

## Winnowing (*Zoreh*)

### What is the labor of Winnowing?

Winnowing separates the wheat kernels from the husks and straw by means of the wind. One takes a winnower, places the kernels and the husks in it, and tosses the kernels and the husks in the air. The husks and straw are blown away in the wind, and the heavier wheat kernels fall back into the utensil. This action is called winnowing and it is enumerated among the thirty-nine primary categories of labor that are prohibited on Shabbat.

Ostensibly, one who winnows on Shabbat should be exempt, as all they did was toss the kernels and the husks upward and it was the wind that blew the husks away. In the **Gemara** in *Bava Kamma* (60a), Rav Ashi explains that indeed, the act of winnowing could be considered an indirect action, but the Torah introduced a novel *halakha* that it is nevertheless prohibited since “the Torah prohibited planned creative labor.” In other words, since the person knew that by tossing the contents of the utensil into the air the husks would blow away, and this was their intention, they are liable (pp. 941–943).

**What is the definition of the labor of Winnowing?** From the **Gemara** (73b) it appears that the labor of Winnowing is substantively similar to the labor of Selecting, and its essence is **separating waste from food by means of the wind**. Yet, the **Yerushalmi** (7:2) writes, surprisingly: If a person spits and the wind scatters the spittle, they are liable due to Winnowing. Ostensibly, that is not at all similar to Winnowing, as there is no separation of food and waste. Apparently, according to the Yerushalmi, the labor of Winnowing relates to **scattering particles by means of the wind**, even if they are not food and waste.

It emerges that there is a fundamental dispute with regard to the definition of the labor of Winnowing. According to the Bavli, Winnowing is separating waste from food by means of the wind, while according to the Yerushalmi, the definition of Winnowing is scattering particles by means of the wind (p. 945).

The authorities also discuss whether Winnowing is specifically scattering parts of a whole by means of the **wind**, or if it includes even scattering those parts by other means. A consequence of this *halakha* might be the use of an aerosol spray, as explained below (p. 192).

## Primary category and subcategory of labor

PRIMARY CATEGORY: Separating waste from food by means of a utensil or by means of the wind.

SUBCATEGORY: Separating waste by means of blowing and not by means of natural wind; tossing food and waste by hand with the wind blowing away the waste (*Eglei Tal, Zoreh 5*).

## Where was Winnowing performed in the Tabernacle?

In the Tabernacle, the dye plants were winnowed in the wind so that the lighter husks blew away in the wind and the heavier parts of the plant remained.

## Practical ramifications of the labor of Winnowing

### Is it permitted to scatter waste by means of blowing with one's mouth?

This action is very similar to Winnowing. Indeed, the *Arukh* (entry: *Zar*) and *Rabbeinu Hananel* (74a) write that the prohibition of Winnowing is in effect even in a case where one separates the waste by means of blowing with their mouth. Therefore, if a person blows a mixture of peanuts with their thin shells and scatters the shells in that manner, it is prohibited by Torah law as a subcategory of Winnowing, and that is also the ruling of *Shulhan Arukh HaRav* (*Piskei HaSiddur, Hilkheta Rabbeta LeShabbeta*, On the matter of a fly in a cup), and others (pp. 943–944).

### Is it permitted to use an aerosol spray on Shabbat?

According to the **Bavli**, the definition of Winnowing is **separating waste from food by means of the wind**, while according to the **Yerushalmi**, the definition of Winnowing is **scattering particles by means of the wind**. In using an aerosol spray, there is no separation of food from waste; rather there is the scattering of particles in the air, propelled by pressure or by gas. Therefore, according to the **Bavli**, it is clearly permitted, while according to the **Yerushalmi**, ostensibly it should be prohibited. The **Rema** (319:17) cites the statement of the Yerushalmi with regard to spitting into the wind as the *halakha*. On that basis, one would not be permitted to use an aerosol spray on Shabbat.

In practice, it is reasonable to permit using an aerosol spray for several reasons:

1. The Bavli disagrees with the Yerushalmi, and most authorities ruled in accordance with the opinion of the Bavli.
2. Perhaps Winnowing applies only to items that grow from the ground, e.g., wheat, peanuts, or the like.
3. When spraying, the scattering is effected **by a person** and not by the wind, and perhaps that action is not at all connected to the prohibition of Winnowing.

The prominent authorities write to be lenient (see **Responsa of Rabbi Akiva Eiger**, *Mahadura Kamma* 20, in a similar context; **Responsa Minḥat Yitzhak** 6:26; **Responsa Yehaveh Daat** 6:25) (pp. 944–951).

### Is it permitted to add water to a cold water vaporizer?

A cold water vaporizer separates water into droplets that are then scattered throughout the room. According to what was explained with regard to an aerosol spray, it is permitted to add water to a cold water vaporizer if the need arises, provided that adding the water does not activate the device (pp. 951–953).

**Is it permitted to shake out a tablecloth with crumbs on it?**

It is permitted to shake out a tablecloth in a place where there is no wind, even if one's intent is to scatter the crumbs, since the prohibition of Winnowing does not apply to scattering effected by a person. If there is wind, it is permitted to shake the tablecloth only if there is no intent that the crumbs will be scattered by the wind (pp. 948–950).

**Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss****[Responsa *Minhat Yitzhak*]**

Rav Weiss, who was born in Galicia in 1902, was one of the foremost ruling authorities of the previous generation. He was ordained as a young man, and within a short time he began serving as a rabbi and teaching Torah widely. During the Holocaust he was forced to perform hard labor in Hungary. When the deportations to the extermination camps began, he survived by hiding in a bunker. He wrote about these experiences in a pamphlet called *Pirsumei Nisa*, which he published as part of the first volume of his Responsa, *Minhat Yitzhak*.

After the war he served for many years as *Av Bet Din* in Manchester, England, where he began writing his halakhic responsa. These were published in a series of ten volumes called *Minhat Yitzhak*. The *Minhat Yitzhak* became accepted as one of the most significant halakhic works of the generation, although its rulings are not universally accepted.

In 1970, Rav Weiss immigrated to Jerusalem and joined the leadership of the Orthodox Council of Jerusalem, the *Eida Haredit*, in which he served in various capacities until his death in 1989. Through his activities in these positions he exerted a significant influence over Israeli society.

## HALAKHIC OVERVIEW

### Winnowing

**In the Tabernacle:** Dye plants would be winnowed (tossed) in the wind so that the lighter husks blew away in the wind and the heavier parts of the dye plants remained.

**Primary category of labor:** Separating waste from food by means of a utensil or by means of the wind  
**Subcategory:** Separating waste by means of blowing; tossing a mixture by hand with the wind blowing away the waste

#### Definition of the labor

**Bavli:** Separating waste from food by means of the wind

**Yerushalmi:** Separating a substance into particles by means of the wind

#### Is it permitted to spit, or to shake out a tablecloth with crumbs, in a place where there is wind?

It is permitted, because there is no separation of waste from food.

It is prohibited, because the wind scatters the spittle or the crumbs in the air.

In terms of practical halakha one may be lenient if one does not desire the separation caused by the wind. If one does desire the consequent separation, it is advisable to be stringent (*Mishna Berura*).

#### Is it permitted to use a spray?

According to the Bavli it is certainly permitted, as there is no separation between food and waste. Perhaps it is permitted even according to the Yerushalmi, since the scattering is effected by a person and not by the wind. Therefore, one may be lenient in this case even though there is intent to scatter the material. On that basis, it is permitted to shake out a tablecloth in a place where there is no wind even if one wants the crumbs to scatter, and likewise, it is permitted to add water to a cold water vaporizer.

#### Is it permitted to scatter thin peanut shells and the like by means of blowing them with one's mouth?

It is prohibited even according to the Bavli, since this scatters the waste by means of the wind that one is generating with one's mouth.