

## Play Ball!

Playing ball on Shabbat and holidays hardly sounds like the sort of activity fitting for such holy days. There is even a report in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Ta'anit* 4:5) of a city in *Eretz Yisrael* which was destroyed because its inhabitants made it a regular practice to play ball on Shabbat.

But is such ball playing actually forbidden?

The obvious problem with ball playing is that it involves moving the ball from one place to another, which is forbidden under certain circumstances: If the activity is restricted to a closed-in private domain, or to an area enclosed by an *eruv*, this problem would not apply. In a public area, however, this would be ruled out on Shabbat. What about on a holiday?

The *mishna* informs us that one may carry a child on a holiday into the public domain in order to perform a circumcision, and one may also carry a Sefer Torah or the "four species" on Succot in order to fulfill his obligation. This is based on the fact that even though the Torah prohibited all categories of creative work on holidays as it did on Shabbat, it permitted many of them for the purpose of preparing food for use on that day. Once a labor was permitted for food, it was also permitted for any other purpose which will bring enjoyment to that day. Tosefot rules that this extends to ball playing as well.

This ruling of Tosefot is cited by Rema in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 308:45 regarding the permissibility of playing ball on Shabbat in an area where carrying is permitted. This does not extend, however, to games such as soccer which are played on an unpaved field, because this may lead to making adjustments in the earth which comes under the category of agricultural labor forbidden both on Shabbat and holidays. (*Mishna Berura* *ibid.* 158)

This lenient ruling based on Tosefot is challenged by the Beit Yosef who forbids playing with or even handling a ball on Shabbat. A ball is considered *muktzeh* like a stone which has no practical use; it's not even fit for covering a pot because it is usually covered with dirt. According to this ruling the ball's function as an instrument of sport fails to remove it from this category of *muktzeh*.

Jews of Sephardic origin follow the ruling of the Beit Yosef while the Ashkenazic Jews abide by the ruling of the Rema.

Beitza 12a

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# Eyes of the Dove

A weeping rabbi, a Russian general and a wandering dove — what is the connection? It was the custom of Rabbi Chaim Berlin, who spent the later years of his life in Jerusalem, to melodiously chant the verses of *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs) on late Friday afternoons as a welcome to Shabbat. Neighbors were so enchanted by the beauty of his recitation that they stood beneath his window to listen. But they were always mystified by the manner in which his sweet singing was interrupted by a tearful rendition of passage 1:15 in which the Jewish People are extolled as having a special beauty and “the eyes of a dove.”

When someone finally had the courage to ask for an explanation the rabbi told him the following story:

“When I served as rabbi of the Jewish community in Moscow, one day an army general came into my chambers and ordered me to remove all the people who had come to consult me so that he could discuss something privately. He then confided to me that he was a Jew and that his wife had given birth to a son for whom he wished to have me arrange a circumcision. Any public knowledge of this would endanger his career and even his life, so it all had to be done with the greatest secrecy.

“Anticipating my question as to why such an assimilated high ranking officer in the czar’s army was so determined for his son to have a *brit milah*, he explained that although he had strayed so far from Judaism, he maintained his Jewish identity because of what he saw and experienced in the home of his observant parents. His son, however, will not have the privilege, he added, so unless he is circumcised he will have nothing to remind him that he is a Jew.

“At that moment I recalled what the *gemara* says about doves that are found outside their nest on a holiday. Since only a dove which had been designated before the holiday for use on the holiday may be slaughtered for consumption, it is necessary to determine whether or not these doves came from a designated nest. If these doves are old enough to fly, say our Sages, we must assume that these birds could have come from far away, from an undesignated nest, and cannot be used on this day. But if they are so young that they are only capable of wandering from the nest on foot, we assume that if there is no other nest within fifty cubits of where the doves are found that they must definitely have wandered from the designated nest. This criterion is based on the established principle that a dove will not wander by foot more than fifty cubits from its nest. Even if there is another nest within this distance, but the dove must go around a corner in order to reach it, we still assume that it did not wander from that undesignated nest. This, once again, is based on another facet of the dove’s nature — it will wander from its nest only as long as it still can see that nest.

“This,” concluded the rabbi, “is the meaning of Jews being compared to the eyes of a dove. A Jew may wander from his faith, but he always keeps his eyes on the Jewish nest from which he came and it is that awareness which preserves him as a Jew. Whenever I say these words in *Shir Hashirim* I recall that encounter with the Russian general and I cannot help but cry.”

Beitza 11a

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