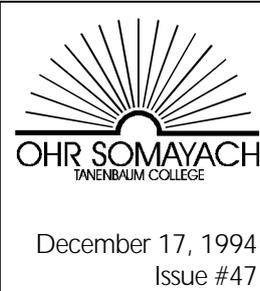




Ask The Rabbi...

Researched at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College
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This edition contains:

1. Scrabble™, Monopoly™ and Chess on Shabbat

Bradley from Milton,
Massachusetts wrote:

*Can you play a
game like
Scrabble™,
Chess or
Monopoly™ on
Shabbat?*

Steven Edell from Jerusalem
wrote:

*My two girls, both under
the age of 11, recently
got a Monopoly™ game
as a pre-Channukah gift.
They are interested in
knowing if it's allowed
to play it on Shabbat?*

Balint Nogradi from Iowa wrote:

*Last Shabbat I was reading a book by
Michael Jay Katz: Night Tales of the
Shammas. In the book the Shammas
says: "...[he] followed Maimonides'
stipulations: he never played chess
for money and he did not play on the
Sabbath." Is it correct that one
cannot play Chess on Shabbat?*

Moti Karta from
cyberspace.org wrote:

*Can one use a
wind-up chess
clock on
Shabbat?*

Dear Bradley, Steven and Balint and Moti,

Let's start with Scrabble™. Does the forming of a word by placing letters next to each other on a Scrabble-board transgress the prohibition against "writing" on Shabbat? Also, since people keep score when playing Scrabble, would that make it prohibited to play because one might come to write down the score by accident? I showed Rabbi Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg, *shlita*, an edition of Scrabble which had a flat board, without grooves for the tiles, and asked him if it is permitted to play this game on Shabbat. He acknowledged that some *Poskim* forbid it, and others permit it. He ruled that it is permitted, but that great care must be taken to ensure that the players do not forget that it's Shabbat and write down their scores.

Now for Monopoly™. Monopoly is a game that mimics business transactions. Rabbi Scheinberg, *shlita*, says that *technically* it is permitted, but playing a business-oriented game on Shabbat is not conducive to a proper attitude about Shabbat.

Chess is discussed in the Shulchan Aruch. The *Rama* mentions it as a pastime that is permitted on Shabbat. Some of the *Poskim* note, though, that in order to differentiate between Shabbat and weekday, some people had special Chess sets made of Silver just for Shabbat play.

Chess clocks are another matter. Chess clocks are two spring-wound clocks attached such that when one player finishes his move he pushes a button, stopping his clock and activating the clock of his opponent. Rabbi Scheinberg, *shlita*, rules that they cannot be used on Shabbat.

When playing these games a Halachic consideration that should not be overlooked is the prohibition of *Borer*. *Borer* is prohibited when you separate something that you don't plan to use immediately, from a pile of other objects. With games that have many different pieces, this is something that can occur when cleaning up. Don't separate the pieces when putting them away.

Up until now we have been talking about the "technical Halacha." But is this the way to spend the precious moments of Shabbat? Shabbat can be a beautiful time -- to sing *zemirot*, take a walk, get closer to family and friends and -- yes -- even to study Torah. You're the final arbiter -- could you be spending your time more wisely?

I once heard Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, *shlita*, tell a beautiful story about a rebuke that he once received from his saintly father, the Hornesteipel Rebbe, *zt"l*. He told this story at the 10th anniversary of the passing. He told it as an example of rebuke that makes its point and expresses love at the same time. The story took place on Rosh Hashanah when Rabbi Twerski was a young boy. Staying at their house was a man who should have known better, but asked the young Abraham Twerski if he would play Chess with him. The boy felt that there must be something wrong with playing Chess on Rosh Hashanah, but the man assured him that there wasn't -- "*What could be wrong with a game of Chess?*" So, they played and the young boy Checkmated the older guest. Later that night after Rosh Hashanah ended, young Abraham Twerski was told that his father wanted a word with him in the study. Nervously, he entered. His father, never taking his eyes from the book that he was studying, chided the boy "*You played chess on Rosh Hashanah?*" The tone said that he knew him to be above this kind of behavior, and that he was disappointed with him. The rebuke struck deep in the little boy, who felt very ashamed. When the father was certain that he had made his point, he lifted his head from the book he was studying, picked up his glasses and with a twinkle in his eyes he said to his son, "*Did you win?*"

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch - Orach Chaim* 338.
- *Chayei Adam* - 38:11.
- *The Halachos of Muktza* - chapter 1 note 24.
- *Shmirat Shabbat Kehilchata* - 16:32

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to ohr@jer1.co.il. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

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