

Tea bags

Today people typically prepare tea with **tea bags**. Ostensibly, this should be prohibited, as these bags contain granules and the bag serves as a filter through which the water passes, leaving the granules behind. However, in practice there is no prohibition, in light of the ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh* (319:9):

A filter, even if it was suspended before Shabbat, it is prohibited to place sediment inside it; however, if one placed the sediment in it before Shabbat, it is permitted to pour water on it so as to flow through it and return to its clear state.

The *Shulhan Arukh* permits passing clear water through a filter upon which sediment is placed, so the water will absorb some of the wine in the lees. This is permitted despite the fact that the water first mixes with the sediment and is then filtered. Why doesn't this violate the prohibition of Selecting? The *Mishna Berura* explains (319:33):

The reason that pouring the water is not considered Selecting is because the water that one pours is clear, and there is nothing to be selected from it.

In other words, the prohibition of Selecting applies to items that were initially mixed, while here, the water was clear at the outset and only later was mixed with the sediment and then selected from



Preparing tea with a tea bag, for those who are lenient and permit using a tea bag in a tertiary vessel, does not violate the prohibition of Selecting.

The prohibition of Selecting does not apply to a liquid that was clear from the outset

the mixture. Therefore, there is no violation of the prohibition of Selecting.

On that basis, it is permitted to use a tea bag, since at the first stage the water is clear, and only later is it mixed with the granules of tea in the tea bag and is then filtered through the bag. This is the opinion of *Minhat Yitzhak* (vol. 4, 99:2). Similarly, it appears that on Shabbat it is permitted to use a manual, but not an electric, **coffee filter**. One pours water from a tertiary (third) vessel, for those who are lenient in that regard, onto a filter that contains the coffee beans. Although the water passes through the filter and emerges clear, since it was clear beforehand as well, it is permitted.

However, when removing a tea bag from the cup, several drops drip from the tea bag into the cup. This might be prohibited due to Selecting, as those drops are selected from the granules through the bag, which serves as a sifter. This is the ruling in *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata*, citing Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (3, note 171):

It is appropriate to be stringent and refrain from removing the bag and holding it in one's hand so that the water will seep from it, as although the water was initially clear... in any case this is different, as the holding of the bag so the water will seep from it is more serious, as the water and leaves are already mixed, and by removing the bag and holding it in one's hand it is tantamount to filtering murky, not clear water... However, if the person merely removes the tea bag from the water and does not intend for liquid to come out, it is possible that although it is an inevitable consequence that a few drops will fall from the bag, nevertheless, since they drop out with ease, and the person is merely lifting and holding the tea bag, and the filtering happens on its own, this is not considered Selecting.

According to this opinion, one should be stringent and refrain from holding the tea bag over the cup for the drops to drip into the

The prohibition of Selecting does not apply to a tea bag or a coffee filter

Concern that when removing a tea bag from the cup one performs Selecting



The tea bag should be transferred directly to its designated spot.

One should move the bag directly to where it will ultimately be placed, and not hold it over the cup

SIFTING

cup, as that might constitute an act of Selecting. Here there is no room to contend that these drops were initially clear and ultimately emerged clear as well, since removal of the bag from the cup is considered a new action; therefore, the previous state of the liquid is not taken into account, only its state when the tea bag is removed from the cup. At this stage, the small amount of liquid in the tea bag is mixed with the granules of tea and is considered murky water, meaning that its seeping from the bag is an act of filtering murky water through a filter. The *Minhat Yitzhak* agrees (vol. 4, 99:2).

However, **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach** adds that if the intent is not to select, but that the drops emerge on their own when the person removes the tea bag, it is not a violation of the prohibition of Selecting. Therefore, one should refrain from holding the tea bag over the cup so drops will drip into the cup *lekhathila* (*ab initio*), and instead immediately move the tea bag to where it will ultimately be placed. It is preferable to remove the tea bag with a spoon to avoid any possibility of Selecting (*Shemirat Shabbat KeHilkhata* 3:58).

Practical *halakha*

IN CONCLUSION, it is permitted to use a **tea bag** on Shabbat, at least in terms of the labor of Selecting. As for the labor of Cooking, some prepare tea essence before Shabbat, while others use a tea bag in a tertiary vessel (see pp. 329–334). It is also permitted to remove the tea bag from the cup, but it should be moved directly to where it will ultimately be placed, to avoid allowing it to drip into the cup.