

In Hilchos Shabbos

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Sticks and Stones And other Muktza Machmas Gufo

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by **Rabbi Shmuel Stein** at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

The rabbinical prohibition of *muktza* is quite possibly the largest subject in Hilchos Shabbos. The Mishna Berura¹ explains that there are several categories of *muktza*, and in this chapter we will review the category of *muktza Machmas Gufo*, which includes objects that are considered *muktza* because they have no inherent function.

We will discuss the following:

- 1) The Rabbinical Prohibition of *Muktza*
- 2) When the Prohibition of *Muktza* was Instituted
- 3) Objects which are *Muktza Machmas Gufo*
- 4) Designating a non-functional Object
- 5) Times when *Muktza* items may be Moved

1) The Rabbinical Prohibition of *Muktza*

The prohibition of *muktza* was instituted by *Chazal* to safeguard the *melachos* Shabbos. This prohibition states that any object which is *muktza*, “set apart” from being used on Shabbos, may not be moved on Shabbos. For example, a rock is generally “set apart” from Shabbos use, because it is an object which has no inherent use, and therefore may not be moved on Shabbos. Only objects that are *muchan*, “prepared” for being used on Shabbos, may be moved on Shabbos. For example, a table and chairs are considered objects which are “prepared” for Shabbos, because they have an inherent use, and therefore may be moved on Shabbos.

Touching *Muktza* objects on Shabbos

The Rema² writes that although it is prohibited to move a *Muktza* object on Shabbos, merely touching a *Muktza* object on Shabbos is permissible. For example,

- It is permissible to touch a large rock, car, or sturdy tree, on Shabbos, so long as they do not move when they are touched.³

Why *Chazal* instituted the prohibition of *Muktza*

The Rambam⁴ explains that *Chazal* instituted the prohibition of *muktza* to preserve the holiness of the day of Shabbos. By restricting the types of objects that one may move on Shabbos, *Chazal* ensured that one would remember that the day of Shabbos is different than the other days of the week. Just as we find that the Navi⁵ instituted that one’s manner of speech and one’s manner of walking must be different on Shabbos than the way one speaks and walks during the other days of the week. So too, by instituting that the objects which moves on Shabbos must be different that the objects which moves during the other days of the week, a person will come to remember that Shabbos is different and will utilize it as a day of holiness and not as a day to be busy with mundane activities.

Muktza Machmas Gufo: Objects which have no inherent function

Any object which has no inherent function is considered ‘set apart’ from Shabbos use and is therefore considered *muktza* and may not be moved on Shabbos. Objects which have no inherent function are called *muktza Machmas Gufo* – *muktza* because itself has no inherent function. For example, the Shulchan Aruch⁶ rules that a stone is considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* and may not be moved on Shabbos, because it has no inherent function. The *poskim* give several other examples of objects which are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*:

- Sticks and twigs,⁷
- Sand and dirt,⁸
- Eggshells, nutshells, and pits,⁹
- A dead body.¹⁰

Since these objects have no inherent function, they are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*.

***Muktza Machmas Gufo* may not be moved at all.** The Rema¹¹ writes that the category of *muktza Machmas Gufo* has the strictest restrictions as they may not be moved at all on Shabbos. Unlike objects which belong to other categories of *muktza* which may be moved for certain purposes. For example, the category of *kli she’melachto l’issur* may be moved *l’tzorech gufo u’mikomo* (moving them in order to be used in a permissible manner or to gain access to the place they are resting), yet objects which are *muktza Machmas Gufo* are so “set apart” from Shabbos use that they may not be moved at all on Shabbos.¹²

2) When the prohibition of *muktza Machmas Gufo* was instituted

The Gemara¹³ recounts the following story which occurred when Dovid Hamelech passed away:

*Dovid Hamelech was getting older, and he asked Hakadosh baruch Hu to reveal to him the day and time when he would die. Hakadosh baruch Hu told him that he would die on a Shabbos but did not reveal to him on which exact Shabbos he would die. Dovid Hamelech decided that to protect himself from the Angel of Death, he would learn Torah continuously every Shabbos without ceasing for even a moment, as the merit of his Torah learning has the power thwart the Angel of Death. The Shabbos came when it was time for Dovid Hamelech to die and the Angel of Death came to take his life, but because he would not cease from learning Torah the Angel of Death could not kill him. The Angel of Death found a tree outside the room where Dovid Hamelech was learning and knocked down the tree down causing a great commotion outside. This caused Dovid Hamelech to go outside and interrupt his learning, and the Angel of Death was able to take his life. Shlomo, the son of Dovid Hamelech, found his father’s body outside and was unsure of the permissible manner to move his father’s dead body on Shabbos. Since a dead body has no function, it is considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* and may not be moved on Shabbos. He directed this issue to the Rabbanim of the time and they explained to him a permissible manner to move the dead body.*

The Shulchan Aruch HaRav¹⁴ writes that we learn from this Gemara that the prohibition of *muktza Machmas Gufo* was already enacted in the times of Dovid Hamelech. However, other categories of *muktza* were instituted only later in the times of Nechemia during the second Bais HaMikdash (335 BCE).¹⁵

3) Other examples of Objects which are *muktza Machmas Gufo*

We mentioned earlier some examples of objects which are *muktza Machmas Gufo*, we will now discuss some other types of objects which the *poskim* consider having no function and are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*.

a. Foods which are inedible

Foods which are raw and cannot be eaten in their present state are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*. Since they cannot be eaten in their present state, they have no inherent function.¹⁶ For example, raw meat, raw chicken, or raw fish,¹⁷

1 Introduction to siman 308 2 Rema 308:3 3 39 Melochos p. 40. However, if touching the object will cause it to swing or shake it may not be touched on Shabbos (see Nishmas Shabbos 3:2). 4 Rambam Shabbos end of perek 24 (cited in Mishna Berura’s introduction to siman 308) 5 Yeshaya 58:13 6 308:7 7 Mishna Berura introduction to siman 308 8 ibid 9 Shulchan Aruch 308:27 (Orchos Shabbos 19:145) 10 Mishna Berura introduction to siman 308 11 308:7 12 However, one may ask a non-Jew to move an object which is *muktza Machmas Gufo* if it is being moved *l’tzorech gufo u’mikomo* [however, one may not as the non-Jew to move the *muktza Machmas Gufo* if it is being moved *mei’chama l’tzel* (so that the object does not get ruined)] Mishna Berura 279:14; see *Shmiras Shabbos k’hilchaso* 30, note 65. 13 Shabbos 30b 14 308:17 15 Gemara Shabbos 123b 16 See Orchos Shabbos 19:118. Food that some people would consider edible is not *muktza* (See Nishmas Shabbos 3:160, and Orchos Shabbos 19:118, note 157) 17 For example, raw gefilte fish. However, nowadays, raw fish which is edible (e.g., for sushi) is not considered *muktza* (OU-Kosher). 18 Ibid. The Nishmas Shabbos (3:195) writes that if while opening the freezer, a piece of frozen raw meat fell on the floor one may not pick up the meat on Shabbos even with another object such as a dustpan. (If there is a ‘great loss’ which one will incur if the meat is left out of the freezer, one should consult a Rav.) If the meat is blocking one’s way, then he may pick it up with another object (e.g., a dustpan). If one can pick up the meat with a part of his body other than his hands (e.g. his elbow or mouth) it is permissible to do so, as we will later discuss.

which are inedible in their raw state are considered *Muktzah Machmas Gufo*.¹⁸ Similarly,

- Raw pasta or rice,¹⁹
- Flour or dough,²⁰
- Raw potatoes,²¹
- Unripe avocados (which are not fit at all for consumption).²²

Since these items serve no function on Shabbos, they are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*.²³ Accordingly, when removing non-*muktza* items from a freezer or cabinet on Shabbos, one must be careful not to move these *muktza* items.²⁴

a. Money. The Mishna Berura²⁵ writes that money is considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* and thus may not be moved at all. Rav Nissim Karelitz²⁶ explains that although money has a function (i.e., it can be used to buy things), we do not consider it to be a significant function, because the function of money is merely a representation of value and not a function which is done with the physical object. Unlike a chair or even a hammer which have functions that are performed with the *physical* object (i.e., a chair is used to sit on, and a hammer is used to drive in nails), the function of money is not considered a true function because it is not performed with the physical object but merely serves as a representation. Therefore, it is considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* which may not be moved at all on Shabbos. Similarly, utility bills or credit card bills are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* because they have no function which is performed with the physical object and thus may not be moved at all on Shabbos.²⁷

b. Objects which can become functional through a prohibited act. Some *poskim*²⁸ write that objects which are not functional in their present state and are only functional through performing a prohibited act are also considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*. For example, a roll of aluminum foil is considered to have no function on Shabbos, because the only way to make the foil useful is by *tearing* the foil (which is prohibited on Shabbos under the *melacha* of *Koreya* and *Makeh b'Patish*) and is therefore considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* since it is not functional in its present state.²⁹ Similarly, the following items are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*:

- A roll of paper towels,³⁰
- A roll of plastic tablecloth,³¹
- A spool of thread.³²

Since these items cannot be used in their present state, these *poskim* rule that they are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo* and may not be moved on Shabbos.

c. Broken objects. Broken objects which no longer have a practical use are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*, because they are no longer functional. For example, the Shulchan Aruch³³ writes that if a glass vessel breaks, the broken shards are *muktza*. (If the shards of glass are hazardous, they may be moved on Shabbos, as we will later discuss.) Similarly, the following items are considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*:

- A button which fell of a shirt or jacket.³⁴
- A closet door which fell off its hinges.³⁵
- A door handle which fell off a door.³⁶
- A wheel of a stroller which broke off the stroller.³⁷
- A pair of eyeglasses which broke in half.³⁸
- A pair of eyeglasses which one of its lenses fell out.³⁹
- A torn piece of *tzitzis* string.⁴⁰

Since these items are broken and are no longer functional, they are considered *Muktzah Machmas Gufo* and may not be moved on Shabbos.

4) Designating Non-Functional Objects

The Shulchan Aruch⁴¹ writes that one can transform a non-functional *muktza* item into a non-*muktza* item by *permanently* designating an object for a specific purpose before Shabbos begins.⁴² Since the object is now designated for a specific function, it is no longer *muktza*. For example:

- One may designate a stone before Shabbos to use as a doorstopper and then move it on Shabbos.⁴³
- One may designate a stone before Shabbos to use to hold down a tablecloth and then move it on Shabbos.
- Although sand is typically considered *muktza*, sand in a sandbox is not *muktza* since it was designated to play with, and thus may be used on Shabbos.⁴⁴

5) Circumstances when Muktza Items may be Moved on Shabbos

There are several instances when objects which are *muktza Machmas Gufo* may be moved on Shabbos:

1. *Titul k'lachar yad*- Moving Muktza in a backhanded manner

The Shulchan Aruch⁴⁵ writes that *Chazal* only prohibited moving a *muktza* object in a normal manner but moving it in a backhanded or irregular manner is considered *Titul k'lachar yad* and is permitted. The Shulchan Aruch⁴⁶ explains that it is therefore permitted to move a *Muktza* object with any part of one's body (other than one's hands). For example:

- One may kick money which was left on the floor to move it to a safe place.⁴⁷
- One may sit on a log or rock, even doing so will cause it to move.⁴⁸
- One may use his teeth to move a utility bill that was left on a table.⁴⁹
- One may move a package of raw meat in the freezer with his elbow to get a non-*muktza* item which he is trying to reach.⁵⁰

Similarly, the Rema⁵¹ writes that one may blow a *muktza* object in order to move it, because he is not moving it with his hands. For example, one may blow a dollar bill off a table.

2. Situations where the prohibition of muktza is waived

There are several situations where, due to the necessity of the situation, *Chazal* waived the prohibition of *muktza* and allowed the *muktza* object to be moved.

a. The *muktza* object may cause an injury. If the *muktza* object may cause an injury it may be moved, as the Rema⁵² writes, "A glass vessel which breaks is considered *muktza*, however if it breaks in an area where the glass shards may cause injury they may be removed on Shabbos."

b. *Graf Shel Reiyi* – Repulsive objects. The Gemara⁵³ writes that one may move a *muktza* item which is repulsive and whose presence is disturbing. This leniency is referred to as *Graf shel Reiyi* (an object which was used for repulsive purposes). For example, the Gemara writes that one may remove a dead rodent from one's home on Shabbos. Although the dead animal is considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*, it may be removed since its presence is disturbing. Similarly:

- One may remove eggshells or nutshells from a counter.⁵⁴
- One may remove leftover bones from the table.⁵⁵
- One may remove a dirty diaper from a room.⁵⁶

Since these objects are repulsive, they may be moved on Shabbos.

19 Orchos Shabbos 19:118 20 Ibid 21 Ibid 22 Ibid, 19:117 23 If the *muktza* object is in a draw of the freezer, it can cause the entire draw to become a *Bosis* (if the value of the *muktza* objects in the draw are greater than the value of the non-*muktza* objects) and the draw may not be opened at all even to reach the non-*muktza* objects (Orchos Shabbos 19:118). 24 Ibid, 19:118 25 Introduction to siman 308 26 Shabbos vol. 3, 53:1 27 Orchos Shabbos 19:116 28 Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (cited in Orchos Shabbos 19:125, note 169); Rav Nissim Karelitz (Shabbos vol. 3, p. 58); Orchos Shabbos 19:125 29 Orchos Shabbos 19:125 30 Ibid. However, a roll of toilet paper is not *Muktzah* since they may be used on Shabbos. *Chazal* allowed tearing paper in an awkward manner in a time of need cut due leniency of *kavod habrios*. (Orchos Shabbos 19:126) 31 Ibid 32 Ibid 33 308:6 34 Igros Moshe O.C. Vol. 5 pg. 74 (20). However, this ruling hinges on a dispute between the Mishna Berura and Aruch HaShulchan. According to the Mishna Berura (308:35) a button would not be *Muktza* because although the button has no form of usage it is not *Muktza* when one intends to re-sew it to the garment that it fell off of. According to the Aruch Hashulchan one may only make use of this leniency (of intending to re-sew the garment) when the button has at least some form of usage. Seemingly, Rav Moshe ruled in accordance with the Aruch Hashulchan. See Nishmas Shabbos 3:242. 35 Mishna Berura 308:35. A closet that is attached to the house is comparable to the door of a house. However, the Shulchan Aruch (308:8) permits moving a door of a box that fell off since it is subordinate to the box which is not *Muktza*. For further explanation on this issue see Orchos Shabbos 19:176 note 235. 36 Orchos Shabbos 19:176. However, if one is accustomed to using the broken handle as a "key" to open the door it takes on the status of a functional object and is not *Muktza* (Shevus Yitzchak Vo. 1 pg. 92) 37 Shalmei Yehuda pg. 67 based on Shulchan Aruch 308:16 if the broken object cannot be used properly without the broken piece, both the broken piece and the object are *Muktza* due to the concern that if one were to move the object, he may come to fix it. 38 Mukteh: A practical guide pg. 112. Regarding whether a pair of eyeglasses that one of its temples broke off: the Nishmas Shabbos 3:261 rules that it is not considered *muktza*. 39 Nishmas Shabbos Vol. 3:262. Since it is very difficult to use the glasses with only one of its lenses it is not considered functional and since it is prohibited to fix the lens on Shabbos it is considered *muktza Machmas Gufo*. 40 Nishmas Shabbos 3:157. If the string is in a place where people are walking, one should use another object to move the string (*tiltul min hatzad*) to a place where it will not be stepped on (Nishmas Shabbos, *ibid*). 41 Shulchan Aruch 308:22. 42 The Shulchan Aruch (*ibid*) discusses whether temporarily designating a *muktza* object is sufficient to make it non-*muktza*. 43 Mukteh: A Practical Guide, p. 29 44 Orchos Shabbos (19:238, note 333,2). However, if the sand is wet then it is considered *muktza* since it is used in a prohibited manner (i.e., to make ditches); Orchos Shabbos *ibid*. 45 Shulchan Aruch 311:8 46 311:18 47 Mishna Berura 308:30. However, the Chazon Ish (47:12) rules that one may only kick a *Muktza* object somewhat inadvertently as he is walking but may not kick it outright. 48 39 Melochos p.45 49 39 Melochos *ibid* 50 39 Melochos *ibid* 51 308:3 52 308:6 53 Beitza 36a 54 Nishmas Shabbos 3:167; Mukteh: A Practical Guide (Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen) p. 47. (However, *l'chatchila* one should peel eggs directly into a garbage can; Nishmas Shabbos 3:170.) 55 Mukteh: A Practical Guide, *ibid* 56 Mukteh: A Practical Guide, p. 45