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Games, Toys on Shabbos – 1

Parshas Lech Lecha 5785

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Playing Games on Shabbos

Shabbos Is a Day of Menucha

- Learning Torah.** Chazal tell us that Shabbosos and Yamim Tovim are for learning Torah (ירושלמי שבת ט"ו ג). Workers busy with their jobs all week gather together on Shabbos to learn Torah (פסיקתא, נחומא, פסיקתא) (רבתי סי כ"ג). Talmidei chachamim who toil all week in Torah and enjoy food and drink on Shabbos should certainly set aside time on Shabbos to learn Torah (שם, ב"י סי רפ"ח, של"ה שבת פ' נר מצוה אות נ"ג).
- Games.** Therefore, gedolim throughout the generations wrote at length about people who spend their time on Shabbos on games. This is a problem of bitul Torah even during the week if it is at a time when one can learn, unless it is to relax a bit in order to gather more strength to learn Torah. One should certainly not spend his time on games and useless things on the holy Shabbos. He should learn Torah (שבת מוסר פרק מ"ב, ראשית חכמה עער הקדושה פ"ב, שו"ת מנחת יצחק) and enjoy spiritual delights akin to Olam Haba, as whoever honors Shabbos by refraining from doing his own things is given a boundless inheritance (גמ' שבת דף ק"י"ח ע"א).
- Women, children.** Women, who are not obligated to learn Torah, and children who are unable to learn Torah play all sorts of games on Shabbos, depending on their age. However, many games involve Shabbos issurim or at least potential Shabbos issurim without people realizing. Thus, we will attempt here to go through several types of common games, presenting the issues and the halachos.

Children

- Not yet chinuch aged.** Children who are not yet chinuch aged, i.e., who do not understand the concept that there are things that may not be done on Shabbos, based on their intelligence and understanding, do not need to be stopped, as they have not yet reached the age of chinuch. This is until about five years old. Still, if they understand how to obey instructions, one can begin explaining to them that we are not allowed to do this on Shabbos, so that they will become careful about it over time.
- Chinuch aged.** Chinuch aged children, who understand the concept that we keep Shabbos and there are things we may not do – e.g., starting at five – should be stopped from playing with toys that are definitely assur on Shabbos, such as electronic toys, e.t.c. One certainly may not give the child the toy to play with.
- However, if there is a machlokes between accepted poskim whether a certain toy is assur or mutar, then it depends: If the child plays with it on his own, there is no need to stop him, as there are poskim to rely on and one does not need to burden a child with chumros (ארחות חיים סי תס"ז סק"ט). If the father follows the opinion that something is assur, he should at least not give that toy to his child to start playing with.
- A child who has the intellect to understand the form of a melacha and how some action with a toy relates to a particular melacha, e.g., from nine years old and up, should be stopped from playing with any toy that involves a potential melacha.

Help from a Parent

- When a child is playing a game involving a potential issur – in a case where it is mutar for a child but not for a gadol – one may help the child a bit by showing or hinting to them what they need to do. However, one may not do the actual issur; that would be a gadol doing melacha.

Melachos Involved in Games

Various Melachos

- Several types of games involve multiple melachos or Shabbos issurim. We will first list different types of melachos and issurim that one can end up violating, then we will give some examples of games.
- Borer.** When there are items one is interested in mixed together with items he is not interested in, he must take the ones he wants from the ones he doesn't [אוכל מפסולת], not the other way around. Also, the purpose of separating them must be for immediate use [לא לתר], not for later, and he must use his hand [בד], not a utensil [ש"י"ט סי"א].
- Noisemaking [השמעת קול].** One may not intentionally use an item to produce a noise on Shabbos out of concern he might fix a musical instrument. This is an issur d'raban (ש"י"ט סי"א).
- Leveling the ground [אשוויי גומות].** One may not sweep the ground with a broom on Shabbos due to the issur of leveling the ground (ש"י"ט סי"א). One may not do anything on the ground which requires the ground to be level due to this concern (ש"י"ט סי"א).
- Kesiva.** Some poskim hold one may not tightly connect letters made from a material together on a surface or background, as that is like writing (מג"א סי ש"מ סק"י). Some allow it, as it is not the action of writing (נשמת אדם כלל ל"ז סק"ב). Similarly, the poskim discuss whether putting together different letter parts is an issur of writing (שו"ת רמ"א סי"א סק"ט, ט"ז סי"א סק"ב).
- Binyan with utensils [בנין בכלים].** Although there is a rule that binyan and stira do not apply to utensils or objects (גמ' שבת דף ק"ב ע"ב), the poskim hold that when parts of an item are connected by strongly sticking one into the other, there is an issur d'oraisa of binyan with utensils (ש"י"ט סי"א). If two things are attached tightly without inserting one into the other, it is an issur d'raban. If they are only loosely connected, it is mutar.
- Makeh b'patish.** One may not make a utensil or complete the final stage of a utensil on Shabbos even if there is no issue of binyan with utensils, e.g., it is done loosely, due to the issur of makeh b'patish or tikun mana.
- Making an ohel.** One who makes a proper, lasting ohel is chayav a chatas (ש"י"ט סי"א). The minimum size of an ohel is a tefach high with an area of a tefach by a tefach (תוס' שבת קל"ח: ד"ה שאין). It is an issur d'raban to make a makeshift ohel for protection or for usage of the space underneath even if there are no walls (ש"י"ט סי"א).
- Business [משא ומתן].** It is an issur d'raban of business for one person to sell, buy, or transfer ownership of an item to another person on Shabbos.
- Weekday activities [עובדין דהול].** There are some things which, strictly speaking, may be done on Shabbos, but were forbidden by the poskim because they are weekday activities, e.g., riding a bike on the street where there is an eiruv and the like.

Different Games

Chamesh Avanim / "טשייך" / Kugelach

- Noisemaking.** Children used to play with a small bone [from a cattle foot] called the "טשייך" [knucklebone, talus] (ע"י פרישה י"ד) (סי נ"ה סק"ח ובאר היטב שם למהרי"ט kugelach [or chamesh avanim], and apparently the bones made noise during the game. Nevertheless, it was mutar to play; there was no issur of noisemaking on Shabbos (above, 11) because there was no intent for music (רמ"א אר"ח סי"א של"ה סי"ה).

In the next issue, we will deal with the toys of construction, such as Lego, Click's, Capllah, Magnetile's, and the like. Since new toys are always renewed, the public is invited to send questions about Shabbat on different toys with a description of the toy and its actions and a picture, and in the next issue we will try to answer the common questions

20. **Leveling the ground.** One may not play a game on the ground on Shabbos if the game requires the ground to be level out of concern he will level the ground (שול"ע סי' של"ח ס"ה). Thus, one may not play in a courtyard, even if it has flooring, as a gezeira for a yard without flooring (הגרש"ז"א) (רמ"א סי' של"ז ס"ב, מ"ב סי' של"ח סק"כ, הגרש"ז"א) (שולחן שלמה סי' של"ז סק"ד, שו"ת שבט הלוי ח"ט סי' ע"ח). [The Mechaber holds it is mutar if there is flooring (שם)]. Nowadays that most houses have flooring, one can be meikel in a house, as Chazal did not make a gezeira on the majority of cases due to a concern for the minority of cases (ביאה"ל ד"ה ויש מחמירין), especially for small children (ארחות שבת פ"ח אות נ"ג ובהערה).
21. Thus, children should not play kugelach or marbles on the ground in a shul's outdoor courtyard or in a building's courtyard, even if it has flooring. However, it is mutar in a building (כ"ל) or on a table (רמ"א שם).

Chess

22. The poskim hold one may play chess on Shabbos. However, some used silver pieces to differentiate them from weekday pieces to avoid דחול (מג"א סי' של"ח סק"ה, מ"ב סק"א) עובדין דחול. In practice, today people do not specifically use chess pieces designated for Shabbos.
23. At the beginning of the game, each player may choose his color, as that is for an immediate purpose and מפסולת. However, one may not separate the black pieces from the white pieces after the game to put it away neatly in the box for the next game, as that is borer for later use, which is assur.
24. **Wasting time.** However, some forbid spending time playing chess on Shabbos since there is no purpose in learning that knowledge. This is based on the issur to study books about disciplines other than Torah (שו"ע סי' ש"ז ס"ז) (שו"ע סי' ש"ז ס"ז) (שם). This is even if it is done to sharpen the mind, as one can sharpen his mind through Torah. However, one should not object to people playing in a place where the minhag is to be meikel (שם), especially for children under bar mitzva.

Odds and Evens

25. **As a game.** There is a game commonly played by children called Even or Odd [Whole or Missing (רמ"א), or *Grad* or *Umgrad* (מ"ב סק"ב)]. One player has to guess if there is an even or odd number of items in his friend's closed hand. If he guesses right, he gets what is in the friend's hand, or he gets to go first for something or the like. The poskim hold that if there is no monetary gain and it is just a game, it may be played on Shabbos (רמ"א סי' של"ח ס"ה).
26. **For monetary gain.** However, if it is done for monetary gain, e.g., the winner wins a monetary obligation or some other item, food, or candy that will become completely his, and it is not just a game or pastime, it may not be played on Shabbos, because it is like business on Shabbos. However, one should not object to women or children, as it is better for them to transgress unknowingly than intentionally (רמ"א שם).

Monopoly

27. Chazal only made a gezeira on games whose goal is to gain something. If the goal is not for any gain whatsoever, neither money nor anything of monetary value, there is no issur according to halacha. Even if it closely resembles business, e.g., it uses fake money and bills and involves deals, purchases, and sales of property, like the game Monopoly, there is no issur, especially for small children.
28. However, in practice, it is proper and appropriate to refrain and to stop chinuch aged children from playing this. It is an objectionable thing and it is disrespectful to the Shabbos to speak words and use things that are spoken and used for business during the week.

Baby Toys that Make Noise

29. One may put in a small baby's hands a toy that makes noise when it is shaken or pressed, e.g., a rattle or the like, because its main purpose is to be used as a toy. However, a gadol may not make any noise with these toys, even if he is just doing so for the baby (ש"כ"ג). If the baby is crying a lot and it is distressing to him, it can be allowed in an unusual manner (ע"ד) (שולחן שלמה סי' ע"ד).

Electronic Toys

30. Toys powered by electricity or batteries that involve assur actions in the regular course of usage, e.g., walkie talkies, remote control cars, flashlights, or the like, are muktzah. They have the status of kli shemilachto l'issur, as they are not used in any way other than the usage that involves an issur.
31. However, electronic toys that also have a mutar way to play with them without using electricity are not muktzah and may be played with. One should remind the child not to use it in the way that uses electricity. If one sees that the child forgets and uses it electronically, the child should be stopped from playing with it.
32. **Baby swing.** Similarly, a child can be placed on Shabbos into a baby swing that is used with electricity during the week but can also be used without electricity.

Kesiva

Puzzles, Connecting Letters

33. **Not attached.** The poskim agree that when different pieces of a single picture are brought together to create a complete picture, as long as they do not connect together at all, e.g., picture blocks, there is no issue of kesiva and it may be done on Shabbos (אג"מ) (א"ח ח"א סי' קל"ה, ארחות שבת פט"ו אות י"ג).
34. **Attached.** However, if the pieces of the picture attach to each other, e.g., in a puzzle where the protruding part of one piece is placed into the opening of another piece and together they make a complete picture, some poskim say that if they connect tightly enough to each other that when one piece is picked up, the other pieces come up too, one may not play with it on Shabbos due to the issur of kesiva. The same is true if the pieces are placed within a frame (הגרש"ז"א בש"כ פט"ז ס"ג).
35. However, if the puzzle is meant for a young age and has big pieces which, despite being inserted into each other, do not connect tightly together, children may play with it on Shabbos.

Connecting Whole Letters

36. **Connecting letters on a board.** A child's toy in which plastic letters are inserted onto a board with holes and the letters are combined to form words may be used on Shabbos. Even if some poskim hold that connecting whole letters together is considered writing (מג"א; see 13 above), when they are attached to a background in a temporary way, not a more permanent way, it is not considered writing (ארחות שבת פט"ו אות י"ז).
37. **Magnetic letters.** Some say that putting magnetic letters onto a metal surface, e.g., a fridge door, to form words is considered writing since the letters can stay that way for a long time (ש"כ פט"ז ס"ד). However, others allow it because the letters are not completely attached as with glue or stitching. They are considered temporary and not meant to consistently remain that way on the fridge (לפי הארחות שבת הנ"ל).

Balloons

38. **Inflated balloons.** A balloon filled with air is normally tied shut. One may not inflate a balloon on Shabbos out of concern he might make a lasting knot; consequently, they are also muktzah on Shabbos (קצוה"ש סי' ק"י בדה"ש סק"ז). However, children who play with balloons by filling them with air and emptying them without making a knot may play with them. They should be cautioned not to make knots (ש"ר"ב באר משה ח"ב סי' כ').
39. **Soap bubbles.** Strictly speaking, there is no issur to make air bubbles with soap water on Shabbos, as they do not last. However, one should not tell a child to make such bubbles, as some are machmir (הגרש"ז"א, ש"כ פט"ז אות ל"א).

Sorting Games after Use

40. **Jumbled.** If children played with different types of toys in a room and they are in a jumble on the floor, one may not sort them and put each one in its intended spot, as that is a problem of borer for later. Similarly, game pieces may not be sorted by color after their use, as that is borer for later.
41. **Scattered.** However, if the games are scattered across the floor such that they are not considered a mixture, one may pick them up and return them to their spots or sort them, as there is no issur of borer for items that are not in a mixture (ארחות שבת פ"ג אות י"ב).



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