



B'NAI DAVID-JUDEA

Shabbat Shorts

As we saw on Tuesday, the goal of what we commonly call the "*muktzah* laws" is to differentiate Shabbat from the rest of the week through our literally letting go of as many physical objects as we can. What Heschel might call "letting go of our *thinginess*". The term *muktzah*, which literally means "set apart", refers to the entire set of objects that are set apart for weekday use, meaning all objects in the world except for those which we specifically use in the service of Shabbat observance.

So that's a pretty big set of objects. As we'll see though, not all objects are as *muktzah* as others are, and not all means of "handling" *muktzah* objects are halachically equivalent. These distinctions all flow directly from the big-picture objective of enhancing our observance of Shabbat through the way that we do - and do not - interact with our "things".

We'll begin with the "most *muktzah*" category, which are objects which simply have no utility whatsoever on Shabbat, either because:

- (a) They have no utility in general (things like empty peanut shells, denuded grape stems), or
- (b) They have absolutely no utility other than the one that is forbidden on Shabbat (your work laptop, for example, as opposed to a hammer which you might conceivably use to smash open a walnut or to prop open a window, things you just wouldn't do with your work laptop)

These kinds of objects are the most obvious targets of the effort to separate us from things that in no way contribute to our observance or experience of Shabbat.

Yet, the Halacha recognizes that there may nonetheless be some Shabbat-connected reason that we might want to move these objects, namely because their presence where they are is somehow impeding or disturbing our Shabbat observance. In these cases, the Halacha offers a way to move these objects, but in a manner that preserves and protects the basic integrity of the *muktzah* enterprise. The means the Halacha offers is that of moving (in essence *removing*) the object through the use of some intermediary instrument. For example, if we need to clear the table of shells or stems so that we can then use the table for our Shabbat pleasure, we may remove these items using a fork or knife, or by removing the tablecloth and shaking it out. Similarly, we might

imagine moving the laptop by sliding a book beneath it. (Elbows and feet may also be employed, as this sort of "handling" is never forbidden.)

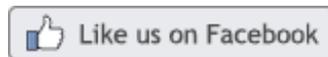
There is also another possibility that pertains to a shells-type scenario. if you (and yes, this is a subjective Halacha) are viscerally disturbed by the presence of the shells, for it feels to you like you have "garbage" on your table, and this upsets your Shabbat joy, then you are permitted to remove the offending objects even with your hand. The utility of restoring your Shabbat serenity is considered to be that important. (This is also the reason that we may take the garbage out of the house if it begins to smell.)

In all of the foregoing, the underlying principle is the same. To truly differentiate Shabbat, we withdraw from handling physical objects, unless through handling them we are contributing to our observance or experience of Shabbat.

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