

The Prohibited Labor of Threshing (*Dash*)

What is the difference between the labors of Threshing and Selecting?

Why is it permitted to remove grapes from a cluster?

May one use a nutcracker?

Is it permitted to shell peanuts?

Definition of the labor



Wheat kernels.

Threshing is the first stage in the production of flour from wheat. When wheat kernels grow they are covered with husks, and in order to prepare them for grinding, **the husks must be removed**. For this purpose, pressure must be applied to the kernels until the husk is broken and the wheat kernel

Threshing

exposed. This act is called **threshing**, and it is performed by striking the wheat with a stick or a threshing instrument. Then, the grain is separated from the husk and stalks in which they are mixed by tossing them in the air (**Winnowing**). Afterward, one removes the stones and dirt which are still among the kernels (**Selecting**), so that they are clean and ready to be ground.

The labor of Threshing seems to be equivalent to the labor of Selecting: In both cases, one separates the kernels from various

What is the difference between Threshing and Selecting?

forms of waste products. Yet, the **Gemara** clearly implies that these are two different labors (73b). What is the essential difference between Threshing and Selecting? What, precisely, is the definition of Threshing?

Rabbeinu Ḥananel:
Threshing applies
to attached waste;
Selecting applies
to intermingled
waste

Rabbeinu Ḥananel (74a) provides one answer:

Threshing is separating waste that is **attached** to food, thereby preparing it for selecting... Winnowing, Selecting, and Sifting all serve to remove waste that is **mixed** with, but not attached to, food.

According to this opinion, Threshing is the removal of waste that **adheres** to food, whereas Selecting is the removal of waste that is **mixed** with food. When the food and the waste grow together as a single entity, performing the first act of separating this entity into food and waste is the labor of Threshing. By contrast, if the food and the waste are separate bodies which became mixed and one subsequently separates them, this is the labor of Selecting (see at length *Shevitat HaShabbat*, introduction to the Labor of Threshing 1).¹



Husks covering wheat kernels.

1. Rabbeinu Ḥananel notes that the act of threshing is a **preparation for the labor of Selecting**: After the attached waste has been removed, it is usually still mixed with the food, and therefore it is necessary to separate them. It is possible that in his opinion this is an essential element of the definition of the labor: The labor of Threshing is the preparation of the food for Selecting; an act of threshing that brings the food to a state where it does not require Selecting is not included in the prohibition of Selecting. Consequently, peeling a fruit, such as an apple, is not included in the labor of Threshing, since after the fruit has been peeled, it is ready to be eaten without any additional selecting. Yet, the *Arukh* (s.v. *dash*), who presents an opinion similar to that of Rabbeinu Ḥananel, adds: “Threshing... this is extracting from food the waste that is attached to it and preparing it for **Selecting**... Similarly, it is extracting from the food the waste that is attached to it so that it will be ready

Other *Rishonim* provide other definitions for the prohibition of Threshing. **Rashi** writes that crushing wheat in order to remove the husk is comparable to the labor of Threshing, “because this is also removing it from its covering” (74a, s.v. *velihshav nammi*). This implies that the labor of Threshing is the removal of the food from the covering in which it grew. Similarly, the **Gemara** states that one who milks an animal is liable due to **Extracting** (*mefarek*) (95a),² and **Rashi** explains that Extracting is a subcategory (*tolada*) of Threshing:

One extracts the food from the encasing in which it is covered, and this is a subcategory of Threshing.

Rashi implies that the labor of Threshing consists of **extracting food from its natural covering**. Other *Rishonim* suggest the same idea, and the *Peri Megadim* likewise writes that “extracting applies to [the removal of] food from the waste in which it is concealed and in which it has grown” (*Eshel Avraham*, introduction to 320, 5).

This basic point can be further clarified. Some labors involve the process of **producing the food**, while other labors **prepare the food for consumption**: The labors of Plowing, Sowing, and Reaping all serve to produce the food; the labors of Winnowing, Selecting, Grinding, Sifting, Kneading, and Baking render the food edible. Where does Threshing fit on this continuum?

It would appear on first glance that Threshing belongs to the group of labors which prepare the food for consumption, because the “creation” process is completed at harvesting. But on closer investigation, it seems that Threshing is actually part of the first group, the process of producing the food. Before threshing, the wheat kernel is still attached to and enclosed within its stalk. Admittedly,

Rashi: Threshing is the extraction of food from its covering

When Threshing, one creates the food; when Selecting, one prepares it for consumption

for eating.” This implies that threshing is prohibited either as preparation for Selecting or as preparation for eating. According to this opinion, one must find another explanation as to why peeling fruit is not included in the labor of Threshing; see below.

2. The issue of milking animals will be discussed at length on pp. 741–746.

it has already been harvested from the ground, but it has not been “harvested” from the stalk. Only after this second “harvest” can the wheat be considered fully formed and complete, to the extent that one can begin to prepare it for eating by extracting the waste found **next to it** through selecting, grinding, kneading, and baking it (*Shevitat HaShabbat*, introduction to the Labor of Threshing 2, citing the *Pe’er Etz Hayim*, also explains the labor of Threshing along these lines).

With this in mind, **the distinction between Threshing and Selecting can be sharpened**: Threshing is **the creation of food**, whereas Selecting is **preparing the food** that has already been created. Accordingly, the prohibition of Threshing applies only to items that have been **covered** until now, and which are **revealed** at this stage.

There are *Rishonim* who define the prohibition of Threshing somewhat more broadly. The **Gemara** states (73b):

Rav Pappa said: One who threw a clod of earth at a palm tree and severed dates is liable to bring two sin offerings: one due to Severing, and one for Extracting.

As stated, **Extracting** is a subcategory of Threshing: The removal of grain from the stalks is the primary labor (*av melakha*), while removing other items is the subcategory (Rashi ad loc.; Rambam 8:7). Why, then, is one liable due to Threshing for knocking down dates from a tree?

Tosafot write in the name of **Rabbeinu Shmuel** (s.v. *ve’ahat*):

Dates have an upper peel, and when one knocks down dates, he removes the peels from the dates, and this is like Threshing, in which one removes the grain from the stalk.

According to this opinion, Threshing applies here because dates have an upper peel, which comes off when they fall.³ This act is

3. Yet, from a practical perspective, it is difficult to determine the nature of the peel to which *Tosafot* refer, and indeed, the *Shevitat HaShabbat* writes (introduction to the Labor of Threshing 5): “I asked a learned man from Iraq

regarded as Threshing, as one thereby extracts food from its covering. It is therefore possible that *Tosafot* maintain that the prohibition of Threshing applies specifically when one **extracts food from a peel or covering**.

The **Ran** explains the Gemara in a different manner (Rif, 31a):

When the cluster is detached from the tree, one is liable due to Severing, and when it hits the ground and the dates detach from the cluster, one is liable due to Extracting.

Ramban and Ran: Threshing is removing food from its natural place

The date branch is detached from the tree, falls and strikes the ground, and, as a result, the dates become detached from their cluster. One is liable due to Extracting, a subcategory of Threshing, for removing the dates **from the cluster**. The **Ramban** (ad loc.) explains in the same manner, and one can understand **Rashi** likewise (ad loc., s.v. *mefarek*).⁴ According to this opinion, the prohibition of Threshing is not limited to food that is covered and wrapped



Removal of a date from its cluster is prohibited due to Threshing.

in waste; rather, it applies to detaching any food from the place where it grew, as they understand that **any detaching of food from the place where it grows is prohibited due to Threshing**.⁵ **Rashi** in *Ketubot* also writes that Extraction is defined as “one who detaches something from the place where it grew” (60a, s.v. *mefarek*).⁶

where palm trees grow, and he said . . . that, according to his understanding, he was not able to understand this statement of Rabbeinu Shmuel, because the peel exists only before the dates form, and once the dates form, there is no peel.”

4. *Tosafot*, the **Ramban**, and other *Rishonim* maintain that according to **Rashi** one is liable due to Threshing for the actual severing of the date **from the tree**. A full treatment of this issue is beyond the scope of this discussion.

5. According to this opinion, the labor of Threshing applies to the detachment of wheat from the stalk even before the kernel is extracted from its shell.

6. According to **Rashi**, the prohibition of Threshing applies to food **covered** by waste even if it is not attached to it (such as milk in an animal’s body and

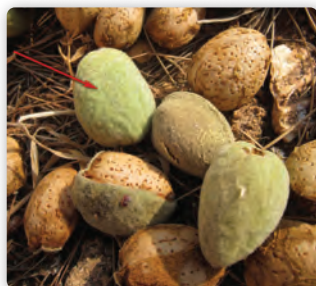
Why is it permitted to peel fruit and detach grapes from their cluster on Shabbat?

In light of the above, one can ask: If removing fruit from a cluster is prohibited due to Threshing, it should be prohibited by Torah law **to detach grapes from their cluster on Shabbat, even in the process of eating them.** In practice, one can raise a similar difficulty with the explanation of *Tosafot* that Threshing is the removal of food from its covering: Why it is permitted **to peel a banana or an orange and eat it?** After all, one thereby removes each fruit from its covering, which is precisely the prohibition of Threshing.

Why is it prohibited to remove the green nut shell and not its brown shell?

Another difficulty arises from a statement of the **Rema**. In light of the ruling of the *Shulḥan Arukh* (319:6) that it is prohibited to remove grain from its stalks due to the prohibition of Threshing, the **Rema** writes:

Therefore, it is prohibited to remove hazelnuts or large nuts from their green husks.



An almond with its green shell; it is prohibited to extract the fruit.

Almonds and walnuts both have two shells: a softer green shell which sometimes falls off on its own when the fruit ripens, and a hard, brown shell (in fact, almonds have another peel inside that, but most people do not remove that before eating). The **Rema** rules that removing the green hull is prohibited due to Threshing, but he implies that if the **green** hull has already

been removed, there is no prohibition in removing the hard, **brown** shell. The *Mishna Berura* (319:24) explains the Rema's opinion along these lines, namely that removing the green hull is comparable to separating grain from the stalks,



Walnuts with their brown shell; it is permitted to extract the walnut.

juice inside a fruit), and likewise to food that is **attached** to the waste, even if it does not cover it (*Shevitat HaShabbat*, introduction to the Labor of Threshing 5). Rashi's opinion requires further elaboration, which is beyond the scope of this discussion.

whereas removing the hard shell is like peeling fruit, which is permitted if performed just before eating (see p. 841).

Yet, the *Peri Megadim* (*Eshel Avraham* 320:1) raises an obvious difficulty against the opinion of the **Rema**: “How is the green shell different from the hard shell?” Indeed, this issue requires an explanation: Why should taking grain out of its stalk, or removing the green hull of a walnut, be prohibited due to Threshing, while peeling fruit, removing the hard shell of a nut, and detaching grapes from a cluster, are permitted? After all, in each of these cases, one detaches food from where it grew.



Peeled almonds.

The *Eglei Tal* discusses these questions and establishes an **important principle with regard to the halakhah of Threshing** (Threshing 3:1–2):

It is permitted to peel garlic or onions in order to eat immediately... because since one wants to eat it immediately the action is not considered Threshing. Although it is explained in chap. 319 that removing stems or the outer hull of walnuts is considered Threshing even [if one does so in order] to eat them immediately, one must say that it is different here. [This is] because **the customary manner of peeling [onions] is at the time of eating**, unlike walnuts, where the outer hull is removed before the time of eating. The same is true of parched ears of grain, where it is prohibited... even [if one does so in order] to eat immediately, because **grain is generally threshed when it is in the pile**. And this is the reason that one may crack walnuts on Shabbat, and this is not considered Threshing... since **the customary way to do this is only at the time of eating**. The same is true of a cluster of grapes.

Eglei Tal: The prohibition of Threshing does not apply to actions typically performed while eating

According to this explanation, the prohibition of Threshing does not apply to actions that are generally performed **while eating**; it is relevant only for actions that are usually done **prior to the stage of**

eating.⁷ Removing wheat from the stalks is performed in the field long before eating. The removal of the green shell of the walnuts is typically performed in the field or in a factory, and commercially available walnuts do not usually have this shell. Therefore, these actions are prohibited due to Threshing. By contrast, peeling fruit or removing the brown shells of the walnuts is often done while eating, and therefore these actions are not included in the prohibition of Threshing.⁸ Similarly, removing **dates** from their cluster is prohibited due to Threshing, since this is generally performed in the **field**, whereas removing **grapes** from their cluster is permitted, because one generally does so at home **while eating**. Similarly, it is permitted to detach **bananas** from their bunch, and likewise to detach **cherry tomatoes and greenhouse tomatoes**, which arrive attached to a thin branch, as one usually does this just before eating.

The reason for the leniency: It is part of the process of eating

Why doesn't the prohibition of Threshing apply to actions that are generally performed while eating? One possibility is that this *halakha* can be explained by the concept of "**part of the process of eating**," which is also relevant to the labor of Selecting (see pp. 778–780). *Halakha* permits one to prepare food and eat in the normal manner on Shabbat and does not prohibit actions that are performed in the course of regular eating. According to this suggestion, those actions are permitted only when they are performed **proximate to eating**, whereas one who peels fruit or detaches grapes from the cluster a long time before eating is liable due to Threshing. This indeed seems to be the opinion of the *Eglei Tal* (ad loc. 3–4).

Another reason: The prohibition applies only to "labors of the field"

Yet, the majority of the *Aharonim* are of the opinion that peeling fruit even long before the time of eating is not prohibited due to Threshing but rather **due to Selecting** (e.g., *Magen Avraham* 321:30;

7. The **Meiri** also implies this, as he writes that "[with regard to] breaking open pomegranates or breaking open nuts, **since this is their manner of eating**, it is permitted to do so on Shabbat itself in order to eat" (114b, s.v. *kenivat yarak*).

8. Nevertheless, there may be a problem of **Selecting** with regard to these actions. There are various opinions on this issue, as explained at length on pp. 841–846. For more on shelling nuts and almonds on Shabbat, see pp. 712–714.

Mishna Berura ibid. 83).⁹ According to this opinion, it would seem that if the action of removing food from its natural covering is generally done proximate to eating, it is **not included in the labor of Threshing at all**, regardless of when one does it. The reason for allowing it is not because it is “part of the process of eating,” but because the prohibition of threshing does not apply to such actions. The *Ketzot HaShulḥan* is also of this understanding (126; *Badei HaShulḥan* 7):

Threshing applies only to an item that will be stored, but an action which is generally performed just prior to eating is permitted. Thus, [the prohibition applies to] threshing wheat from stalks, legumes from stems, or walnuts from green hulls, in each of which [the waste] is customarily removed by threshing before one places the produce in the storehouse, and it is prohibited even if one threshes them just before eating. By contrast, [with regard to] the peels, which are typically removed only proximate to eating for the sake of eating, **threshing does not apply to them at all**.

Accordingly, the labor of Threshing includes only actions of extraction which are generally performed “to store,” that is, in great quantities, whereas actions that are generally performed in small amounts close to eating are not included in this labor.

This reasoning accords with the overall explanation detailed above with regard to the labor of Threshing. The essence of threshing is the **completion of the creation (preparing for eating) of the produce**. Therefore, only those actions that are generally performed in the field can be considered part of this process. Once the produce reaches the house for eating (or after the threshing in the field has been completed and one has reached the stage of winnowing), it is considered a completed product, and actions that one performs upon

Actions performed in the house are considered preparing, not creating, food

9. The *Eglei Tal* himself writes (*Borer* 6) that peeling fruit for later consumption renders one liable due to Selecting, not Threshing, and the *Ketzot HaShulḥan* (126; *Badei HaShulḥan* 8) already notes the apparent contradiction in the statements of the *Eglei Tal*.

It is therefore
permitted to peel
barley kernels

it from that point onward are part of **preparing the food for eating**, not **creation of the food**. Therefore, these actions are **not included in the labor of Threshing**; if anything, they entail a prohibition of **Selecting**.¹⁰

The above reasoning can resolve another difficulty as well. The **Gemara** in *Beitza* relates that Rav's wife would peel a lot of barley for him on Shabbat (13b). *Tosafot* (s.v. *ve'im kalaf*) were bothered by this, as it might be supposed that this practice should be prohibited due to Threshing:

This is puzzling: How could Rav's wife peel barley for him on Shabbat by the cupful? Wasn't it stated above that one may husk kernels of grain on Friday, which implies that it is prohibited on Shabbat? It may be said [in response] that [the Gemara] there is referring to detaching them from the stalks, which is Extracting, a subcategory of Threshing, the primary labor. Here we are dealing with those items which were already detached on Friday from the stalks but are still in their outer shell, and therefore it is permitted.



Removing the inner peel of the barley is permitted.

10. The **Maharshag** states (Responsa 2:108): "Only an action that is generally performed by the farmer can be considered Extracting or Threshing. For example, with regard to produce, the farmer threshes it and removes the wheat from the stalk and the husk, and this is the final [stage] of the labors connected with the produce [in the field]... By contrast, an action that is not performed by the farmer but by each individual person at home... this is not Threshing, but rather the manner of eating... And this also accounts for the common practice of peeling eggs on Shabbat, as well as garlic and onions; with regard to all of these, since they are generally done at home, and the farmer does not do them, they are not included in Threshing." The *Helkat Yaakov* (*Orah Hayim* 133) offers a similar explanation, and claims that the *Hayei Adam* (14:1) should be understood in the same way.

According to this opinion, removing barley kernels **from the stalk** is prohibited due to Threshing,¹¹ but after removing the kernels, it is permitted to remove their **inner husk**, and this does not involve the prohibition of Threshing. The *Beit Yosef* (319, s.v. *ein molelin*) and the *Magen Avraham* (319:8) rule accordingly.

Why isn't removing the inner husk of the barley prohibited due to Threshing? After all, this act also involves the detachment of food from the covering in which it grew. The *Peri Megadim* (*Eshel Avraham* 319:8) and **Rabbi Akiva Eiger** (Glosses, end of 321) explain that the light barley husk adheres to the kernel, and therefore it is nullified relative to it, so that the prohibition of Extracting does not apply at all. The *Beur Halakha* maintains that the leniency is because one removes the husk by hand, not with a utensil (321:19, s.v. *le'altar*).¹² According to the aforementioned reasoning, the issue can be explained in a straightforward manner:¹³ Removing barley kernels from the stalk is performed in the field, and therefore the prohibition of Threshing applies to it. By contrast, the light husk which covers the kernel would be left to be taken off only in the home, and therefore its removal is not classified as Threshing.¹⁴

11. **Rabbeinu Hananel** implies that one who separates the stalk from the kernel by **rubbing it in his hands** thereby violates the Torah prohibition of Threshing (73b). By contrast, the **Rambam** rules that one who does this merely appears to be violating Threshing, and it is prohibited only by rabbinic law (14:21). The ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh* (319:6) also implies that this act is prohibited by rabbinic law, and the *Mishna Berura* (ad loc. 20; *Shaar HaTziyun* 11) concurs.

12. The *Beur Halakha* does not explain why peeling barley is not prohibited at least by rabbinic law, as is generally the case with regard to a labor performed in an unusual manner, nor does he account for the distinction between extracting a kernel from a stalk and removing its inner husk.

13. It is possible that the *Aharonim* who suggest other answers would agree with this reasoning in principle, but they maintain that the removal of a barley husk is a labor of the field, and therefore they must find other reasons for permitting it.

14. This explanation can also help one understand the ruling of the **Rema** (336:8) that it is permitted to take fruit off a branch that had been detached

The removal of fruit
from a detached
branch

Summary: The definition of the labor of Threshing

TO CONCLUDE, the labor of Threshing applies to **removing food from the covering in which it has grown**. This act **creates the food**, in contrast to Selecting, which involves the preparation of already existing food. Consequently, Threshing applies only to actions that are performed **in the field**, and which create food, whereas actions that are normally performed **in the home** are not prohibited due to Threshing.¹⁵ For this reason, it is permitted to peel fruit just before

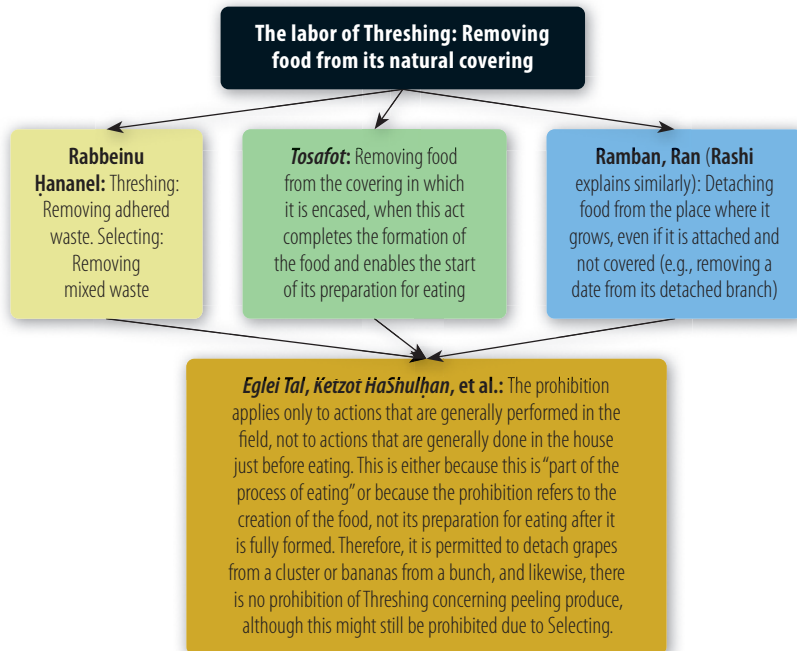
from the tree before Shabbat. Fruit is generally harvested from the tree (dates are an exception, as they are taken off the branch only after it has been severed from the tree), and therefore removing fruit after the branch has been chopped off is not considered a labor of the field, and is not included in the prohibition of Threshing (see *Eglei Tal*, Threshing 2:4). One case that requires further analysis is that of moist dates on a thin branch. These are generally sold separately from the branch, but at times they are sold attached to the branch. It would seem that at such times the act of detaching is a labor performed in the home, which should be permitted, but the issue must be examined in greater detail.

The relationship between Threshing and Selecting

15. Parallel to the analysis of the definition of the prohibition of Threshing, the precise definition of the prohibition of Selecting also requires clarification. Does the prohibition of Selecting apply only to food that is fully formed but has waste mixed in it, or does it include every separation of food and waste, even if this separation serves to create the food? If so, is it possible that specific actions are prohibited due to both Threshing and Selecting? This issue is apparently a matter of dispute among the *Aḥaronim*. The *Shaar HaTziyun* (319:15) implies that removing legumes from their stalks is prohibited both due to Threshing and Selecting. In fact, he adds that the act of threshing itself would render one liable for Selecting if the grain were to separate entirely from the husks, and the reason why one is not liable for Selecting when performing threshing is that the grains are left mixed with husks. The *Eglei Tal* is also of this opinion (Selecting 10).

Furthermore, several *Aḥaronim* discuss the following question: Why is one who squeezes fruit, and is therefore liable due to Threshing (as explained later), not liable for Selecting as well (see e.g., *Magen Avraham* 319:16; *Eglei Tal* ad loc.)? Some contend that one who squeezes fruit is indeed liable due to Selecting (see *Peri Megadim*, introduction to 320). By contrast, the *Shevitat HaShabbat* (introduction to the Labor of Threshing 1–2), maintains that there is a clear distinction between Threshing and Selecting: Threshing involves the extraction of food that is encased in waste, whereas Selecting is the separation of food that is mixed with waste. Therefore, one cannot be

it is eaten, to remove the hard shell of almonds and walnuts and similar items, and also to detach grapes, bananas, and tomatoes from their cluster (if they are sold in that manner). Since all these activities are performed in the home, they do not constitute Threshing.



held liable for both prohibited labors for a single action. This is also implied by the aforementioned statement of **Rabbeinu Hananel**: Threshing applies to waste that is attached to food, whereas Selecting involves waste that is separate from but intermingled with the food. In fact, this disagreement is at the basis of the dispute between the *Aḥaronim* as to whether Selecting applies to peeling a fruit (see pp. 841–846).