



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

At the risk of conjuring up bad childhood memories, let's spend a few "Shabbat Shorts" on a concept that we may have first been introduced to through someone shouting the word "MUKTZAH!!" at us. Yes, many of us have been there. (And many of us, though we now regret it, have even been on the other end :)

The concept that we refer to by the catch-all word "Muktzah!" is actually a profound and meaningful dimension of Shabbat observance. Yes, it manifests practically in terms of there being numerous objects that we are forbidden to handle on Shabbat, but the big idea beneath it deserves appreciation. Here is how Rambam (Laws of Shabbat 24:12) presents the big idea:

"The Sages forbade the handling of certain articles on the Sabbath in the way they are handled on weekdays. Why did they enact such a prohibition? They reasoned as follows: Inasmuch as the prophets admonished us and charged us not to walk on the Sabbath in the manner we walk on weekdays, nor to converse on the Sabbath in the manner we converse on weekdays, since it is written "nor speaking of it," so much the more should we refrain from handling articles on the Sabbath in the manner they are handled on weekdays, so that one should not regard the Sabbath as if it were a weekday and be led to lift and rearrange articles from one corner to another or from one room to another, or to put stones out of the way, or do similar things. Since one is at leisure and at home, he might look about for something to do; the result would be that he would not rest at all, thus disregarding what is written in the Torah, "that they may rest..." (Exodus 23:12)."

Note that Rambam does NOT here focus on - or even specifically mention - objects whose use is forbidden on Shabbat (pencils, hammers, i-phones). Yes, these sorts of objects do become part of the discussion as we go along, but the big idea here is not "don't handle item 'x' lest you come to use it". The big idea rather, is the quest to create one day of the week that is as different as possible - in material terms - from the other six days. This is the conceptual touchstone for the laws that we colloquially refer to as the laws of "muktzah".

I'll close this introduction with the memorable words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, from the introduction to his classic work, The Sabbath, in which he famously describes Shabbat as a "cathedral in time":

"Realty, to us, is *thinghood*, consisting of substances that occupy space.... The result of our *thinginess* is our blindness to all reality that fails to identify itself as a

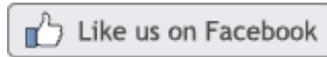
thing... This is obvious in our understanding of time, which being *thingless* and insubstantial, appears to us as if it had no reality."

And we'll proceed to the details from here....

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