**Responsum on Playing Sports on Shabbat**

Conservative leaders have engaged in extensive deliberations about what

constitutes appropriate practice on the Sabbath. One such example is Rabbi Jonathan Lubliner’s responsum, “Recreational Sports on Shabbat,” asking “May one exercise or play recreational sports on Shabbat? If so, what kinds of sports and exercise are compatible with Shabbat observance and what kinds are not?”

The CJLS voted on its sections individually. The general conclusions (excerpted here) were approved on May 13, 2015 by a vote of thirteen in favor, one against, and four abstaining (13-1-4). Other sections (which also follow) were approved by different votes, as follows: “Is it Permissible to Ride a Bicycle or a Skateboard on Shabbat?” by 10-5-3 (10 yes, 5 no, 3 abstentions); “Riding a Bicycle for the Performance of a Mitzvah” by 14-4-0; “Non-Motorized Scooters, Tricycles, Skates and Skateboards by 17-1-0; “Playing Court and Field Sports on Shabbat” by 17-0-1; “Ice Skating on Shabbat” by 11-6-1; “Running on Shabbat” by 16-1-1; “Skiing on Shabbat” by 9-1-8; “Swimming on Shabbat” by 18-0-0; *“*Weight Lifting and Body Building”by 11-2-5; “Yoga on Shabbat” by 15-1-2; and “Bathing After Exercise on Shabbat” by 11-2-5. To read the full 77-page responsum: <http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/lubliner-recreation-sports-shabbat.pdf>

*Exercising or Playing Sports on Shabbat: General Conclusions*

*Oneg Shabbat* [joy on the Sabbath] is a *mitzvah* [a positive commandment]. Although the Torah does not explicitly mention it, numerous authorities sought to accord the enjoyment of Shabbat *d’oraita*-like status [that is, as if it came from the Torah directly], legally and homiletically.

Traditional *halakhic* sources tend to prohibit exercise generally on the basis of *shevut* [a Rabbinically-inacted prohibition]; even when permissible, they do not perceive it as a vehicle in-and-of itself for *oneg Shabbat*. Given important changes in our cultural perceptions and the importance they play in framing a meaningful protective framework for Shabbat observance, it is no longer tenable to maintain a blanket prohibition of all exercise as *tirha yetirta* (superfluous exertion) or *u’vdin d’*h*ol* [a weekday activity]*.* In our time many types of exercise can and do serve as permissible -- even praiseworthy -- activities for the pursuit of *oneg Shabbat*.

The halakhic literature points to a recognition that subjective enjoyment plays an important, if not ultimate, role in determining whether or not an activity is a matter of *oneg Shabbat* or *shevut* for the individual. This may mean that while one person may be permitted to engage in a certain activity because he finds it Shabbat-enhancing, another may be prohibited from doing so because it diminishes his enjoyment of Shabbat.

For those who engage regularly in exercise during the week, but do not actually enjoy the experience, or are training in pursuit of specific goals, exercise on Shabbat does not constitute *oneg Shabbat*; on the contrary, it remains *u’vdin d’hol* [a weekday activity]. With the exception of medical reasons (see below), the only permissible rationale for engaging in recreational sports or exercise activity on Shabbat is for the sake of enhancing one’s experience of Shabbat itself.

For those in good health, the general benefits of exercise do not automatically override the issue of *shevut*. Those with skeleto-muscular issues, however, who need to follow therapeutic routines for the sake of mobility or relief from pain must do so on Shabbat -- not because it yields them pleasure, but because it is a medical necessity.

Organized league sports, competitive racing against a clock or others for the sake of recognition, attainment of a prize, or first place within a league remain subject to the prohibition of *shevut* because their purpose is primarily goal oriented. That they may be very enjoyable, especially for the victors, but this does not constitute *oneg Shabbat*.

Synagogues, Jewish schools, and other institutions within the Jewish community should neither sponsor nor participate in charity races or other sporting events to benefit not-for-profit causes when such events take place on Shabbat. Aside from the likelihood of violating myriad proscriptions of Toraitic law, the purpose of such events, no matter how worthy the cause, has nothing to do with the concept of *oneg Shabbat*.

No type of recreational sport or exercise may trump a *melakhah* [one of the 39 categories of work that, according to Rabbinic interpretation, are prohibited by the Torah on the Sabbath] or its derivative categories. Any activity requiring prohibited types of carrying, travel beyond Shabbat boundaries, or the recording of data are forbidden as *d’oraita* [Torah] injunctions and not simply as matters of *shevut* [Rabbinic injunctions].

Beyond the broad parameters of the *oneg Shabbat* and *shevut*, the permissibility of individual types of exercise or sports and their compatibility with Shabbat will depend on the equipment they require, their respective characters, and the venues where they take place.

*Is it Permissible to Ride a Bicycle or a Skateboard on Shabbat?*

Riding a bicycle on Shabbat for the sake of *oneg* [joy] is not permitted, even within an *eruv* [a boundary denoting a private domain], because of *shema yitaken*, the concern that the rider may repair a flat tire or fix a derailed chain, especially if the breakdown occurs at some distance from one’s destination.

*Is it Permissible to Bicycle on Shabbat for the Performance of a Mitzvah?*

For the performance of a mitzvah that takes place on Shabbat, it is permitted to ride a bicycle to/from one’s destination, as long as doing so enables one to bike instead of drive because it is too far to walk; and so long as such travel takes place entirely within the boundaries of an eruv [a boundary marker, usually a wire or a natural barrier such as a river, that designates an area as a private domain, within which a Jew may carry or travel on Shabbat just as one may do in one’s home].

*Are Non-Motorized Scooters, Tricycles, Skates, and Skateboards Permissible?*

Non-motorized scooters, tricycles, in-line skates, and skateboards are permissible on Shabbat within an *eruv* or private spaces.

*Is it Permissible to Play Court and Field Sports on Shabbat?*

*..*Recreational games such as baseball, softball, soccer, basketball, tennis, and other racquet sports, touch or flag football are permitted on Shabbat within an eruv.

Tackle football is not permitted on Shabbat.

Golf is not permitted on Shabbat because of the creation of divots [pieces of turf cut out of the ground by a golf club when a golfer makes a stroke]..Those who wish to hit golf balls from a non-grass mat on Shabbat may do so within an *eruv*.

*Is Ice Skating Permissible on Shabbat?*

Ice skating is permissible on Shabbat when it does not entail violations of Shabbat including, but not limited to, driving to/from a rink, paying to rent skates or for admission, or carrying outside of an *eruv*. Outdoor skating must take place within an *eruv*. Competitive skating of all types is impermissible on Shabbat.

*Is Running Permissible on Shabbat?*

Jogging or running at a leisurely pace constitutes a legitimate form of *oneg Shabbat*, if pursued for its own enjoyment, rather than for the purpose of training or racing.

Organized races remain prohibited as a matter of *shevut*. Similarly, running against one’s own watch to beat a particular personal best is incompatible with the spirit of Shabbat.

The limits of *Tehum Shabbat* [the distance from one’s home on Shabbat, even it is not one’s permanent home, beyond which one may not go on Shabbat] apply to the distance and routes that runners may take.

*Is it Permissible to Ski on Shabbat?*

Downhill skiing and cross-country skiing are permissible on Shabbat only within an *eruv*....

It is a violation of Shabbat to purchase lift tickets on Shabbat.

The limits of *Tehum Shabbat* apply to the distance and routes that skiers may take.

*Is Swimming Permissible on Shabbat?*

Swimming in a pool or a natural body of water is permitted on Shabbat.

Contemporary flotation devices and pool toys may be used within an *eruv*. The same would apply to the carrying of towels or robes.

Care should be taken on Shabbat not to wring one’s hair or bathing suit after swimming. One may rub one’s hair with a towel, but should not wring out the towel after use.

*Are Weight Lifting and Body Building Permitted on Shabbat?*

Weight lifting and body building with free weights or machines are not permitted on Shabbat. Light stretching and mild calisthenics that do not require excessive exertion are permissible.

*Is Yoga Permitted on Shabbat?*

Yoga is permitted on Shabbat, with the sole exception of Bikram, which requires exercise in a highly heated room to induce heavy perspiration for therapeutic reasons.

*Is Bathing After Exercise on Shabbat Permissible?*

Bathing or showering one’s entire body on Shabbat is permissible.

Those living in large apartment complexes with multiple non-Jewish residents and large boilers for common use and those who own solar water heaters may take warm showers on Shabbat, but should not use water hot enough to qualify as *yad soledet bo* [one would flinch upon putting one’s hand in it]. For those with conventional water heaters, the heating of water for bathing on Shabbat constitutes an act of *bishul* [cooking] and is therefore impermissible.

Shampoo, liquid and bar soap are permitted for Shabbat use.

Care should be taken on Shabbat not to wring out one’s towel or hair after washing.

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