

## 14095 - Is Chess Haram?

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### the question

I wanna ask if chess (the type played nowadays) is allowed in Islam or not?

### Summary of answer

When chess distracts us from what we are obliged to do both inwardly and outwardly, it is haram according to the consensus of the scholars. But if chess does not distract us from our obligations or involve anything that is haram, then there is a difference of scholarly opinion concerning the ruling.

### Detailed answer

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### Is chess haram?

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“When [chess](#) distracts us from what we are obliged to do both inwardly and outwardly, it is haram according to the consensus of the scholars – such as when it distracts from an obligatory duty such as prayer or anything that is necessary in the interests of oneself or one’s family, or enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, or upholding ties of kinship or honouring one’s parents, or any obligations connected to positions of authority or leadership, etc.

In this case it is haram according to the consensus of the scholars. Similarly, if it involves anything that is haram such as telling lies, swearing false oaths, cheating, wrongdoing or helping in wrongdoing, or other forbidden things, then it is haram according to the consensus of the Muslims.” (Adapted from Majmu’ al-Fatawa, 32/218, 240)

But if it does not distract us from our obligations or involve anything that is haram, then there is a difference of scholarly opinion concerning the ruling. The majority of scholars (Abu Hanifah, Malik, Ahmad and some of the companions of al-Shafi`i) said that it is also haram, basing that view on the evidence of the Book of Allah and the opinions of the Companions.

The evidence of the Quran is the words (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al-Ansab [stone altars set up for sacrifices to idols etc], and Al-Azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytan’s (Satan’s) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.

Shaytan (Satan) wants only to excite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from As-Salah (the prayer). So, will you not then abstain?” [Al-Maidah 5:90-91]

Al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“This verse indicates that it is haram to play dice or chess , whether that involves gambling or not, because when Allah forbade alcohol He explained the reason for that, which is ‘Shaytan (Satan) wants only to excite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from the prayer.’

So every kind of game in which a little leads to a lot and stirs up enmity and hatred between those who are devoted to it and prevents them from remembering Allah and

praying, is like drinking alcohol, which implies that it must be haram like alcohol.” (Al-Jami’ li Ahkam al-Quran, 6/291)

## **Companions’ views on playing chess**

With regard to the views of the Companions, it was narrated that ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) passed by some people who were playing chess. He said, “What are these images, to which you are devoted? [cf. al-Anbiya 21:52]” Imam Ahmad said: “The soundest comment on chess was that which was said by ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him).”

‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked about chess and he said, “It is worse than dice.”

“Dice” refers to what is used nowadays for [playing backgammon](#) , which is played on a special table. It was narrated in the hadiths that it is haram.

Abu Dawud (4938) narrated from Abu Musa al-Ash’ari that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever plays dice has disobeyed Allah and His Messenger.” (Classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih Abi Dawud, 4129)

Muslim (2260) narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever plays dice is like one who has dipped his hand in the flesh and blood of a pig.” Al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “This hadith is quoted as evidence by al-Shafi`i and the majority of scholars to prove that playing dice is haram. The phrase ‘dipped his hand in the flesh and blood of a pig’ refers to eating it, and this simile is used to show that this is haram because it is haram to eat that.”

## **Scholars’ views on playing chess**

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Chess is like dice in that it is forbidden.” (al-Mughni, 14/155),

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The evil consequences of chess are greater than the evil consequences of dice. Everything that points to the prohibition of dice points to the prohibition of chess even more so... This is the view of Malik and his companions, of Abu Hanifah and his companions, of Ahmad and his companions, and the view of the majority of the Successors... It is not known that any of the Companions permitted it or played it. Allah protected them from that. Everything that is attributed to any of them and says that he played it – such as Abu Hurayrah – is a fabrication and lie against the Companions and is rejected by anyone who knows how the Companions really were and by anyone who has sufficient knowledge to examine the reports critically. How could the best generation and the best of mankind after the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) permit playing something that prevents people from remembering Allah and from praying, and is worse in this regard than alcohol when the player gets immersed in it, as we see in real life? How could the Lawgiver forbid dice but permit chess, which is many times worse?...” (Al-Furusiyah, 303, 305, 311)

Al-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“With regard to chess, most of the scholars say that it is haram to play it, whether that is for money or not. If it is played for money then it is indisputably gambling. Even if it is not played for money it is still gambling and haram, according to most of the scholars... al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked about playing chess, is it forbidden or permissible? He (may Allah have mercy on him) replied that if it makes a person miss praying on time or he plays for money, then it is haram, otherwise it is makruh according to al-Shafi'i and haram according to others...” (Al-Kabair, 89-90)

For more information, please see *Tahrim al-Nard wa'l-Shatranj wa'l-Malahi* by al-Ajurri, ed. by Muhammad Sa'id Idris.

And Allah knows best.