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By the Hakham
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5782/2022 *Parashath Huqqath* פרשת חקת

Touching a Tree on Shabbath

One is permitted to touch a tree on Shabbath provided it does not move or sway as a result. Leaning on a tree is more complicated.

In order for leaning on a tree to be permitted, two conditions must be met:

1. The person must be strong and not need to lean heavily on the tree. Leaning on it is considered to be "using the tree" which is forbidden. Therefore, someone who is weak and needs to lean heavily on the tree is forbidden from doing so (as this comes into the category of using that which is attached, which is forbidden on Shabbath).

2. The tree must be strong and wide and not sway when one leans on it. If the tree is not that sturdy and rocks as a result, leaning on it is forbidden.

Unless both these conditions are fully met, leaning on a tree on Shabbath is forbidden.

(See Rama 336: 13. Kaf Haḥayim ibid, Oth 89 & 90)

Huqqath: It's Illogical - I Won't Do It

"This is the statute of the Torah that G-d commanded saying" (Bamidbar 19:2). When the Jewish people fulfill this commandment of Parah Adummah (the Red Heifer), which is a Huqqah (statute without logical reasoning), it is considered as if they performed the entire Torah that G-d commanded them. That is why it is called Huqqath HaTorah (statute of the Torah) and not a statute of purification or anything else.

When a person performs a commandment that might even seem illogical, such as the commandment of the Parah Adumah, it is testimony to the depth of his faith and the willingness of his soul to perform all the commandments of the Creator. The Ohr Haḥayyim Haqqadosh comments that perhaps this is precisely why G-d wanted to give us this commandment in the form of a Hoq (statute for which there is no logic).

We commonly see people who have difficulty doing something when they do not understand the logic behind it. This is a normal human trait. When it comes to serving G-d, however, it is a test of our belief and faith in Him. If our faith is shaky and wavers, we will have difficulty doing something that appears to defy logic. If, on the other hand, we fully believe that Haqqadosh Barukh Hu (the Holy One blessed be He) is the Creator of the world and, by extension, fully understands the workings of the world that He created, we will have no qualms or difficulties in following all His precepts and directives, irrespective of whether we comprehend the logic behind them or not.

(See Ohr Haḥayyim, Parashath Huqqath)



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Not Crossing at the Crosswalk

It is often tempting not to walk the extra distance to a crosswalk, but to cross the street where one is. Is this permitted?

The Gemara (Ta'anith 20b) mentions Rab and Shemuel who did not pass in front of a wall which was in a dilapidated condition, even though it had been standing there for thirteen years. This is because of the dictum of Ribbi Yannai who said that one should not stand in a place of danger and say a miracle will occur for me because, perhaps it will not. He stated further that if a miracle is wrought for him, it will detract from his merits (Zekhuyoth).

It says in Dibrei Mordekhai that a person who passes in a place which is considered to be dangerous, transgresses the commandment of "ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם" (You shall guard yourself exceedingly - Debarim 4:15). Therefore one should avoid any unnecessary dangerous situation, and should make every effort to cross the street at the appropriate crossing.

(See Dibrei Mordekhai, Parashath Wayyishlah, Halakha BaParasha)

Who Can Recite the Qaddish After the Study of Torah?

After the study of the Torah in the presence of at least ten adult males, it is customary to recite the Qaddish. This Qaddish may be recited by anyone who has lost a parent, even if it is not during the 12 months of the passing one's father or mother or on an anniversary.

It is even recited by those who have stopped reading the Qaddish after the 11 months of their father or mother, during the first year. (Sephardim stop reading the Qaddish for one week after the 11th month and continue for the next three weeks, whereas Ashkenazim stop reading for the entire month and only read again on the anniversary [Yahrzeit]).

After the reading of Torah SheBikhtab (the Written Law - the Five Books of Moses, Tehillim and so on), Qaddish Yehe Shelamah is recited. After Torah SheBe'al Peh (the Oral Law - Halakha, Gemara, a Derasha and so on), Qaddish 'Al Yisrael is recited.

(See Ben Ish Hai, 1st year, Parashath Wayhi, Oth 14)

Women's Corner - by Rabbanith Ruth Menashe 'a"h

Nine Measures of Speech, Part 1

Somehow, when women and speech are mentioned, many people associate these words with a wide selection of jokes. Our Rabbis of blessed memory stated that ten measures of speech came down to the world and women took nine of them. It is in women's nature, in general, to feel the need to talk and express their thoughts and feelings. Speech is a powerful medium which can build and create, console and soothe, yet, can hurt, destroy, and cause much pain.

Hakham Yoseph Hayyim, 'a"h, in his famous work, "Laws for Women", compares speech to salt: a small amount improves the food, however, excessive amounts will spoil it. He says that if we carefully examine the way the Creator made us, it will give us an insight into how we should act. We each have two ears and one mouth, from which we derive that we should listen more than we should talk. To remind us of this we should remember that the English words 'silent' and 'listen' contain the same letters. In order to really listen, we must be silent.

(To be continued)