

Threshing (*Dash*)

What is the labor of Threshing?

Threshing is the first stage in the process of producing flour from wheat. The wheat kernels are naturally covered with husks. In order to prepare the kernels for grinding, one must first separate them from the husks. To that end, one applies pressure to the wheat kernel until the husk cracks and the kernel is revealed. This action is called threshing, and it is accomplished by striking the kernels with a stick or by means of a threshing machine. In the next stage, one separates the kernels from the husks intermingled with them, by means of tossing them into the air (Winnowing). Then one removes the pebbles and dirt intermingled with them (Selecting). At that point, the kernels are ready for grinding.

What is the definition of the labor of Threshing, and what is the fundamental difference between Threshing and Selecting? In both, one separates the wheat kernels from the waste. **Rashi, Tosafot, and others explain that threshing is the separation of the food from inside the shell or the husk in which it grew**, in contrast to Selecting, in which one separates the food from the waste in which it became intermingled.

To clarify: There are labors that **generate** the food and there are labors that **prepare** the food and render it fit for consumption. The labors of Plowing, Sowing, and Reaping generate the food; the labors of Winnowing, Selecting, Grinding, Sifting, Kneading, and Baking take existing food and prepare it for consumption. **How is the labor of Threshing categorized?**

Ostensibly, Threshing belongs to the labors of preparation of the food, as the item became a food once it was detached from the ground. Yet, it is reasonable to categorize Threshing as **generating the food**. Before threshing, the wheat kernel is attached to the stalk and concealed within it. Although the stalk was already severed from the ground, the kernel was not yet severed from the stalk. Only after it was severed from the stalk can it be seen as full-fledged food, as a

completed entity. At that point, one begins to prepare the food for consumption: to remove the intermingled waste (Selecting), to grind it, to knead it, and to bake it.

This is the essential definition of the labor of Threshing: **Extracting and removing the food from the place of its growth, which is considered the end of the process of generating the food.** This is in contrast to Selecting, which applies to preparing food that was already generated, by removing the waste intermingled with it.

The *Ran* (based on Gemara 73b: One who threw a clod of earth at a palm tree) broadens the limits of the labor a bit more. In his opinion, Threshing does not relate only to extracting food from a **shell or covering**; rather, it relates to any **severing of food from the place of its growth**, including severing dates from their **cluster**, even if the cluster is already detached from the tree. In his opinion, the dates are not considered full-fledged food until they are separated from the cluster. That separation, therefore, constitutes the conclusion of the process of generating food.

These definitions can assist us in explaining why certain actions are prohibited by Torah law due to Threshing, and why other, apparently identical actions are not prohibited at all. Why is separating a wheat kernel from its husk prohibited due to Threshing, while peeling a banana or an orange just before eating it is permitted? Why, according to the *Ran*, is detaching dates from a cluster prohibited due to Threshing, while detaching grapes from a cluster is permitted?

The *Aḥaronim* explain that only **actions that are typically performed in the field**, e.g., separating wheat kernels from their husks or extracting dates from the cluster, **are prohibited due to Threshing**, while **actions that are typically performed just before consumption**, e.g., peeling fruit or severing grapes from a cluster, **are not included in the prohibition of Threshing.**

According to this explanation, **only actions that are typically performed in the field are considered part of the process of generating the produce.** Once the produce reaches the house for consumption it is already considered a completed entity, and all the actions performed from that point forward are not categorized

as generating food; rather, they are considered preparation of food for consumption. Therefore, these actions are not included in the labor of Threshing. At most, there is the problem of Selecting, and therefore, as with other instances of Selecting, it is permitted to do so for immediate use.

IN SUMMARY: The labor of Threshing relates to removal of the covering in which the item grew, or severing the item from the place of its growth. This action generates the food, in contrast to the labor of Selecting, which prepares the food that was already generated. Therefore, Threshing is categorized among those labors performed in the field and is considered creating food, while actions that are typically performed in the house, e.g., peeling fruit or severing grapes from a cluster, are not prohibited due to Threshing (pp. 699–711).

Squeezing fruit

Included in the labor of Threshing is the prohibition of **Squeezing**, as in that action one extracts the juice from the fruit in which it is latent and generates a new food, the juice drink. From the **Gemara** (143b and onward) and the *Rishonim* it is clear that there are three levels in the prohibition of Squeezing:

1. **Olives and grapes** – It is prohibited to squeeze them by Torah law.
2. **Strawberries and pomegranates** (which some people squeeze) – It is prohibited to squeeze them by rabbinic law.
3. **Other fruits** (which people do not typically squeeze) – It is permitted to squeeze them.

Today, all fruit and vegetables are typically squeezed to some degree, and therefore, squeezing any fruit or vegetables is prohibited at least by rabbinic law. There is a question whether squeezing most fruits would be prohibited today **by Torah law**. Did the Gemara determine that squeezing olives and grapes is prohibited by Torah law because **those are the fruits that were typically squeeze in the time of the Gemara?** If so, then today, when it is common to

squeeze a significant majority of fruits, squeezing any of those fruits would be prohibited by Torah law. Or perhaps, squeezing olives and grapes are prohibited by Torah law because the **liquids that emerge from them, i.e., olive oil and wine, have special significance**, as evidenced by the fact that there is a special blessing on wine, and some say that one is obligated by Torah law to take *teruma* from and tithe only wine and oil. Perhaps only concerning these liquids is the squeezing out of the juice considered completion of the processing of the fruit. If so, today too, squeezing out the juice from other fruits would be prohibited only by rabbinic law.

IN PRACTICE, therefore, by squeezing olives and grapes, one violates a prohibition by Torah law. With regard to other fruits that one typically squeezes, i.e., virtually all fruits today, there is uncertainty whether squeezing them is prohibited by Torah law or by rabbinic law. Concerning fruits that very few people typically squeeze, it is prohibited to squeeze them only by rabbinic law (pp. 699–711).

Primary category and subcategory

PRIMARY CATEGORY: Extracting grain kernels from the stalks.

SUBCATEGORY: Extracting foods from their shells, squeezing fruit (at least olives and grapes), milking an animal.

Where was Threshing performed for the Tabernacle?

For the Tabernacle, they threshed the plants for the dyes and extracted the substances to make the dyes from their shells.

Practical ramifications of the labor of Threshing

Is it permitted to pick dates or grapes from a cluster?

As stated, an action that is typically performed **in the field**, before the produce is ready to be distributed or consumed, is **prohibited** due

THRESHING (*DASH*)

to Threshing, while an action typically performed **in the house of the consumer is not prohibited** due to Threshing (although sometimes it is prohibited due to Selecting). Therefore, it is prohibited to extract grain from stalks¹ or to pick dates from a branch, even if the branch was detached before Shabbat, as these actions are typically performed in the place of their growth. By contrast, it is permitted to detach grapes from a cluster or to separate bananas from their bunch, as those actions are typically performed in the house. It is also permitted to remove cherry tomatoes or greenhouse tomatoes from their thin branch, if at times those tomatoes are sold on such branches (pp. 704–711).

Likewise, it is permitted to extract **garlic cloves** from a head of garlic, as that is an action performed in the house (*Orehot Shabbat* 4:6, citing **Rav Karelitz**). This should be performed just before the meal, due to the prohibition of Selecting (p. 716).