

Filtering liquids

At times, filtering liquids is permitted

As stated, it is prohibited to filter liquid in a strainer, due to either **Selecting** or **Sifting**. Nevertheless, there are situations where it is permitted. The **mishna** (139b) permits straining wine with **cloths**:

One pours water over sediment so that it will become clear. And one filters wine through cloths and through an Egyptian basket.

These cloths are fabrics that are not designated for straining but which can be used for this purpose. The **Gemara** (ad loc.), citing the *amora* **Ze'iri**, adds that if the wine or water is clear, one may filter it even with a **strainer**, a utensil designated specifically for this purpose:

Ze'iri said: A person places clear wine and clear water into a strainer on Shabbat, and need not be concerned; however, regarding murky liquids – no.

Ran: Clear liquid may be filtered with a strainer; liquid that is somewhat murky may be filtered with a cloth

When is it permitted to strain wine in a strainer, and when is it permitted to do so with only a cloth? The **Ran** explains (Rif 57b):

Through cloths and through an Egyptian basket... as any case like this is an atypical act, as the person is not filtering with a strainer. The reference here is to murky wine, but of a type that can be drunk in that state. as, were it speaking of clear wine, it is permitted even in a strainer, as stated in the Gemara, and were it speaking of murky wine that cannot be drunk in that state, it is prohibited even through cloths and through an Egyptian basket, since, in any case, it is **Selecting**.

According to the Ran, **clear** water or wine, which is the case addressed by **Ze'iri**, may be filtered even with a strainer; **somewhat murky** water or wine, which is still potable, may be strained only with cloths, and this is the case addressed in the **mishna**; very murky water or wine, which is not potable, may not be strained at all.

The **Ran** later explains the distinction between clear water and somewhat murky water:

Clear liquid is a drink that most people drink in its current state

A person places clear wine and clear water into a strainer, as, since they are clear, **and most people are not particular about them**, it is permitted to place them even into a strainer to render them even clearer.

However, liquids that are not murky, although it is possible to drink them as they are, since **most people are particular about them**, it is only permitted atypically, i.e., with cloths or an Egyptian basket, as taught in the mishna, but it is prohibited with a strainer.

According to the Ran, if **most people would drink** the water or wine in its current state, the liquid would be considered **clear** and it would be permitted to filter it with a strainer even if it were not completely clean. However, when most people are particular to strain the liquid before drinking it, it is prohibited to strain it with a vessel specifically designated for that purpose; it is permitted only with measures not exclusive to straining, e.g., a cloth.

The Ran holds that with regard to straining liquids, there are three levels of severity, which correspond to the condition of the liquid:

1. **Clear water or wine**, which most people drink as is, even though it is not perfectly clear. It may be filtered even with a **standard strainer**.
2. **Somewhat murky water or wine**, which most people strain but which can be drunk in its current state. It is permitted to filter it with a cloth but not with a strainer.
3. **Very murky water or wine**, which is not at all potable. It is prohibited to filter it at all.

The **Rashba** (139b, s.v. *umesanenin*) interprets the Gemara in the same way as the Ran, but the **Rambam** understands the Gemara differently (8:14):

One who strains wine, or oil, or water or other liquids in their strainer is liable ... but one strains wine that does not contain sediment or clear water, through cloths and through an Egyptian basket, so that it will be very clear.

Three levels with regard to the permission to strain

Rambam: It is permitted to strain only clear liquid with a cloth

According to the Rambam, the leniency is only to strain **clear water or wine through a cloth**. It is prohibited to strain liquids that are not clear, and under no circumstances is it permitted to use a standard strainer.

To summarize, the **Rambam** maintains that it is permitted to strain only clear liquids through a cloth, whereas the **Rashba** and the **Ran** contend that it is permitted to filter clear liquids even with a strainer, and that with a cloth it is permitted to strain even liquids that are somewhat murky.

The **Tur** agrees with the **Rashba** that one may use a strainer to strain clear liquids, but he agrees with the **Rambam** that one may not strain somewhat murky liquids even through a cloth (319).

Shulhan Arukh: It is permitted to filter clear liquids with a strainer

The **Shulhan Arukh** cites both opinions with regard to straining clear liquids, although he does not explicitly refer to liquids that are somewhat murky (319:10):

It is permitted to filter clear wine or water with a strainer... and according to the Rambam it is prohibited with a strainer... and even cloths they permitted only with clear, but not with murky, liquids.

The *Shulhan Arukh* cites without attribution the opinion of the **Rashba** and the **Ran** that it is permitted to filter clear liquids even with a strainer, before adding that the **Rambam** prohibits this. The formulation of the *Shulhan Arukh* implies that he rules in accordance with the first opinion, and the *Mishna Berura* agrees that the *halakha* is in accordance with the first opinion (319:41). It should be noted that some Yemenites are stringent in this regard, in accordance with the opinion of the Rambam.

Mishna Berura: It is preferable to refrain from straining somewhat murky liquids

The **Mishna Berura** rules leniently in the case of filtering clear liquids with a strainer, but in the case of somewhat murky liquids, he writes that one should consider the opinion of the Rambam and not strain them at all (319:42):

Not with regard to murky liquids, that is, even slightly murky liquids, and in this regard it is preferable to factor in the statement of the Rambam.

Shaar HaTziyun explains that other authorities, e.g., the *Tur*, rule in accordance with the opinion of the Rambam in this case, and therefore one should take their opinions into consideration.⁴

Why is it permitted to filter clear liquids, with a strainer, according to the Rashba and the Ran, or with a cloth, according to the Rambam?

The reason is simply that since most people would drink the liquid in its current state, **the straining is not considered preparation**. This conclusion can be inferred from a comment of **Rashi**. Later, the Gemara (139b) states that new wine that just emerged from the winepress may be filtered with a strainer, and Rashi explains (s.v. *bein hagitot*):

Since all wines are murky and they are drunk with their sediment, **there is no preparation here**, as one would drink them anyway.

However, this explanation is applicable only for those who maintain that the essence of the prohibition of Selecting is preparation of food. As stated above (p. 771–773), some contend that the act of Selecting is **removal of waste and the separation of waste and food**. Why, then, is it permitted to strain clear liquid? After all, even in this case some waste is removed of necessity; otherwise one would not strain the liquid at all.

An additional possible explanation for the leniency allowing one to strain clear liquid is that since the majority of people drink it in

Why is it permitted to strain clear liquid?

Straining of this kind is not considered preparation

The liquid and the waste are considered a single kind

Making a hole in the cloth

4. The Gemara states that when using a cloth to filter water, it is prohibited to attach it to the mouth of the vessel (139b). The Rambam, in keeping with his general approach, explains that the reason is that it is entirely prohibited to filter with a strainer, and therefore when using a cloth, one must do so in a **distinctive manner**, so that one will not come to use a strainer (21:17). But according to the Rashba and the Ran, who permit placing clear water in a strainer, why would it be prohibited to attach it to the vessel? Rashi (s.v. *shelo yaaseh guma*) explains that this is either because it is a **weekday activity**, or **so that one will not come to squeeze out the liquid**. It should be noted that the reason of weekday activity applies only to straining liquid that is not clear; with regard to clear liquid, since it is permitted to filter it with a strainer, it is all the more so permitted to do so with a cloth, even if there is a fold in it. The *Mishna Berura* agrees (319:45).

its current state, the liquid and the waste mixed with it are **considered a single kind**. Therefore, their separation is not categorized as Selecting, as Selecting is possible only when both items are not of a single kind, as explained above (pp. 794–797).

What is the difference between clear liquid and two kinds of food?

Tehilla LeDavid questions the leniency allowing one to strain clear liquid (319:15):

But this *halakha* requires clarification, as it appears that even if we say that since they are fit for drinking in any case, it is not considered waste; since, in any case, he does not wish to drink the wood slivers in the drink, let them be tantamount to two kinds of foods, as what one does not want to eat at present is called waste.

In other words, if in any situation where the mixture can be, and typically is, consumed in its current state, it is permitted to separate its components, why is it prohibited to separate two kinds of food? After all, both kinds of food can be eaten even when they are mixed. As explained above (pp. 786–789), regarding two kinds of food, if the person does not desire one of them, that kind is considered waste and it is prohibited to separate it. Why, then, isn't the same reasoning applicable to one who does not want waste in a liquid?

Shevitat HaShabbat: This leniency applies to two foods that are commonly eaten together as well

Indeed, *Shevitat HaShabbat* holds that this leniency applies to two kinds of foods (*Meraked, Be'er Rehovot* 26):

And with regard to straining the sauce from potato pancakes (*latkes*) or vegetables, it appears that it is permitted, as they are eaten as they are.

According to this opinion, it is permitted to separate **vegetables from soup** even with a strainer. Since most people eat the soup and vegetables together, the status of the mixture is like that of a clear liquid, which can be drunk even without straining. If so, the principle that Selecting is not relevant to a mixture that can be eaten in its current state applies to a mixture of two kinds of food, as well.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach: The leniency applies only to food and waste, not to two kinds of food

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach rejects the opinion of the *Shevitat HaShabbat* (cited in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 3, note 156):

We say this explanation only with regard to wood slivers . . . which are insignificant in and of themselves. Since most people drink wine with slivers, they are ancillary to the wine and are considered the same kind; therefore, it is not Selecting . . . This is not the case with regard to two kinds, each of which is significant, in which case, neither is nullified by the other. Since one wishes to eat only one of the kinds, the fact that they can be eaten together does not allow the person to separate them, and one is liable for Selecting between two kinds . . . This resolves the difficulty raised by the *Tehilla LeDavid*.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach maintains that in the case of a liquid with a small amount of waste, if people commonly drink it in its current state, it is considered a **single kind**, as the waste is not significant at all and is **ancillary to the liquid**, and the prohibition of Selecting does not apply. By contrast, in the case of vegetable soup, the water and the vegetables are **two kinds**, each of which is **significant in its own right**; they are just commonly eaten together. Therefore, separating them is prohibited due to Selecting.⁵

In conclusion, concerning **two kinds of food** mixed together, each significant in its own right, e.g., soup and vegetables, it is prohibited to separate them with a strainer, even if they are commonly eaten together. By contrast, it is permitted to filter **clear water**, which most people drink without straining, and it is permitted to do so even with a strainer. In the case of **somewhat murky** liquid, which most people do not drink, although it is possible to do so, it is prohibited to filter it with a strainer, and it is preferable not to strain it at all. But it is permitted for those who adopt the lenient ruling to strain it with a utensil that is not designated for straining.

Summary

5. Based on this principle, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata*, *Tikunim UMiluim* 3, note 156) permits straining **fruit juice** to remove the pulp mixed with it, as they were one kind when they were formed, and are typically drunk together.

Straining fruit juice

