

Selecting (*Borer*)

What is the labor of Selecting?

During the process of **Threshing**, wheat kernels were removed from their husks. The kernels and the husks remained intermingled, and in addition, they are also intermingled with pebbles, dirt, or the like. The labor of Selecting is meant to remove the waste from the wheat kernels and prepare the kernels for grinding. Removing the waste is accomplished in two stages:

1. **Winnowing** – One places the intermingled kernels and husks into a utensil (a winnower) and tosses the kernels into the air. The lighter husks are blown away by the wind, while the heavier wheat kernels, along with pebbles and dirt, settle back into the utensil.
2. **Selecting** – One removes by hand the pebbles and dirt that remain intermingled with the kernels.

After that stage the kernels are clean, and it is possible to **grind** them. At the conclusion of the grinding, there remains a mixture of fine flour and coarse flour (bran). Therefore, a third action, **Sifting**, is required to separate the waste. One places the mixture in a sieve and shakes it until the fine flour emerges from the holes in the sieve, while the unwanted, coarse flour remains in it.

It appears that Winnowing, Selecting, and Sifting are similar labors. All three **separate the waste from the food**, but each employs a different means: **Winnowing is by means of the wind, Selecting is primarily by hand, while Sifting is by means of a utensil** (see *Rabbeinu Hananel* 74a). Indeed, the *Gemara* (73b) notes the similarity between the labors:

Winnowing is the same as Selecting, which is the same as Sifting.

The *Gemara* explains that despite the similarity, these actions were enumerated as three separate labors among the thirty-nine primary categories of labor, since all three of them were performed in the Tabernacle, and each labor that was performed in the Tabernacle

is enumerated separately. Therefore, our discussion below essentially relates to all three of these labors, as their objective is identical: separating unwanted material from the desired material (pp. 767–770).

Ostensibly, a difficulty can be raised with regard to the essence of the labor of Selecting. There is a principle that one is exempt for any labor performed not for its own sake. A labor performed not for its own sake is a labor that one performs not for its essence; rather, one requires only its peripheral consequence. Isn't every act of Selecting a labor performed not for its own sake? The labor is performed on the waste, and the person does not require the waste that is being removed.

Baal HaMaor (37b Rif) explains that indeed, Selecting is a labor performed not for its own sake. Nevertheless, the Torah teaches here a novel concept, that one is liable for performing that labor.

By contrast, from the **Ramban** (106a) and the *Yeshuot Yaakov* (cited in *Beur Halakha* 319:3, s.v. *le'ekhol miyad*), it emerges that even though the labor is actually performed by means of removing the waste, the purpose of the labor of Selecting is preparing the food, and therefore, the person requires the purpose of the labor.

If so, there are two approaches with regard to the essence of the labor of Selecting:

1. Removing the waste.
2. Preparing the food.

There are many ramifications to this analysis. For example: Is one liable for removing the waste if the entire mixture was not rendered edible? In the **Yerushalmi** (7:2) it is explained that one is exempt, while from the **Bavli** (according to *Eglei Tal*, *Zoreh* 1:4) it appears that one is liable. Perhaps the Yerushalmi holds that the essence of Selecting is preparing the food. Therefore, even though a considerable amount of waste was removed, since the food was not rendered edible, one is exempt. By contrast, the Bavli holds that the essence of the labor is removal of the waste. Therefore, one who removes even a small amount of waste is liable, even though the mixture was not yet rendered edible.

An additional ramification: Is it permitted to remove the waste

together with a small amount of food? From the *Taz* (319:13) and the *Mishna Berura* (319:61) it is clear that it is permitted, while the *Hazon Ish* (beginning of 53) prohibits doing so. If the essence of the labor of Selecting is the removal of the waste, perhaps if one removes some food with it, it is not the removal of waste alone, and would be permitted. But if the essence of the labor of Selecting is rendering the food edible, one would prohibit removal of waste even together with a small amount of food, since ultimately, one is thereby rendering the remaining food fit for consumption (pp. 771–774).

Although Selecting is prohibited by Torah law, there are situations where selecting is permitted. The *Gemara* (74a) mentions three conditions essential for permitting selecting:

1. RAV YOSEF said: One selects and eats by hand...one may not select with a sieve or with a sifter, and if he did select, he is liable to bring a sin-offering.
2. RAV HAMNUNA said: One selects and eats food from the waste... one may not select waste from food, and if he did select, he is liable to bring a sin-offering.
3. ABAYE said: One selects and eats for immediate use...one may not select for use later that same day, and if he did select...he is liable to bring a sin-offering.

On the basis of this *Gemara*, the ruling is that it is permitted to select only if **three conditions** are fulfilled (*Shulhan Arukh* 319:1–4):

1. It is permitted to select **food** from waste but not to select waste from food.
2. It is permitted to select **by hand** but not with a utensil.
3. It is permitted to select only **for immediate** use.

The *Rishonim* disagreed with regard to the basis of the leniency to select when these three conditions are fulfilled: According to **Rashi** and **Tosafot**, the leniency is based on the fact that the selecting was performed in an **unusual manner** (*shinui*), while according to the **Ramban** and the **Ran**, the leniency is based on the fact that this is **the manner of eating**, and the Torah allowed one to eat in a normal

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manner. There are various practical ramifications to this dispute that will be cited below (pp. 775–780).

Primary category and subcategory

PRIMARY CATEGORY: Removing waste from food, even by hand and for immediate use. Some say that in certain cases this category includes even separating food from waste with a utensil designated for that use, as will be explained below with regard to the labor of Sifting (pp. 907–909).

SUBCATEGORY: Separating food from waste by hand or with a utensil that is designated for later use (*Eglei Tal, Borer 2*), **churning butter, and making cheese** (*Gemara 95a; Rambam 8:11*).

Where was Selecting performed for the Tabernacle?

The dye plants for the preparation of the curtains were intermingled with waste. The waste was selected and removed from the plants.