

# GAMES ON SHABBOS BALL PLAYING ON SHABBOS

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

Among the many transgressions which are enumerated throughout Talmudic literature as causes for the destruction of the Second Temple, we find one very puzzling. Our Sages<sup>(1)</sup> report that the city of Tur Shimon, a large city in the Judean hills, was destroyed on account of ball-playing! According to many commentators, their sin was that they played ball on Shabbos.<sup>(2)</sup> But could so "minor" an infraction have such disastrous consequences? Perhaps our Sages are alluding to an overall spiritual malaise in Tur Shimon. People who can while away the precious, sacred hours of Shabbos on a mundane sporting activity like ball-playing are surely wanting in their commitment to Torah and mitzvos in general. Their choice of diversion is symptomatic of a dismal spiritual state; they lack entirely the concept of what is required from a Jew on Shabbos - how a Jew is to spend the Shabbos day. Thus, the decree of destruction, originally issued for many other greater sins, was sealed.

Indeed, all of the poskim frown on any type of ball-playing on Shabbos, for it blemishes the aura of holiness that sets the Shabbos day apart from the other days of the week. In recent years, however, with the proliferation of eiruvim in many communities, more and more children are seen playing ball on Shabbos. Since many of these children are of chinuch age, the question arises: May parents permit their children to play ball on Shabbos? If the children are already playing, must the parents stop the game?

## THE HALACHIC CONSIDERATIONS:

There are six halachic violations that may possibly result from playing ball on Shabbos and Yom Tov:

1. **CARRYING:** Obviously, playing ball can be allowed only where carrying is permitted (within a kosher eiruv,<sup>(3)</sup> an enclosed courtyard, inside a house)<sup>(4)</sup>. On Yom Tov, however, this restriction does not apply. <sup>(5)</sup>
2. **MUKTZEH:** Although some poskim are of the opinion that a ball is muktzeh since it serves no purpose (similar to a rock), the Rama clearly rules that balls are not muktzeh.<sup>(6)</sup> This ruling is accepted by all of the poskim.<sup>(7)</sup> [Ball-playing equipment, such as bats, gloves, rackets, etc., is not muktzeh either.<sup>(8)</sup>]
3. **EXERCISE:** If one plays for the sake of exercise, it may be prohibited as certain types of exercise are prohibited on Shabbos.<sup>(9)</sup> When the exercise is medically warranted, a rav should be consulted.

**4. LEVELING OF THE GROUND:** It is Rabbinically prohibited to play games which require that a ball [or another item, e.g., nuts] be rolled on the ground, such as marbles, soccer, kickball, hockey and golf. Playing those games can easily lead the player to level the playing field, which is a form of Plowing, a Biblically forbidden Shabbos Labor.(10) Some poskim hold that a paved court is also included in the Rabbinical decree, (11) while other poskim are lenient with a paved court or floored surface. (12) Games played on a table (ping-pong,(13) pool table or air hockey) or on a mat are permitted according to all views.(14) Games which are played on the ground but do not require that the ball be rolled on the ground (e.g., baseball, basketball, football), are not included in this Rabbinical decree.(15) [Obviously, though, it is clearly Biblically forbidden to actually level any playing area.]

**5. MOVING TREES AND BUSHES:** If the ball gets stuck in a tree or in a bush which is over 10 inches high, it is forbidden to retrieve or remove the ball, even if the removal can be accomplished without shaking the bush or climbing up the tree.(16) If the ball falls out of the tree or bush by itself, it may be picked up and played with.(17)

**6. INFLATING A BALL:** Many poskim hold that it is forbidden to inflate a ball (e.g., a basketball, soccer ball) on Shabbos. Some forbid it because it is a week-day activity,(18) while others hold that it is considered as fixing [or creating] an object (tikkun mana) and may be Biblically prohibited.(19)

#### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:**

As stated earlier, beside the possible halachic violations listed above, there is an additional consideration when it comes to playing ball on Shabbos. The poskim are almost unanimous in condemning ball-playing on Shabbos as being frivolous and inappropriate behavior,(20) a waste of time, (21) and a practice befitting shallow individuals.(22) Accordingly, even when not expressly in violation of a Shabbos prohibition, adults over the age of bar/bas mitzvah are strongly discouraged from participating in any type of ball-playing on Shabbos.

It is praiseworthy, therefore, for parents to instill in their children the proper understanding of the spirit of Shabbos. Even if it is not technically forbidden for children to play ball,(23) they should be taught that it is not fitting and proper to do so.

It would be ideal, of course, if the children were given some positive and constructive Shabbos activities to take the place of playing ball. Simply prohibiting children from playing ball and then allowing them to aimlessly roam the streets or to read material of dubious value is not the way to imbue them with the holy spirit of Shabbos.

#### **TOYS AND GAMES ON SHABBOS**

Hashem gave us the gift of Shabbos, a holy day of rest, to be spent in prayer and Torah study.(24) 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 pages, 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. The second lists those that entail Biblical or Rabbinic violations of Shabbos Labors, and children who are above the age of chinuch should be taught to avoid them. [Games involving balls and marbles were discussed earlier.] There are no restrictions concerning infants or toddlers playing with toys or games on Shabbos.

### **PERMITTED GAMES AND TOYS:**

- *Beads* - Beads may be strung, but only if the knot at the end of the string was tied before Shabbos.(25)
- *Binoculars* - Adjusting the focus is also permitted.(26)
- *Blocks*
- *Board or dice games* - Battleship, Chutes and Ladders, Risk, Trouble, etc.
- *Books*(27) - 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.(28) In deference to the minority view, however, it is proper not to use such books when others are available.(29)
- *Bubbles*(30)
- *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*(31)
- *Lego, Bristle Blocks, Clicks, Tinkertoy* - Most poskim allow playing with these on Shabbos.(32) There are, however some poskim who rule stringently. (33)
- *Monopoly* - Play money is not prohibited.(34)
- *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*.(35)
- *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.(36)
- *Tent* - It is permitted to drape a blanket over a table or a single chair so that children can play underneath.(37) It is prohibited, however, to place a blanket over an empty space in between two or more chairs.
- *Tricycle*(38) - It may be ridden in an enclosed area only.

## FORBIDDEN GAMES AND TOYS:

- *Bells, rattles, phones, whistles* - Any object whose purpose is to make noise is forbidden.(39) If it makes noise immediately upon being picked up, it is also "severe" muktzeh.(40)
- *Bicycle* - It is prohibited because it is generally ridden out of an enclosed area and is liable to require adjustment.(41) 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 forbidden to play even if the words or the score will not be written. (42) 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. (43)
- *Puzzles* - Many poskim are of the opinion that assembly of a puzzle is considered "Writing" and should be avoided on Shabbos, especially if the pieces are fitted into a frame or are tightly fitted together.(44)
- *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.(45)
- *Snowballs, snowman* - Snow that fell before Shabbos is definitely not muktzeh. Snow that fell on Shabbos is questionable muktzeh. (46) Almost all poskim agree, however, that a snowman or snowballs should not be made on Shabbos.(47) Writing in the snow is prohibited.(48)
- *Tile pictures*
- *Tree-climbing*.(49)
- *Weaving, Lanyards* - Yarn, plastic, and other materials are all prohibited.(50)
- *Wind-up toys* - Some poskim do not object to children playing with wind-up toys (cars, robots, etc. without batteries) unless they produce a spark. (51) Other poskim disagree.(52)

## FOOTNOTES:

1 Yerushalmi Ta'anis 4:5, quoted by the Beis Yosef, O.C. 308.

2 Rokeiach 55, Pnei Moshe, and Korban Eidah on Yerushalmi, ibid. See also Midrash Eichah 2:4 where it specifically says that the ball-playing took place on Shabbos.

3 Ball-playing should not take place if the ball is liable to leave the enclosed area, since in one's eagerness to retrieve the ball, he can easily forget that he is carrying outside the eiruv.

4 Mishnah Berurah 308:158.

5 Rama, O.C. 518:1. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:94, who explains why carrying a ball is considered shaveh l'chol nefesh.

6 O.C. 308:45 and 518:1.

7 Although the Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 308:45 rules stringently on this issue and Kaf ha-Chayim 308:257 notes that Sefaradim should follow his opinion, it is possible that his ruling referred to an item such as a rock, etc. which was later designated for play, not to a modern-day ball which is manufactured as a ball (Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Shevus Yitzchak, pg. 89). Refer to Tosfos Shabbos 308:109 and Pri Megadim 308:72 for possible sources.

8 Harav M. Feinstein (Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 26).

9 O.C. 328:42, when the purpose is to work up a sweat. When the exercise is enjoyable, it may be permitted (Harav S.Z. Auerbach, Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, 16, note 99).

10 Mishnah Berurah 308:158. Harav S.Z. Auerbach is quoted as suggesting that the Rabbinical decree does not apply to a standard playing field which is usually used as such, since playing fields are usually prepared in advance (Kovetz Beis Aharon v'Yisrael 3:39).

11 Shulchan Aruch Harav 338:6; Mishnah Berurah 338:20.

12 Pri Megadim 338:3; Aruch ha-Shulchan 338:12. In addition, nowadays when most of the ground in or near our homes is paved, possibly all poskim would agree that paved courts are not included in this decree (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16, note 16; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 91). See, however, Shevisas ha-Shabbos, pg. 29, and Ketzos ha-Shulchan 146, pg. 131, who disagree with this logic concerning ball-playing.

13 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Kovetz Beis Aharon v'Yisrael 3:39); Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:6.

14 Mishnah Berurah 338:20.

15 Teshuvos Salmas Chayim 1:71; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Kovetz Beis Aharon v'Yisrael 3:39). Ketzos ha-Shulchan 146, pg. 126, seems to prohibit these games as well.

16 Mishnah Berurah 336:3. For additional details, see our discussion to Parashas Shelach (pg. 396).

17 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah, pg. 183).

18 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 92).

19 Chelkas Yaakov 3:159; Minchas Yitzchak 6:30; Machazeh Eliyahu 69-2. Note, however, that Harav S.Z. Auerbach (see Minchas Shelomo 1:11-5, Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:8, 34:24; Binyan Shabbos, Makeh be-Patish, pg. 156) holds that once a ball has been inflated, it is permitted to inflate

it again, even with a pump, as long as no tying is involved.

20 Mishnah Berurah 518:9.

21 Kaf ha-Chayim 308:259.

22 Aruch ha-Shulchan 518:8. See also Mishnah Berurah 338:21.

23 Note that Shulchan Aruch 301:2 allows children to jump and run for their enjoyment and pleasure. Accordingly, there would not seem to be any difference between playing ball and playing tag, hide and seek, jump rope, etc. Somehow, though, ball-playing is associated with Shabbos desecration more than these other activities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

31 O.C. 301:2.

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

33 Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 90 and in Yashiv Moshe, pg. 35); Machazeh Eliyahu 6g. 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.

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

35 Based on Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:135

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

37 Mishnah Berurah 315:31.

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

39 O.C. 339:1. For this reason, games which have timers that make a noise as the minutes tick by, are prohibited.

40 See Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:22-7.

41 Kaf ha-Chayim 404:8; Tzitz Eliezer 7:30-1.

42 Chayei Adam 38:11.

43 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:18).

44 Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling, quoted in Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 25); Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:23; Shulchan Shelomo 340:13-2); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 90). See Children in Halachah, pg. 140, for opinions who are more lenient.

45 Igros Moshe O.C. 5:22-14. See also Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 25.

46 Mishnah Berurah 338:30 writes that rain which fell on Shabbos is not muktzeh. Some poskim (Har Tzvi, Soser; Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, Dosh, pg. 120, quoting Harav M. Feinstein; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 203; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:44) hold that snow is similar to rain, while others (Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:22-37; Harav S.Z. Auerbach, Shulchan Shelomo 310:26-2) suggest that snow may be considered severe muktzeh. See also Mishnah Berurah 310:32, quoting Chayei Adam.

47 Be'er Moshe 6:30; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:44.

48 See Mishnah Berurah 340:20.

49 The details of this prohibition are discussed in The Weekly Halachah Discussion on Parashas Shelach.

50 Mishnah Berurah, 344 (end)-6.

51 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 16:14 and Tikunim u'Miluim); Be'er Moshe 6:32.

52 Harav M. Feinstein (orally quoted in Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 28); Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 93; Orchos Shabbos 8:92). For an explanation of the issues involved, see The Weekly Halachah Discussion on Parashas Shelach.

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