

TOYS AND GAMES ON SHABBOS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Hashem gave us the gift of Shabbos, a holy day of rest, to be spent in prayer and Torah study⁽¹⁾. This concept of Shabbos should be impressed upon children as well, even while allowing them the games and toys that are permitted on Shabbos. In the following article, we have divided many of the most popular games and toys into two lists: The first includes those which may be used on Shabbos by children [under the age of bar/bas mitzvah], and the second which lists those that entail Biblical or Rabbinic violations of Shabbos Labors. [Games involving balls will be discussed in a subsequent article.]

A. PERMITTED GAMES AND TOYS:

- Beads - Beads may be strung, but only if the knot at the end of the string was tied before Shabbos⁽²⁾.
- Binoculars - Adjusting the focus is also permitted⁽³⁾.
- Blocks
- Board or dice games - Battleship, Chutes and Ladders, Risk, Trouble, etc.
- Books⁽⁴⁾ - Most poskim maintain that it is permitted to open and close books which have words stamped on their edges, as is commonly found in library books. The basic halachah conforms to their opinion⁽⁵⁾. In deference to the minority view, however, it is proper not to use such books when others are available⁽⁶⁾.
- Bubbles⁽⁷⁾
- Cards - After the game is over, the cards may not be sorted by color, type, etc.
- Checkers, Chess, Dominoes
- Dolls
- Hide-and-seek, Hopscotch, Jump rope, Tag⁽⁸⁾.
- Lego, Tinkertoy, Bristle Blocks - Most poskim allow playing with these on Shabbos⁽⁹⁾. There are, however some poskim who rule stringently⁽¹⁰⁾.
- Monopoly - Play money is not prohibited⁽¹¹⁾.

- Pick-up-stix - If the game is usually played with the score being recorded, it is forbidden to play even if the score will not be recorded. If it is usually played without recording the score, then it is permitted.
- Sandbox - Water may not be poured into the sand.
- Scrabble for Junior(12).
- Stamp collection - It may be shown and looked at when stamp collecting is a hobby, not a business.
- Sticker collection - It may be handled when the stickers are easily - effortlessly - stuck on and peeled off. If they are stuck on firmly and will remain intact for 24 hours, it may be prohibited(13).
- Tent - It is permitted to drape a blanket over a table or a single chair so that children can play underneath(14). It is prohibited, however, to place a blanket over an empty space in between two or more chairs.
- Tricycle(15) - It may be ridden in an enclosed area only.

B. FORBIDDEN GAMES AND TOYS:

- Bells, rattles, phones, whistles - Any object whose purpose is to make noise is Rabbinically forbidden(16). If it makes noise immediately upon being picked up, it is also "severe" muktzeh(17).
- Bicycle - It is prohibited because it is generally ridden out of an enclosed area and is liable to require adjustment(18). It is considered "light" muktzeh, which may be moved if the space it occupies is needed.
- Boggle - Since it usually entails writing words and recording the score, it is Rabbinically forbidden to play even if the words or the score will not be written(19). Placing the cubes in the individual slots may also be considered writing, since the letters remain fixed in the board. For this reason, Junior Boggle may also be prohibited.
- Clay, Playdough - These could involve aspects of the forbidden Shabbos Labors of "Kneading," "Building," or "Writing."
- Etch-A-Sketch, Magna Doodle
- Models - Toys composed of parts which are screwed together are prohibited because of the prohibition of "Building". These include airplane or train models, etc.
- Paper airplanes and boats - These can be played with, but not assembled(20).
- Scrabble, Deluxe Scrabble - Because this usually requires writing the score, it is forbidden to play even if the score will not be written. Deluxe Scrabble may also be considered "Writing", since the letters remain attached to the board(21).
- Snowballs, snowman - Snow that fell before Shabbos is definitely not muktzeh. Snow that fell on Shabbos is questionable muktzeh(22). Almost all poskim agree, however, that a snowman or snowballs should not be made on Shabbos(23). Writing in the snow is prohibited(24).
- Tile pictures

- Tree-climbing - This is Rabbinically forbidden(25).
- Weaving, Lanyards - Yarn, plastic, and other materials are all prohibited(26).

C. QUESTIONABLE GAMES AND TOYS:

- Puzzles - The issue is whether putting together shaped pieces to form a word or a picture is considered "Writing". Some poskim prohibit doing all kinds of puzzles(27), while others allow all kind of puzzles(28). Other poskim allow them only when they are not in a frame and the pieces are not tightly fitted together(29).
- Wind-up toys - Some poskim allow wind-up toys (cars, robots, etc. without batteries) unless they produce a spark(30). Other poskim disagree(31).

FOOTNOTES:

1 Mishnah Berurah 290:7; 307:4-5.

2 Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:21; Be'er Moshe 6:37.

3 O.C. 307:17; Chazon Ish (quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 6, pg. 296).

4 See O.C. 307:17 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 11 concerning reading secular books on Shabbos.

5 Shulchan Aruch Harav 340:4; Aruch ha-Shulchan 340:23.

6 Mishnah Berurah 340:17. See Chazon Ish O.C. 61:1, who is more stringent.

7 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16, note 81*).

8 O.C. 301:2.

9 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16, note 53 and Binyan Shabbos, pg. 47); Tzitz Eliezer 13:30; Yechaveh Da'as 2:55; Ohr le-Tziyon 2:272; Be'er Moshe 6:26.

10 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 90 and in Yashiv Moshe, pg. 35); Machazeh Eliyahu 69. Harav M. Feinstein is quoted (Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 24) as not rendering a final ruling on this issue. See also Igros Moshe O.C. 5:22-27. It stands to reason that Waffle Blocks, which are loosely connected blocks, would be permitted even according to the more stringent view.

11 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16, note 84).

12 Based on Igros Moshe O.C. 1:135

13 Based on O.C. 317:3 and 340:14.

14 Mishnah Berurah 315:31.

15 Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling, quoted in Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 24); Be'er Moshe 6:16.

- 16** O.C. 339:1. For this reason, games which have timers that make a noise as the minutes tick by, are prohibited.
- 17** See Igros Moshe O.C. 5:22-7.
- 18** Kaf ha-Chayim 404:8; Tzitz Eliezer 7:30-1.
- 19** Chayei Adam 38:11.
- 20** Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:18).
- 21** Igros Moshe O.C. 5:22-14. See also Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 25.
- 22** Mishnah Berurah 338:30 writes that rain which fell on Shabbos is not muktzeh. Some poskim (Har Tzvi, Soser; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 203; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, pg. 190) hold that snow is similar to rain, while others (Igros Moshe O.C. 5:22-37; Harav S.Z. Auerbach, Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 13) maintain that snow may be considered severe muktzeh. See also Mishnah Berurah 310:32, quoting Chayei Adam.
- 23** Be'er Moshe 6:30; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, pg. 190.
- 24** See Mishnah Berurah 340:20.
- 25** O.C. 336:1.
- 26** Mishnah Berurah 344:11.
- 27** Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling, quoted in Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 25); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 90).
- 28** Ohr L'Tzidon 2:272; Be'er Moshe 6:26; Harav C.P. Scheinberg (quoted in Children in Halachah, pg. 140).
- 29** Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:23).
- 30** Ibid. (16:14).
- 31** Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 93); Harav M. Feinstein (orally quoted in Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 28).

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