

Muktza Part I: Basics

Shabbos or Saturday? The Torah calls the seventh day *Shabbos*, a day when G-d rested after the six days of creation. However, it is possible to observe and guard this day in a fashion wherein the seventh day, for all appearances, is hardly different from any other day of the week. This is one of the reasons why the Prophets, *Chazal*, and subsequently, the *Poskim* of the current generation enacted *Shvusim* – injunctions to preserve the spirit of the Sabbath.

One of the primary Rabbinical enactments is Muktza. It refers to something that has been “put aside” from one’s mind. It is anything not designated or prepared for use by the onset of *Shabbos*. The primary prohibited action is *Tiltul*, which means to move Muktza. This prohibition also helps to prevent a person from using the object to do a prohibited *Shabbos* labor, or to carry the object from one domain to another (e.g., from a private to public).

There are three reasons for moving Muktza: (1) *Tiltul l’Tzorich Gufo* – movement to use the item, (2) *Tiltul l’Tzorich Makomo* – movement to use the space the Muktza is occupying, and (3) *Tiltul l’Tzel* – movement for the protection of the Muktza item.

There are two methods of movement of Muktza: (1) *Tiltul b’Yad* – the normal fashion of direct handling, (2) and indirect movement (*Tiltul Min HaTzad* or *Al Y’dav Davar A’cher* – using the hand indirectly via a permitted object such as pushing the Muktza with a coat hanger) or a *Shinui* - change (*Tiltul b’Gufo* - with the body, foot, etc., or blowing).

There are eight categories of objects, of which seven are classified as Muktza. In order to move an item on *Shabbos*, first determine if it is Muktza, and if so, what type of Muktza.

NOT MUKTZA

Category 1: *K’li Sh’m’lachto l’Heter* (Object Used For Permitted *Shabbos* Labor)

Items in this category may be used in the normal fashion for the usual reason that they are used during the week. The three areas include:

1. food and liquid fit for human or animal consumption
2. *Keilim* (utensils or objects), except those specifically prohibited
3. non-*Keilim* that have been designated for use on *Shabbos*

MUKTZA

Type 1 (Category 2): May be moved in a normal fashion *l’Tzorich Gufo u’Makomo* (for itself or its space), but not for its own protection.

Category 2: *K’li Sh’m’lachto l’Issur* (Object Ordinarily Used For Prohibited *Shabbos* Labor)

A hammer is normally used to drive nails into wood in order to build, which is a prohibited *Shabbos* labor. However, a hammer could also be used to crack open a coconut, which is a permitted *Shabbos* labor. Therefore, it is permitted to pick up a hammer to use it (in a permitted fashion) or simply because it is lying on a table where the person wants to eat a meal. However, a hammer is not typically used or well suited as a separator between someone eating meat and someone eating milk, and should not be moved for that purpose.

It is not permitted to move items in this category for their own sake (*Tiltul l’Tzel*). If a hammer was left outside on the lawn, it cannot be brought in (assuming one lives inside an appropriate *Eruv*) to prevent it from rusting. However, one may take the opportunity to decide it would be a good time to eat a coconut, and retrieve the hammer in order to open it.

Type 2 (Categories 3 - 8): May not be moved in a normal fashion *l'Tzorich Gufo u'Makomo* (for itself or its space), or for its protection.

Category 3: Muktzah *Machmas Chisaron Kis* (Objects Set Aside For Fear Of Monetary Loss)

Special objects (e.g., expensive, delicate) that one would not normally handle for alternative purposes fall into this category. A *Shochet's* knife must be handled carefully to protect its edge. It would not be used to slice a tomato out of fear that the blade would be ruined.

This classification is subjective. A \$50 camera may fall into this category for an owner of modest means, but not for a wealthy owner. However, it falls in this classification regardless of value if it is a photographer's professional equipment. Items also fall into this category, even if they are worth only pennies, if a person would normally not handle them. Examples: fragile items (e.g., a collector's figurine) or items that have a special location (e.g., a wall painting).

Category 4: Muktzah *Machmas Gufo* (Object Inherently Unprepared For *Shabbos* Use)

Rocks and dirt, by nature, are not in one's mind for use on *Shabbos* and are Muktzah. However, it is permissible to specifically designate a rock or similar item prior to *Shabbos*, for use on *Shabbos*. Possible uses might be as a paperweight or door stop. Although this designation may be made via a mental note, it is preferred to make a mark on the rock (e.g., paint it or smooth it) as an outward sign that it has been designated for use on *Shabbos*.

Category 5: Muktzah: *Machmas Issur* (Halachically Forbidden Item)

An example is the forbidden mixture of meat and milk, called *Basar v'Cholov*. It may not be made, eaten, or profited from during the week. This type of Muktzah is inherently forbidden to be moved on *Shabbos*.

Category 6. Muktzah *Machmas Mitzvah* (Mitzvah Item)

There are certain items designated for *Mitzvah* use, but that *Mitzvah* may not be carried out on *Shabbos*. Examples include the *Lulav*, *Hadas*, and *Arava* which are used on *Sukkos*. Note that an *Esrog* may not be eaten on *Sukkos*, and hence, it is Muktzah *Machmas Mitzvah* on *Shabbos Sukkos* if the purpose is to eat it. Unlike the *Lulav*, *Hadas*, and *Arava*, however, it is permitted to smell an *Esrog* on *Shabbos Sukkos*, and may be moved for that purpose.

Category 7: *Nolad* (Born, Made, Or First Appeared On That *Shabbos*)

Type 1 is any item that did not exist at the onset of *Shabbos*. An example is an egg that was laid that *Shabbos*. Type 2 applies to *Hilchos Shabbos Yom Tov*. It is any item that changed into a new form. This might happen with a utensil that broke, and its pieces are usable, but not for the original purpose. An example is a shirt that was ripped on *Shabbos Yom Tov*. It can no longer be worn as a shirt, but the pieces are usable as rags. The pieces are not Muktzah on a regular *Shabbos*, but are Muktzah on *Yom Tov* and *Shabbos Yom Tov*.

Category 8: *Ba'sis* (Support-Base For Muktzah)

A base that supports Muktzah becomes Muktzah and may not be moved. For example, if money (*Muktzah Machmas Gufo*) was placed in a dish prior to *Shabbos*, the dish becomes Muktzah. It remains Muktzah for the duration of that *Shabbos* and may not be moved, even if somehow the money fell out. The *Ba'sis* may be beneath the Muktzah (e.g., dish), inside the Muktzah (e.g., coat hanger holding a *Shat'nez* garment - *Muktzah Machmas Issur*), or even on top of the Muktzah (e.g., a laundry pin holding very wet laundry - *Muktzah Machmas Gufo* on a line).

In order for a base to become a *Ba'sis*, (1) the Muktzah item had to be supported by it prior to the onset of *Shabbos*, (2) the item had to be placed there by the owner of the base, and (3) the

owner had to have the intention of leaving the item on the base for *Shabbos*. If any of these conditions are not met the base does not become a *Ba'sis*.

Consider a base that has a Muktza item on it but has not become as *Ba'sis* (for the reasons listed in the previous paragraph). Although not a *Ba'sis*, the base still cannot be moved, because in so doing, one would be indirectly moving the Muktza item it supports. The solution is called *Niur* – tilting the Muktza off the base. Sometimes it is not possible to tilt Muktza off the base without destroying the Muktza, another object, the base, or without blocking necessary space next to the base. In these cases it is permitted to move the base with the Muktza on it, or, remove the Muktza by making a *Shinui* (e.g., *Tiltul b'Gufo*).

Suppose a base contains non-Muktza and Muktza objects. The base does not become a *Ba'sis* if the non-Muktza is more important to the owner than the Muktza. The base could be moved after the Muktza is removed via *Niur* (tilting).

Removable drawers that became a *Ba'sis* do not make the furniture (e.g, chest, desk, dresser) into a *Ba'sis*. The drawer cannot be opened or closed, but the furniture may be moved. Non-removable drawers that became a *Ba'sis* make the furniture a *Ba'sis*. The drawer cannot be used, and the furniture cannot be moved.

A candlestick (or *Menorah*, etc.) that is lit at the onset of *Shabbos* is a *Ba'sis* (to the flame), and remains so even after the flame goes out. In turn, it makes the tray and table it is resting on into a *Ba'sis*. One method to prevent the table from becoming a *Ba'sis* is to place a *Challah* (or other important object, such as a *Siddur*) on the table before the onset of *Shabbos*. Although both the flame and *Challah* are important to the owner, the *Challah* is more important, and thus, the table does not become a *Ba'sis*. Subsequent to the flame going out, the table could be moved by removing the candlestick via *Niur* (tilting). (Note that placing *Challah* on the tray will not prevent it from becoming a *Ba'sis*. Whereas a table is a multi-purpose object, the tray is primarily used for the candlesticks.) A tablecloth does not become a *Ba'sis*.

If a *Challah* was not put on the table to offset the candlestick, the table becomes a *Ba'sis* and may only be used if it is sturdy and won't move when being used. If a *Challah* was put on the table to offset the candlestick, but the table is not sturdy and moves when being used, it may be used only after *Niur*, unless *Niur* is not possible for reasons given above.

Miscellaneous *Hilchos* Muktza

1. It is permitted to touch Muktza items, but not move them. Objects that cannot be touched without being moved are forbidden to be touched. Examples: round or hanging Muktza.

2. Muktza may be moved normally if it (a) presents a health hazard or (b) is disgusting.

3. Category 3 – 8 Muktza may not be moved for its own protection. If it must be moved for the space it occupies (e. g., to get to a non-Muktza item), it may only be done so via *Tiltul Min HaTzad* (indirectly, such as by pushing it with a coat hanger). There are *Poskim* that permit its movement via *Tiltul b'Gufo* (e.g., with one's body, foot, wrist, etc.) or by blowing even for its protection, but this should only be invoked to prevent a great loss.

4. Some objects may fall into different Muktza categories depending on the intended use, or may be only partly Muktza. For example, as a telephone book is a *K'li Sh'm'lachto l'Issur* that may be used as a booster seat for a child. Furthermore, the “yellow pages” are Muktza *Machmas Gufo* in terms of reading material, but, the “white pages” are not Muktza because it is permitted to look up an address in order to visit someone on *Shabbos*.

5. Some Muktza objects are not universally classified as Muktza by all *Poskim*. Examples: *Tephilin* and *Mezzuza*.

6. Permitted objects should not be moved mindlessly.

Question and Answers

Question: Is Muktzta a Biblical or Rabbinical principle?

Answer: Rabbinical. It was enacted by the Prophets, *Chazal*, and *Poskim*.

Question: So, may I treat Muktzta lightly?

Answer: How long can you tread water?

Question: *Shabbos* guests are about to arrive and a hammer is on the dining table. May it be moved to prevent embarrassment?

Answer: This is called *Tiltul l'Tzel* and is forbidden. It may be a good time to open a coconut.

Question: A wall painting fell down. May I move it in a normal fashion?

Answer: No, it is Muktzta *Machmas Chisaron Kis*.

Question: A Mezzuza fell down. May I move it?

Answer: A Mezzuza is *Muktza Chisaron Kis*, but it is also a *Kedusha* (Holy) object. Therefore, it may be moved to prevent it from being desecrated.

Question: Is a valuable diamond studded gold goblet *Muktza Machmas Chisaron Kis*?

Answer: No, surely you would serve a beverage in it to your Rabbi.

Question: Muktzta was purposefully placed in the pocket of a weekday shirt by the owner with the intention of leaving it there over *Shabbos*. Is the shirt a *Ba'sis*?

Answer: Yes, because the pocket is an integral part of the garment (i. e., the patch of cloth and the shirt form the pocket). The shirt may not be moved or worn.

Question: Muktzta was purposefully placed in the pocket of weekday pants by the owner with the intention of leaving it there over *Shabbos*. Are the pants a *Ba'sis*?

Answer: No, because the pocket is a separate object sewn into the opening. The pants may be moved with the Muktzta item in the pocket, and worn after the Muktzta has been removed via *Niur*. That pocket is a *Ba'sis*, even after the Muktzta has been removed, and cannot be used (e.g., to place items in it or put one's hand in it to keep warm) for the duration of that *Shabbos*.

Question: A wheel came off the baby carriage. Is the carriage Muktzta?

Answer: Yes, for fear one might repair it. If the wheel is lost, the carriage is not Muktzta.

Question: Is it permitted to sit on a parked car on *Shabbos*?

Answer: Yes. It is permitted to touch Muktzta, but not move it.

Question: A glass broke. May I move the pieces?

Answer: Yes. It presents a health hazard.

Question: Can I move a Muktzta item that is gross or repulsive? Give examples.

Answer: Yes. Examples: (1) A piece of *S'chach* fell onto the table during *Shabbos Sukkos*. (2): Peels or shells on the table after eating. (3) Dirty dishes. (4) Soiled diapers.

Question: I was taking a *Challah* from the freezer and an expensive piece of raw frozen meat fell out. May I put it back in?

Answer: Yes. Pick it up via a *Shinui* (e.g., grasping it with your wrists instead of your hands).