

The Basic Principles of Selecting (*Borer*)

What is the prohibition of Selecting?

What is the difficulty in defining this prohibition?

Is it permitted to separate part of the waste?

In what manner is it permitted to separate food from waste, despite this prohibition?

Is there no way to eat regularly?

Winnowing, selecting, and sifting

Wheat kernels are enclosed in husks. Before the wheat can be ground, it is necessary to remove the husks and to clean the kernels from residual dirt. After grinding, the fine flour must be separated from the bran. The entire process consists of several stages:

The stages of
producing flour
from wheat

The first stage: Threshing is the removal of the husk from the wheat kernels, and it is achieved by applying pressure to the grain so that **the husk breaks and the kernel is exposed**. Threshing is accomplished by striking the wheat with a rod or with a threshing tool. In biblical times, it was also accomplished with a **threshing board** (Yeshaya 41:15) – a wooden board with sharp blades projecting from its underside that was passed over the stalks.



Threshing.

The second stage: Winnowing is the separation of the husks and stalks from the wheat kernels. During the previous stage, the wheat kernels were extracted from the husks, but the husks and kernels remain intermingled and require separation. This is accomplished with an implement known as a winnowing fork. The kernels and husks are placed on this implement and cast into the air. The light husks and straw are dispersed by the wind, while the heavier kernels fall back onto the fork.



Winnowing.

The third stage: Selecting is performed after the grain kernels have been separated from the chaff and the straw. However, in the process, dirt and stones accumulate alongside the kernels, and now it is necessary to separate the dirt from the kernels.



Selecting.

The fourth stage: Grinding is the stage when the kernels have been cleaned and they can now be ground into flour.



Grinding.

The fifth stage: Sifting is performed after grinding of the kernels results in a mixture of fine flour and coarse flour, bran, and at this stage one seeks to separate them. This is achieved by **sifting** the flour with a **sieve**. The fine flour falls through the holes in the sieve, while the coarse bran remains.



Sifting.

Winnowing,
Selecting, and
Sifting – similar
labors achieved by
different means

Winnowing, Selecting, and Sifting are similar labors (*melakhot*). The objective of all three is to **separate waste from food**. However, each is achieved using a different means of separation: **Winnowing** is performed by **the wind**, **Selecting** is performed primarily **by hand**, and **Sifting** is performed with an **implement** (see **Rabbeinu Ḥananel** 74a; see further **Rashi** 75b, s.v. *harei hu oreg*). Indeed, the **Gemara** (73b) notes the similarity between these labors:

The labor of Winnowing is the same as the labor of Selecting, which is the same as the labor of Sifting.

The Gemara explains that despite the similarity between these activities, they are enumerated as **three distinct categories** of prohibited labor among the thirty-nine primary categories (*avot*), since each of them was performed in the Tabernacle, and every type

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SELECTING (BORER)

of labor that was performed in the Tabernacle is enumerated as a distinct category.¹

Consequently, the discussion that follows regarding the labor of Selecting includes principles related to all three of these types of labor, whose objectives are identical: Separation of waste from food.²

In the labor of Selecting, **the distance between an action that violates a Torah prohibition and one that is permitted is negligible.** By means of a minor variation, an action can be permitted or create liability to bring a sin offering. Therefore, this labor requires special study and a thorough understanding.

The difficulty in
defining the labor
of Selecting