. The *Tosefet Shabbat* therefore explains that the *Mishnah* in *Chullin* (1:7) teaches that on *erev Shabbat* they would blow trumpets in the *Beit HaMikdash* as a warning to stop performing *melacha* – even when *erev Shabbat* was *Yom Tov*. This was allowed based on the principle that *shevut* was permitted in the *Beit HaMikdash*. Yet this reason is not stated in the *Gemara* for the simple reason that the principle is when known. Consequently, it is possible that snapping fingers is not

permitted on a rabbinic level and the *Gemara* did not explain why it was permitted in the *Beit HaMikdash* because the reason was well known. The *Gemara* only mentioned the reason in connection with the later *Mishnah* as it flowed with the discussion there.

The *Tosefet Shabbat* nevertheless proposes a defence for the *Trumat HaDeshen* based on another debate. The *Kesef Mishnah* understands that *shevut* was only permitted in the *Beit HaMikdash* where a permissible alternative was not available, while the *Lechem Mishnah* disagrees. The *Tosefet Shabbat* therefore explains that the *Trumat HaDeshen* agrees that *shevut* being permitted in the *Beit Hamikdash* is well known. However, he understands that one might make the mistake in thinking like the *Kesef Mishnah* that it is not allowed if there is an alternative. Alternatives are available for both keeping the *kohen* awake and heating the *mikveh* on *Yom Kippur*. The fact that the *Gemara* only addresses this concern in that later *Mishnah* and not ours must mean that clicking one's fingers is permitted.

Till now we assumed that snapping fingers was performed in the regular manner – using one's fingers and thumb (*Tosfot*). *Rashi* however understands our *Mishnah* referred to snapping with the index finger and thumb – in an irregular manner. Why? The *Tosefet Shabbat* explains that firstly *Rashi* must hold like the *Rambam* that snapping is prohibited rabbinically. Second, he must understand, like the *Kesef Mishnah*, that when there is a permissible alternative, a *shevut* in the *Beit Mikdash* was not permitted. That being the case regular snapping would not be allowed. *Rashi* therefore explained the young *kohanim* would keep the *kohen gadol* awake by snapping with a *shinui*, which would be permissible.²

One final difficulty is that the *Rambam* maintains that our *Mishnah* refers to regular snapping and that regular snapping is prohibited. The *Tosefet Shabbat* explains that one could explain, like the *Magen Avraham* that there is a difference between snapping to music (which is prohibited) and snapping to get attention (which is permitted)³ – the situation is our *Mishnah*. Alternatively he may hold any *shevut* in the *Beit HaMikdash* is permitted even if there is an alternative available and it was unnecessary for the *Gemara* to state this reason.

Yisrael Yitzchak Bankier

¹ There is a discussion whether the prohibition against clapping and dancing still existing nowadays. See the *Rama* (OC 339:3), *Aruch HaShulchan* (399:9), *Igrot Moshe* (OC II:100)

² See *Mishnah Berura* (339:9).

³ And it is not done with an instrument. See *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata* (28:36,39)

Revision Questions

יומא א' ר' ג' ד'

- What would the *kohen gadol* do during the night of *Yom Kippur*? (א' ר')
- What two things would the *pirchei kehuna* do if they noticed the *kohen gadol* dozing off? (א' ר')
- When was the *trumat ha'deshen* performed: (א' ח')
 - On a regular day?
 - On *Yom Kippur*?
 - On one of the *regalim*?
- Initially, how did they decide which *kohen* would perform the *trumat ha'deshen*? (א' ב')
- What incident caused them to change this system and what was it replaced with? (א' ב')
- What roles were decided by the second daily lottery? (א' ב')
- What restriction was placed on those that could be included in the third lottery? (א' ב')
- What was decided by the fourth lottery? (א' ב')
- When did the *korban tamid* require the following number of people to be involved in its offering: (א' ב' ה')
 - 9?
 - 10?
 - 11?
 - 12?
- How many *kohanim* were required when offering a ram? (א' ב')
- How many *kohanim* were required when offering a cow? (א' ב')
- In what case could a single *kohan* perform all the required tasks of a sacrifice? (א' ב')
- What would the *kohen* call out when he saw (from the viewing spot) that it had reached *alot ha'shachar*? (א' ג')
- What would they then ask this *kohen* to confirm? (א' א')
- Why was this confirmation necessary? (א' ב')
- Is a *kohen* who is *tahor* required to go to the *mikvah* before performing *avodah*? (א' ג')
- How many times would the *kohen gadol* go to the *mikvah* on *Yom Kippur*? (א' ג')
- Where was the *mikvah* that the *kohen gadol* used on *Yom Kippur*? (א' ג')
- What sheets were placed around the *kohen gadol* when he went to the *mikvah* the first time? (א' ד')
- What clothing did the *kohen gadol* wear when he offered the *korban ha'tamid*? (א' ד')

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
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Yoma 3:5-6	Yoma 3:7-8	Yoma 3:9-10	Yoma 3:11-4:1	Yoma 4:2-3	Yoma 4:4-5	Yoma 4:6-5:1

