

## 7. Selecting

### הבִּוּר

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to remove what is unfit or undesirable (פְּסוּלָה) from around something desirable (אוֹכֵל) thereby leaving what is desired in an improved state. Not every act of separation is prohibited. However, the *melachah* is violated if **any one** of the following conditions is present:

- (1) Selecting and separating the undesirable matter from the desired matter.<sup>1</sup>

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1. **Removing Shells, Skins, Peels, and Casings from Food** You may remove inedible shells, peels and skins prior to the meal. For example, you may remove the shells from eggs and nuts, the peel of onions, potatoes, melons and bananas, and the casings from sausages and *kishke*, as this is not considered improving the food as it is simply eating the food. This may be done by hand or with a knife and similar utensils, but not instruments made specifically for that purpose. However, you may use a nutcracker, and even a hammer if necessary, to crack nuts. You may remove the edible skin from chicken and fish, even for a later meal, as it is considered part of the food itself. You may remove the paper or foil that is stuck to food, and you may also remove a bakery label from a *challah* (taking care not to tear the print on the label), as well.

**Removing Bones from Fish and Meat** The preferred method of removing chicken or meat bones and fish bones is to remove them from your mouth after chewing off the meat or fish. If this is not possible, you may remove the meat or fish from the bone while eating, and chewing and sucking the bones as well. Some

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- (2) Selecting with use of a utensil used specifically for that purpose.
- (3) Selecting not for immediate use.<sup>2</sup>

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permit removing the bones, especially small fish bones, in the normal manner while eating, preferably along with some of the meat or fish on the bones, as in that case you are removing meat from meat, which does not constitute a separation of edible from inedible. The custom of eating *gefилte* fish, the fish having already been deboned and prepared before Shabbat, reflects the care with which Jewish families have sought to distance themselves from any possible violation of Shabbat laws in this instance.

**Removing Seeds from Melons and Other Fruits** When eating a watermelon or a grapefruit which contains seeds throughout the fruit, you should shake the loose seeds off and then remove the seeds that remain during the meal, as this is the normal way of eating it. Some, however, advise taking a piece of the melon into your mouth and then removing the seeds. In the case of a melon which contains seeds in the center of the fruit, such as a cantaloupe or honeydew, you may remove the seeds prior to the meal. For fruits which contain a single pit, such as dates, plums, peaches and apricots, you may open them either while eating or prior to the meal and remove the pit, as this is the way you normally eat these fruits. You should discard the seeds of grapes and similar fruits—that contain several pits—while eating, as this is the usual manner of eating such fruit.

**Removing an Insect or Cork, etc., from Food or Drink** If an insect or some other undesirable matter such as a piece of cork fell into your food or drink, you can remove it by hand or with a spoon. However, you should take out some of the food or drink along with it. Some permit removing it only by pouring off some of the food or drink. If you find an insect on a lettuce leaf, you should remove it together with part of the leaf.

2. **Selecting Food to Be Served at a Meal** You may select the food for the meal you are about to eat, for yourself and for others. *Poskim* give no precise number of minutes to determine when you are considered in immediate proximity to your meal. Therefore, you must limit Selecting to the time it normally takes to prepare the next meal. A rule of thumb found in *Magen Avraham*, for example, is that you should not start preparations which include the *Melachah* of Selecting before people have returned from *shul*. In practical terms, if all you have left to prepare for Shabbat lunch is to remove almonds from a nut plate for a salad, you should not do so at 8 a.m. if your guests will not arrive from *shul* until noon. However, you might not need to wait until the guests return from *shul* depending on the number of people and the courses to be served. All the food that you intend to serve, regardless of the duration of the meal, even if it extends for several hours, may be prepared prior to the meal and is considered for “immediate use.” In addition, you can make use of any food remaining after the meal, as long as you did not deliberately select more than was needed.

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If an act of selection contains none of these conditions it is permissible. Therefore, it would be permissible to separate: (1) food from waste (אֹכֵל מִתּוֹךְ פְּסוּלָה) (2) by hand<sup>3</sup> (בְּיָד) (3) for immediate use (לְאֵלֶתֶר).<sup>4</sup>

2. The *Melachah* of Selecting does not only apply to removing waste from food. It also applies where you are removing food you do not want from food you do want, for example, pieces of fried chicken from pieces of roast chicken, if you do not want the fried chicken. In such cases, the food you do not currently want takes on the status of “undesirable matter” (פְּסוּלָה) even though it is completely edible.

The above rule applies when the different kinds are mixed together, but not when they are distinctly separate and readily distinguishable. Therefore, if a serving platter has both potato and noodle *kugel* in piles, or even one on top of another, you may move aside that which you do not want and remove the piece of your choice without fear of violating the *melachah*.<sup>5</sup> It also does not apply when there are so few as not to constitute a mixture.

You are allowed to select and separate the larger pieces of food from the smaller pieces, and vice versa, whether they are of the same kind or of two different kinds provided you select from both kinds.

You are allowed to remove the inedible parts of a food from that which is edible, as this is not considered selection but the normal way of preparing food before it is eaten.<sup>6</sup>

3. **Use of an Ordinary Utensil** Using an ordinary utensil such as a knife, spoon or fork is the same as using your hand. If you can select just as well by hand, but you use a knife, spoon or fork so as not to dirty your hands or to grasp more easily, we consider the utensil an “extension” of your hand and you may use it to remove food for immediate consumption.
4. **Preparation of Food for Animals** You may prepare food for animals, including selecting the food and cutting it up into edible pieces, just as for human consumption.
5. **Different Kinds Mixed Together** Since this *melachah*'s purpose is to improve the desired matter by removing that which is undesired, there must first be a mixture (תערובת) impinging on quality of the desired matter. Two items which happen to be sitting side by side on a plate do not constitute a mixture which affect one another in any way.
6. **Removal of Inedible Parts of Food** You are permitted to remove the outer leaves from a head of lettuce and similar leafy vegetables when the leaves are wormy,

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3. The *Melachah* of Selecting not only relates to food, but also to non-edible items, such as utensils, clothing, etc. In such cases the articles that are unwanted for use are regarded as the “undesirable matter” (פְּסוּלָה).<sup>7</sup>

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moldy, rotted or soiled. In this case it is considered as though you were removing the outer peeling in order to eat the edible part. You are also allowed to cut away the stem and rotted part of fruit, the burnt part of bread, the fatty part of meat, etc.

7. **Selecting and Sorting Silverware, Books and Clothing** Discussion of this *melachah* in the Talmud and *Rishonim* centers exclusively on food. The *Taz* (1586-1667) introduced the possibility of Selecting in the context of other utensils in his commentary on *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 319:12). While *poskim* have accepted his premise, they continue to debate the scope of the prohibition. The stringent position accepts the idea that any sort of selection or sorting of utensils would violate the *melachah*. For example, they would prohibit sorting a pile of books and returning each to its place on the shelf, or sorting a mix of silverware into its various compartments. Similarly, they prohibit taking clothing out of a pile unless the intention is to wear it immediately. However, there are *poskim* who take a lenient view and maintain that the *melachah* is not violated if the mixture is composed of a number of independent items which stand on their own. Those who take a stringent view should keep the following in mind: You are permitted to select the utensils, such as dishes, pots, silverware, etc., which one intends to use for the upcoming meal. After washing and drying, the utensil may be put in its allotted place. In selecting clothing, you should only select the clothes you intend to wear presently. In making the selection, you are permitted to choose from a pile of clothes or articles of clothing in a drawer or among garments hanging in the closet, even if it is necessary to remove the clothing or the garments that you do not intend to wear in order to reach the ones that you want to wear. However, you should not sort clothing or select garments for storage. You may select *sefarim* or books that you wish to read. If you intend to read one later but find it convenient to remove it from the bookcase before then, you should peruse it briefly before setting it down, but you should not sort books in order to stock them on the shelf or in the bookcase. Since the above stringencies are a matter of debate, even if you are stringent in this area, you need not relate to silverware, etc., sorted on Shabbat by those who are lenient as the product of Shabbat desecration (see Introduction to the Nature of *Melachah*). If you take the lenient view, you should keep in mind the leniency is based largely on the fact that large objects such as books and silverware remain distinct and do not form a mixture. However, that cannot be asserted in regard to very small objects that blend easily together.

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4. Also included within the *melachah* (*toladot*) are filtering or straining liquids<sup>8</sup> through a filter or strainer<sup>9</sup> used principally for that purpose, churning milk or cream to make butter, and causing milk to curd, whereby the curd is separated from the whey in the process of making cheese.

5. In addition, *Chazal* prohibited removing the cream from milk unless it is for immediate consumption, putting food into water to remove impurities,<sup>10</sup> and peeling fruits and vegetables to be eaten later in the day.<sup>11</sup>

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8. **Pouring Coffee, Tea and Other Drinks** You should take care, when pouring coffee and tea, that the coffee grounds and tea leaves remain at the bottom. You should not drain out the residual drops, as this would involve separating them from the sediment, and would be prohibited unless the coffee or tea is for drinking immediately. You should follow the same procedure in pouring other drinks, such as wine, that contain sediments.
  9. **Pouring from a Coffee or Tea Pot Through a Strainer** You are permitted to pour coffee and tea or tea essence from a coffee pot or a tea kettle that has a strainer in its spout to keep the tea leaves and the coffee grounds from falling into the cup. Since the coffee or tea is drinkable without straining, the straining is not considered a *melachah*. Similarly, you can put water in a Brita filter on Shabbat since the Brita does not render the water drinkable, it only enhances the quality of the water.
  10. **Washing Fruits and Vegetables** You are not allowed to soak vegetables in water to remove the dust and earth from them, but you may wash fruits and vegetables for sanitary reasons. It is accepted practice to wash apples, pears, peaches and grapes, etc., before eating. Some *poskim* draw a distinction, even with regard to vegetables, between soaking them in a vessel, and washing them with water, which they permit.
  11. **Peeling Fruits and Vegetables** The peel, skin or shell of fruits and vegetables may be removed prior to the meal. The prohibition of peeling for later consumption applies to fruit such as oranges and bananas, to nuts, and to vegetables such as garlic and onions, whose peel, skin or shell is not eaten. Some maintain that it applies as well even to fruit such as apples, whose peel is edible. Other authorities, however, permit peeling apples, pears, peaches and similar fruit, whose peel is eaten by most people, even when you intend to eat the fruit later on during Shabbat.



## 8. Sifting

### הַמְרִקָה

1. The objective of this *av melachah* is to sift flour by passing it through a sieve, separating and removing its impurities and other worthless matter. The *melachah* includes sifting ordinary flour from bran flour, and sifting oats in a sieve to remove the chaff and to cleanse it of undesirable matter.

2. Also included within the *melachah (toladot)* are sifting fine flour from ordinary flour, and placing wine sediment into a strainer<sup>1</sup> in order to filter<sup>2</sup> the wine.<sup>3</sup>

1. **Use of a Water Faucet with a Strainer or a Brita Filter** You are allowed to filter water that is fit for most people to drink to strain out some sediment that it may contain. Therefore, you may use a water faucet equipped with a strainer or designed to keep out sediment and impurities when the water is drawn from the faucet, or a Brita filter, etc.
2. **Drinking Through a Filter** The prohibitions of Selecting and Filtering/Sifting apply only in the preparation of the drink or food beforehand, but not if you filter the liquid as you are drinking it.
3. **Straining and Filtering Drinks and Fruit Juices, Using a Slotted Spoon** Cloudy liquids, such as wine laden with sediment and impurities, which are not fit to drink at all, or which you are particular about and would not drink unfiltered, may not be filtered by any means. Where the beverage is drinkable (or the food is edible) for most people with the impurity present, and you are not particular about it either, filtering (or sifting) is permissible. Therefore, you may filter wine that has some sediment or mold in it, and water that contains some sediment, since it is fit to drink for

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3. *Chazal* prohibited sifting food from food even where there is no undesirable matter, as when ground *matzah* meal is sifted in order to separate the fine particles from clods that are lumped together.<sup>4</sup>

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most people without being filtered. You may strain fruit juice, such as orange juice in order to filter out small particles of the orange, especially for infants to prevent the particles from clogging the nipple in the baby bottle, since most people are able to drink it without straining. Similarly, you may use a slotted spoon when serving coleslaw if the spoon will not rid the coleslaw of all dressing. Since the spoon will retain some of the dressing with the vegetables, it is not prohibited.

4. **Pouring Food Waste Down a Sink Drain** You may pour food and liquid waste down a sink drain that is fitted with a receptacle and a perforated cover to strain out the thick pieces of refuse and prevent the pipe from becoming blocked. You may then also empty the waste matter that has accumulated in the receptacle into the garbage can. Since your intention is not to separate the food in order to retain it, but rather to discard all of it as waste, there is no prohibition of straining or selecting involved.