

3. Laws of *Muktzeh*

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1. Shabbat in its essence is a day of spiritual connectedness to *Hashem*. That sense of connectedness, however, is not achieved by abstaining from *melachah* alone. As Ramban explained in his commentary on *Vayikra* 23:24, the entire spirit of the day can be potentially robbed by a plethora of activities which do not violate any *melachah*. Therefore, in order to safeguard and preserve Shabbat as a day of rest, *Chazal* enacted the *gezerah* of *muktzeh* (מוקצה), prohibiting the moving and handling of certain objects on Shabbat, other than those that are needed and permissible to use.¹

1. **Reasons for *Muktzeh*** Rambam outlines the following reasons for *muktzeh*. Since people are confined to the house and are unoccupied on Shabbat, they would look for something to do in their free time. Were it not for *muktzeh*, they would spend the day arranging and moving things around, or engaging in similar activities. Shabbat would become just like another weekday, and it would cease to be a holy day. Another reason is that if a person were permitted to handle something which is normally used in an activity that is forbidden on Shabbat, he or she might inadvertently engage in the prohibited activity itself and thereby violate the actual *melachah*. Also, some people do not work. Were they permitted to go about doing things in their usual manner they would not be resting on Shabbat in any meaningful way. Therefore, so as to make Shabbat a day of rest equally for all, *Chazal* instituted the law of *muktzeh*. According to Rabad, the rabbinic enactment is intended to keep a person from inadvertently carrying an object from the house into *reshut harabim*. By limiting the

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2. The term *muktzeh* means set aside, or excluded and not counted on for use on Shabbat. There are several different types of *muktzeh*. Although all are essentially explications of the basic concept, they each have separate definitions and rules. The categories of *muktzeh* are as follows:

- (a) Articles intentionally set aside (מוקצה מדעת).
- (b) *Nolad* (נולד), literally, newly born. *Nolad* applies to anything that has come into being on Shabbat.
- (c) Utensils designed for work prohibited on Shabbat (כלי שמלאכתו לאיסור).
- (d) *Muktzeh* due to concern for the value of the object (מוקצה מחמת חסרון כּיס).
- (e) An object which is not considered a utensil (מוקצה מחמת גופו).
- (f) *Basis* (בסיס), which is something which serves as a base or support for a *muktzeh* object.
- (g) *Muktzeh* because the object is repulsive (מוקצה מחמת מיאוס).
- (h) *Muktzeh* due to a prohibition (מוקצה מחמת איסור). (For example, *chametz* on Pesach, or clothing made of *shatnez*, whose use involves violation of a prohibition.)
- (i) *Muktzeh* due to *mitzvah* (מוקצה מחמת מצוה). (For example, a *lulav* that has been set aside for use on Sukkot.)

The *halachot* that pertain to several of the above categories are as follows:

- (a) Articles Intentionally Set Aside (מוקצה מדעת):
Food that was set aside with the intention of not eating it, either because it is unfit and can be eaten only with great difficulty, or because it had been set aside to be sold, even if it was placed in storage; and food that is fit to be eaten that day by dogs, even though it was not so intended before Shabbat (such as cattle that died on Shabbat) is not *muktzeh* and may be handled on Shabbat.² Similarly, an article that has changed from

objects that may be handled only to such that are necessary and prepared for use on Shabbat, you will avoid a possible violation of the *Melachah* of Carrying.

2. **Edible Food and Usable Items** Food that is edible, whether by humans or animals, is not *muktzeh*. Objects that are of some use, even pieces of broken utensils, are not

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what it was the previous day but which is nevertheless fit for some use, such as a utensil that broke on Shabbat but can still be used as a container for food or drink, or a bone that was detached from the meat on Shabbat and is fit to be fed to dogs, is not *muktzeh* and may be handled on Shabbat. All of the above are not *muktzeh* and may be handled on Shabbat. The exception is food that has been deliberately set aside, such as figs and raisins that have been set out to dry, and are put out of mind because they are inedible during the drying process. Since you have actively placed this food into a process which renders it unfit to eat, it is *muktzeh*.

Uncooked food intended for humans but which is currently wholly unfit for human consumption, although it is fit for cattle or dogs, is *muktzeh* since it is intended to be served later as food for humans. Similarly, objects that are unfit for any use on Shabbat, such as pieces of wood, bird feathers, cattle skins, wool, flax, living creatures (even pets),³ shells of nuts and egg shells,⁴ hard bones that are not even fit for dogs, doors and windows that are forbidden to be hung up on Shabbat, pieces

muktzeh. However, food that is unfit for either human or animal consumption is *muktzeh*. Items that are of no use, such as sticks and stones, unless designated for some use, and completely broken utensils, are *muktzeh*. The above is the general rule; specific rulings may vary depending upon the circumstances and *halachic* considerations, as will be explained.

3. **Animals and Pets** According to most *poskim*, all animals including pets are *muktzeh*. Therefore, you are not permitted to handle and pet dogs, cats, and other animals on Shabbat. You are, however, permitted to give them food, as indeed it is your obligation to feed your animals. However, some rule that pets, whose entire purpose is to interact with people, are not considered *muktzeh*. It would seem that pet owners who handle their pets rely on this position. According to all, you are permitted to feed your pet birds and fish, although it is advisable to place a sufficient amount of food in the cage and aquarium before Shabbat. Furthermore, since the birds and the fish are *muktzeh*, you may not move the bird cage and aquarium or fish bowl. If the animal is in distress, or it is necessary to prevent its suffering, you may hold it by the neck and lead it. A blind person is permitted to use a seeing-eye dog on Shabbat; since it is designated for this, it is not *muktzeh* and may be handled as necessary; see also Part IV, Chapter 2 and relevant notes.
4. **Removing Shells, Pits and Peels** Fruit peels which are edible to humans or animals are not *muktzeh*. Nut shells, egg shells, fruit pits, etc., which are inedible are *muktzeh*. However, they may be removed from the table indirectly by shaking out the tablecloth, or by brushing them off the table with a napkin or a knife. If they are unsightly on the table you may pick them up if need be and remove them directly. It is advisable

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of broken utensils that are not fit for any further use, etc., are *muktzeh* and may not be handled on Shabbat.⁵ You are permitted, however, to remove pieces of broken glass from where they may cause injury.⁶

Food which a Jew is forbidden to eat for whatever reason, but which may be given to a non-Jew to eat in its present state, such as cooked meat, is not *muktzeh* and may be handled on Shabbat. However, if it is not edible, as for example, raw meat (nor can it be considered for dogs since it is fit for human consumption, see paragraph 2), or if you cannot give it to a non-Jew because it does not belong to you, it is *muktzeh* and may not be handled on Shabbat.⁷

(b) *Nolad* (נולד):

Nolad is something that has come into being on Shabbat.⁸ Examples of this type of *muktzeh* are ashes from a fire lit by a non-Jew on Shabbat, an

to remove the shells from nuts before Shabbat. You may clear the table of *muktzeh* objects to make room for guests, even if there is a clean table available elsewhere.

5. **Articles Which May Not Be Used** Articles which may not be used on Shabbat, for example, eye color, nailpolish, etc., are *muktzeh*. Insecticides and poisons that are designed to kill ants, roaches and rodents are *muktzeh*, since they may not be used on Shabbat. Insect repellents, sprays and salves which are designed to repel flies and mosquitoes may be used on Shabbat and are therefore not *muktzeh*.
6. **Removing Dangerous Objects** The law of *muktzeh* allows for leniency in a dangerous situation. In this case the broken glass should be cleared away in an indirect manner, if possible, by pushing the pieces away with your foot or by using a broom and dust pan, but not directly by hand. If that is not practical you may pick them up and remove them. Similarly, if the gas on the stove should accidentally be extinguished, you are permitted to turn the knob and shut off the gas, as allowing the gas to flow would constitute a serious hazard.
7. **Handling Food in the Freezer** In applying this *halachah*, you should take care to arrange food in the freezer so that you can remove what is needed without the need to handle items which are *muktzeh*. Of course, not all frozen foods are *muktzeh*; only food that is inedible without cooking. For example, frozen raw meat, or frozen blintzes which are not eaten without cooking are *muktzeh* and may not be handled. However, a pre-cooked *kugel* is not *muktzeh* since it can be reheated in a permissible way and eaten on Shabbat. Similarly, frozen vegetables which do not need to be cooked and can be served at room temperature are not *muktzeh*.
8. **Types of *Nolad*** There are two types of *nolad*. *Absolute nolad* (נולד גמור) is something that actually came into existence on Shabbat or Yom Tov (such as the examples

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egg laid on Shabbat, and juice from fruit juiced on Shabbat. This applies even if it did not come into being as the result of a violation of *halachah*; for example, juice from fruit which fell from a tree or was plucked by a non-Jew on Shabbat, or milk that was milked on Shabbat,⁹ is *muktzeh* and may not be handled on Shabbat.

(c) Utensils Designed for Work Prohibited On Shabbat

(כְּלֵי שְׂמֵלָאֲכֵתוּ לְאִיסוּר):

Keli she-melachto le-issur includes objects such as¹⁰ mortar, a mill, a hammer, an axe, a *shofar*, a candlestick,¹¹ a sewing needle, whole candles,

cited above); any such item is *muktzeh* on Shabbat and on Yom Tov. *Ordinary nolad* is something which existed before in some form but underwent a change, such as a utensil made by a non-Jew, which is *muktzeh* on Yom Tov but not on Shabbat. Rain or snow that fell on Shabbat is not considered *muktzeh* according to most authorities. Young children may play with the snow, although older children and adults should not; see Part II, *Melachah* 5, notes 8 and 9 for prohibitions related to snow on Shabbat.

9. **Making Ice Cubes** See Part II, *Melachah* 5, note 11.

10. **Other Objects Considered *Keli She-melachto Le-issur*** Objects also included in this category of *muktzeh* are cooking and baking equipment, grinders, percolators, etc. If the utensil contains some food it is subordinate to the food and is not *muktzeh*. Other such objects are mechanical and gardening tools, electrical appliances, radios, calculators, cell phones, ipods, flashlights, scissors, pens, pencils, staplers, glue, paints, paint brushes, etc.

11. **Moving a Candlestick or Lamp** A candlestick is only considered *keli she-melachto le-issur* if it had not been lit when Shabbat began, or is not presently lit. However, the *leichter* used to light Shabbat candles, even if the light is no longer burning, is totally *muktzeh* and may not be moved at all, even for use of the space or for some other purpose (לְצוּרֵךְ גּוֹפּוֹ אוֹ מְקוֹמוֹ). Since it was totally *muktzeh* with the onset of Shabbat, it remains totally *muktzeh* the entire Shabbat day. If you lit candles on the table and now need to change the tablecloth, you may fold the candlesticks into the tablecloth and gently set it down somewhere else, but you may not handle them directly. Alternatively, you may have a non-Jew move it. For this reason, it is probably best not to light candles on the table. A candlestick or lamp that was never used for lighting is not yet considered a utensil intended for prohibited actions, a *keli she-melachto le-issur*, and may be moved for any reason.

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cotton wicks, etc.¹² These objects,¹³ despite being *muktzeh*, may be handled in two circumstances. The first is for a permissible use (לְצוּרֵךְ גּוּפוֹ).¹⁴ For example, you may use a hammer, which is *muktzeh* because it is generally used for Shabbat-prohibited purposes, to crack open nuts. Similarly, you may use an axe to cut food, and a needle to remove a splinter. The second circumstance is when you need the place they occupy (לְצוּרֵךְ מְקוֹמוֹ). For example, if a hammer is on a chair, you may move it so that someone can sit there.

Furthermore, once you take hold of the *muktzeh* object for one of these purposes, or even if you inadvertently picked it up, you may hold it and put it wherever you choose. There is no need to drop it immediately.

12. **Moving an Electric Lamp, Clock, and Urn** You may not move a lit electric lamp on Shabbat. Therefore, you may not adjust it to direct the light to different parts of the room. If the light was on during the onset of Shabbat, you may not move it even after the light is turned off by a *Shabbos* clock. If the light was off when Shabbat began, and it was turned on during Shabbat and then off, you may move it, but only for use of the space or for some other purpose (לְצוּרֵךְ גּוּפוֹ אוּ מְקוֹמוֹ). You may move an appliance, such as an electric clock, or an electric urn whose indicator light is on, for its permitted use or if its place is needed (לְצוּרֵךְ גּוּפוֹ אוּ מְקוֹמוֹ). Some *poskim* are of the opinion that there is no difference between a lamp and other appliances, and the lamp may be moved in the permissible circumstances. Therefore, in cases of extreme need, you can rely on those who are lenient. You may move a cell phone whose alarm is set to go off out of a room of sleeping people, as moving it to clear the space of the unwanted alarm is considered *tzorech mekomo*.
13. **Moving Electrical Appliances** An electrical appliance is considered *keli she-melachto le-issur*, and may be moved for a permitted use or for its place (לְצוּרֵךְ גּוּפוֹ אוּ מְקוֹמוֹ). For example, you may move an electric clock plugged in before Shabbat to see the time, or remove it from a table if you need that place, taking care not to unplug the cord. Similarly, you may move an electric fan to direct the breeze as desired, or to clear its place on the table.
14. **Removing Objects from a Car** A car is a *keli she-melachto le-issur*, yet can be used alternatively for storage. In case of urgent need, you may remove permissible items left in the car or in the trunk, *provided no light is activated as the door or trunk is opened*. As a rule, however, you should avoid this practice. Moreover, you may do this only if the car is parked where it is permitted to carry, and in a private place where there is no fear of *mar'it ayin*. The door or trunk may also be closed normally if an object of value is left in the car, otherwise it should be closed indirectly. The keys to the car door, the glove compartment and trunk are not *muktzeh*.

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However, if these two circumstances do not apply, it is forbidden to handle the object. Therefore, you may not move it for the object's own sake, for example, so that it will not be stolen or damaged.

You are not permitted to handle *tefillin* on Shabbat. But if they are in an unseemly place, or where they might become dirty, you are permitted to move them and put them where they will be safe.¹⁵

(d) *Muktzeh* due to Concern for the Value of the Object

(מוקצה מחמת חסרון כּיס):

Articles which a person will not generally use in order to avoid their being damaged, even if they are not used for forbidden activity, are *muktzeh* and may not be handled on Shabbat. For example, a craftsman's expensive tools, a knife used for *shechita* or *milah*, fine writing paper, precious heirlooms, a rare Babe Ruth baseball card, old letters held for safekeeping, precious utensils which you do not use, valuable articles which are not used, objects kept in a store for sale, etc., are *muktzeh*. This category of *muktzeh* is more stringent than *keli she-melachto le-issur*, as these objects may not even be handled for a permissible use or for use of the place it occupies (לְצוּרָה גּוּפוֹ אוֹ מְקוֹמוֹ).

(e) An Object Which is Not Considered a Utensil

(מוקצה מחמת גופו):

Wood, stones, pieces of metal,¹⁶ etc., are *muktzeh* and may not be handled, even for a permissible use or for use of the place they occupy, unless you

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15. **Handling Tefillin, Mezuzah, Shofar, Lulav and a Tallit with Torn Tzitzit** Since *tefillin* are not worn on Shabbat, they are *muktzeh* and may not be handled unless it is necessary to protect them from being damaged or stolen. They may be moved, as well, to allow removal of a *sefer* from a bookshelf, or a *tallit* from a *tallit* bag, if you forgot to remove them before Shabbat. The above also applies to a *shofar*, but not to a *lulav*, which may not be handled at all. You may pick up and put away a *mezuzah* that falls to the ground. You are likewise permitted to handle the *mezuzah's* cover. A *tallit* whose *tzitzit* are *pasul* is not *muktzeh* and may be handled.
16. **Money and Coins Used as an Ornament** Money is *muktzeh*. Gold pieces and coins of silver or some other metal, if perforated and strung as a necklace or chain which serve as an ornament, are not *muktzeh* and may be handled on Shabbat.



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designated them before Shabbat for some permanent use.¹⁷ For example, you are not allowed to take a chip of wood found on the ground to use as a toothpick. Candles which are not whole are not considered utensils and may not be handled. A ladder that rests on a side of a house is also not considered a utensil.