

Sifting (*Meraked*)

What is the labor of Sifting?

Sifting [*meraked*] is the action performed by one who places flour into a sieve and causes it to “dance” [*lirkod*], i.e., one shakes the sieve until the fine flour descends through the holes of the sieve and the waste, i.e., the coarse flour, remains in it. Like the labor of Selecting, the labor of Sifting too, relates to the separation between food and waste. It is listed separately only because it too was performed in the Tabernacle. Therefore, one who separates food and waste in a manner similar to Selecting is liable due to Selecting, and one who separates food and waste in a manner similar to sifting is liable due to Sifting.

In fact, there are different opinions with regard to when one who separates food and waste is liable due to Sifting. Is it in any case of sifting with a utensil (**Rabbeinu Hananel** 74a)? Only sifting with a utensil in which the food descends and the waste remains (**Rashi** 138a, based on **Gemara** there)? Only sifting dry goods (**Commentary Attributed to the Ran** in the name of the **Raah** in reference to the opinion of **Rabba** in the **Gemara** there)? Only sifting that requires performing an action with the food and with the waste (**Beur Halakha** 319:9, s.v. *meshameret*, in the opinion of **Tosafot**)? In any case, in those circumstances where there is no liability due to Sifting, there is liability due to Selecting (pp. 907–911).

There are cases in which sifting is permitted. The **mishna** (139b) permits straining wine by means of a cloth that is not designated for straining, but with which it is possible to strain. The **Gemara** (139b) adds that it is permitted to strain wine **without sediment** and water even in a strainer, which is a utensil designed for straining.

The *Rishonim* disagree concerning the relationship between these two rulings.

The **Rambam** (8:14) understands that one may strain only clear liquids with a cloth that is not designated for straining. In his opinion, there is no leniency under any circumstance to strain liquids in a

strainer, and there is no leniency to strain murky liquids even with a cloth.

Contrary to his opinion, the **Rashba** (139b) and the **Ran** (57b Rif) hold that it is permitted to strain clear liquids even in a strainer, and it is permitted to strain slightly murky liquids with a cloth.

The *Mishna Berura* (319:42) rules that the *halakha* is that one may be lenient and strain clear liquids in a strainer in accordance with the opinion of the Rashba and the Ran, while with regard to slightly murky liquids, it is preferable to account for the opinion of the Rambam and refrain entirely from straining them.

What is the reasoning behind the leniency to strain clear liquids in a strainer? Isn't it a utensil made for straining? There are two possible answers:

1. Since most people drink the liquids in an unstrained state, straining the liquid does not render it fit for consumption.
2. Since most people drink the liquids in an unstrained state, the liquid and the impurities in it are considered one type, and therefore, separating them is not considered Selecting or Sifting. This is as stated above, that there is no prohibition of Selecting within one type (pp. 912–917).

Primary category and subcategory

PRIMARY CATEGORY: Separating waste from food by means of a utensil designated for that purpose.

SUBCATEGORY: Straining liquids (at least according to Rabbi Zeira, 138a).

Where was Sifting performed in the Tabernacle?

In the Tabernacle, the ground dye plants were sifted in order to separate the finely ground parts from those parts that were not finely ground.

Practical ramifications of the labor of Sifting

Is it permitted to strain liquids on Shabbat?

It is permitted to strain clear liquids that most people drink without straining, even with a strainer (*Shulḥan Arukh* 319:1, in accordance with the opinion of the Rashba and the Ran). The reason is that since most people drink the liquids without straining, straining them does not render them fit for consumption. Moreover, since most people drink the liquid as is and pay no attention to its impurities, those impurities can be viewed as **the same type** as the liquid, and there is no prohibition of Selecting within one type.

It is prohibited to strain **slightly murky liquids**, which most people strain before drinking (even if it is possible to drink them as they are), with a strainer, and it is preferable to refrain entirely from straining them (*Mishna Berura* 319:42, citing Rambam). There is room to be lenient to strain them with a utensil that is not designated for straining (in accordance with the opinion of Rashba and Ran).

It is prohibited to strain **liquids that are very murky**, which cannot be drunk without straining (*Shulḥan Arukh* 319:1) (pp. 912–914).

Is it permitted to use a faucet that has a filter?

It is permitted. The reasons are: (1) Most people drink the water even without a filter. (2) The filter is permanently attached to the faucet, and the water is not used exclusively for drinking; therefore, it is not in the manner of Selecting. It is consequently permitted even in a country where water is drunk only with a filter, provided that one drinks the water immediately (*Responsa Minḥat Yitzhak* 7:23) (pp. 919–922).

Is it permitted to use a non-electric water purification system?

If most people drink water without filtration, one may be lenient, as explained above (although some are stringent). In a place where

most people do not drink water unless it is filtered, one may not use a water filtration device, as it is designated for drinking water, and the two reasons cited above do not apply. In a place like that, one must prepare filtered water before Shabbat (pp. 919–922).

Is it permitted to use a vessel of tea essence that has a strainer that prevents tea leaves from being poured?

When there is a large amount of tea essence in the vessel, it is permitted to pour it through the strainer, since the tea at the top that is being poured is not mixed with the tea leaves and does not require straining (based on *Shulhan Arukh* 319:14). When there is only a small amount of tea left in the vessel, and the leaves are completely mixed with the liquid, one should refrain from using that strainer. Nevertheless, there are lenient opinions upon which one can rely, since this vessel is always used for immediate drinking (*Hazon Ish* 53, s.v. *min haamur*), and also because the tea is fit for drinking even with the leaves (*Shevitat HaShabbat, Borer, Be'er Rehovot* 49) (pp. 922–926).

Is it permitted to prepare tea with a teabag?

It is permitted to prepare tea with a teabag (in a tertiary vessel for those who are lenient in that regard), and there is no concern about the fact that the teabag serves as a strainer through which the water passes while the tea leaves remain. The reason is that the prohibition of Selecting applies only to items that were initially intermingled and were separated, while in this case, the water was initially clear, and only later is it intermingled with the tea leaves, and then separated from them (based on *Shulhan Arukh* 319:9). Note that when the teabag is removed from the water, it must be moved directly to wherever one plans to place it, without waiting while the drops drip from the teabag (*Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach*, cited in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 3, note 121).

Similarly, it is permitted to pour hot water over coffee grounds in a non-electric **coffee filter** (with water from a tertiary vessel for

those who are lenient in that regard) because the water was clear at the beginning and clear at the end (pp. 926–928).

Is it permitted to use a slotted spoon? In what manner may one use a standard ladle?

It is advisable to be stringent and to refrain from using a slotted spoon, since it involves straining by means of a utensil, but there are opinions on which one can rely if they want to be lenient and use a spoon of that kind (*Responsa Or LeTziyon*, vol. 2, 31:10). When doing so, one must not hold the spoon in the air so that the liquid will drip; rather, one must transfer the food immediately.

It is, of course, permitted to use a standard ladle to serve soup. One may not tip the ladle to pour out unwanted liquid mixed with the vegetables, as in doing so one selects the waste from the food. One may certainly not strain out the unwanted liquid by holding the ladle against the side of the pot, since that may be considered to be straining with a utensil (Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach cited in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 3, note 159; and in *Tikunim UMiluim* there). One who wants only the liquid may gently place the ladle in the pot so that the liquid alone will enter the ladle. One who wants the vegetables alone should remove them with a standard fork or spoon, thereby removing the food from the waste (pp. 928–932).

Is it permitted to use a salt shaker with rice mixed in with the salt?

There are those who were stringent in this case, since this strains the salt from the rice. The *halakha* is that one may be lenient, since the holes are designed to scatter the salt, not to strain it, and the straining is an incidental consequence (*Az Nidberu* 4:23). In addition, it is a utensil for selecting for immediate use, and perhaps it is not at all considered a utensil for selecting (Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, cited in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 3, note 125; and in *Tikunim UMiluim*) (pp. 932–394).

Is it permitted to use a centrifugal device to dry lettuce?

Since the water does not hinder the eating of the lettuce, and most people are willing to eat the lettuce while it is wet, there is no problem of Selecting when separating the water from the lettuce. Therefore, it is permitted to dry the lettuce even with a utensil designated for that purpose, just as it is permitted to strain clear water in a strainer. That is the conclusion drawn from the *Mishna Berura* (320:24) (pp. 935–936).

Rav Yehoshua Yeshaya Neuwirth

[*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata*]

Rav Neuwirth was born in 1927. During the Holocaust he hid with his parents and brothers in a single room in Holland for almost three years. In 1946 he immigrated to Israel, where he lived in Jerusalem. He learned at the Kol Torah yeshiva and established yeshivot for youth and adults in the Bayit Vegan neighborhood.

His most important work is *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata*, a trailblazing book on the laws of Shabbat. The book is very user friendly, and integrates classical *halakhot* with the realities of modern-day living. It includes an excellent index of topics, which allows one to easily locate almost any *halakha*. One of the most important features of this book is that many of its rulings are derived from the teachings of the foremost halakhic authority of the generation, **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach**. Statements of Rav Auerbach are cited on virtually every page, and a special volume was even published with his comments on the book. *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* itself contains many notes of great importance, and its rulings are discussed in detail in numerous later halakhic works.

Rav Neuwirth passed away on June 11, 2013.

SIFTING (MERAKED)

Sifting

In the Tabernacle: The ground dye plants were sifted from the parts that were not finely ground.

Definition of the labor: Separation of waste from food by means of a utensil. Sifting [*meraked*] is the action performed by one who places flour into a sieve and causes it to “dance” [*lirkod*] by shaking it, until the fine flour descends through the holes of the sieve and the waste (the coarse flour) remains in it.

Primary category of labor: Separating waste from food by means of a utensil designated for that purpose

Subcategory: Straining liquids

Is it permitted to strain liquids on Shabbat?

Clear liquid (most people drink it as is)

It is permitted to strain it even with a strainer (in accordance with the opinion of the Rashba and the Ran).

Slightly murky liquid (most people do not drink it as is)

It is prohibited to strain it with a strainer, and it is preferable not to strain it at all (in accordance with the opinion of the Rambam). According to the basic *halakha* it is permitted to strain it with a utensil that is not designated for that purpose (Rashba, Ran).

Very murky liquid (it cannot be drunk as is)

It is prohibited to strain it at all.

Is it permitted to use the filter on a faucet?

It is permitted. Since most people drink the water without filtration, and the filter is permanently attached to the faucet (and it is not only for drinking), it is not the manner of Selecting (Responsa *Minhat Yitzhak*).

Is it permissible to use a non-electric water purifier?

If most people drink the water as is – it is permitted.

If most people do not drink the water as is – it is prohibited. The water should be treated before Shabbat.

Teabags

It is permitted to use a teabag (for those who are lenient and prepare it in a tertiary vessel). When removing it from the cup one must place the bag immediately in its place and not allow the drops to drip (Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach). It is permitted to use a coffee filter on Shabbat (with water poured from a secondary vessel for those who are lenient in that regard).

A slotted spoon and a ladle

It is permitted to use a ladle, but one must not tip it in order to spill the liquid. It is advisable not to use a slotted spoon, and likewise, one must not hold the ladle against the side of the pot for the purpose of straining.

Salt shaker with rice

It is permitted to use it, since the holes are designed to scatter the salt, not for straining (and for additional reasons).