

The Prohibited Labor of Winnowing (*Zoreh*)

Is it permitted to disperse waste by blowing on it with one's mouth?

Is it permitted to use a spray?

Is one permitted to shake a tablecloth so that the crumbs will disperse?

As we have learned, the first stage in flour production is Threshing, during which the shell of the wheat is broken. In the following stage, the wheat kernels are separated from the straw and husks. This is accomplished by means of the wind, exploiting the fact that the straw and husks are lighter than the grain. One places the grain and chaff in a winnowing fan and casts them into the air. The husks and straw, which are lighter, are carried away by the wind, while the kernels, which are heavier, fall into the vessel. This is called **Winnowing**, and is enumerated among the primary labors (*avot melakha*) prohibited on Shabbat. As mentioned above (p. 770), the prohibited labor of Winnowing is similar to the prohibited labor of Selecting, in that it involves separating waste from food. However, they differ in that Selecting is performed by hand, while Winnowing is accomplished by means of the wind.

A prohibited labor accomplished by means of the wind

The practical ramifications of the prohibited labor of Winnowing are relatively few; however, beyond the practical ramifications, there is an important principle derived from this labor.

Winnowing by means of the wind is considered an indirect action, but is nevertheless prohibited on Shabbat

The **Gemara** in *Bava Kamma* (60a) states that if a person ignites a fire, and the wind fans the flame and causes it to spread and cause damage, in certain cases the igniter would be exempt from payment, since that action is not the sole cause of the damage, as the wind contributes to the damage. The Gemara challenges this assertion, since on the basis of that reasoning, one who performs Winnowing on Shabbat should also be exempt, as the person merely casts the straw and husks into the air, **and it is the wind that carries away the chaff.**

The Gemara proposes several answers to this question. For our purposes, the relevant answer is that of **Rav Ashi**:

Rav Ashi says: When we say that one is liable for winnowing with the assistance of the wind, that is only regarding Shabbat, as the Torah prohibited planned, creative labor. But here it is mere indirect causation, and [for] indirect causation [one] is exempt in the case of damages.

Rav Ashi explains that the act of Winnowing may be considered an **indirect action**, and therefore, one who caused damage while winnowing is exempt from payment. Nevertheless, in terms of the *halakhot* of Shabbat, one is liable, because “the Torah prohibited planned, creative labor.” Since the person knows that the chaff will be carried away in this manner, and the intent is to utilize the wind as a means of selecting, one is liable in terms of Shabbat, even though the person is exempt in terms of the laws of damages. The **Rosh** (*Bava Kamma* 6:11) elaborates:

It is because there, on Shabbat, the Torah prohibits planned, creative labor, even though it is merely indirect causation. It is specifically in a case like this that the Torah holds one liable, **since**

the primary manner of performing this labor is by utilizing the wind. However, here, regarding damages, it is merely an indirect action, and [for] indirect causation in a case of damages [one] is exempt.

According to this approach, the Torah holds the person liable for Winnowing even though it was not accomplished through direct action, because the typical manner of performing this prohibited labor is by means of the wind.

On this basis, the *Mishna Berura* (316:10; *Shaar HaTziyun* 13) explains the Rambam's ruling regarding the labor of Trapping. The **Rambam** (10:22) writes that one who stands before a deer and frightens it, and in doing so enables the person's dog to reach the deer and catch it, is liable. The *Mishna Berura* explains that although this was merely an act of indirect causation, the person is nonetheless liable. This is because it is **the typical manner of trappers**, just as it is the typical manner of winnowers to winnow by means of the wind.

If so, the prohibited labor of Winnowing demonstrates that at times a person can be held liable for a labor accomplished by means of natural factors, e.g., the wind, when this is the standard manner of performing that labor.

Rosh: The prohibition is due to the fact that this is the typical method of separating husks

Separating waste by means of blowing

A contemporary action comparable to Winnowing is **dispersing waste by means of blowing**, e.g., in a mixture of peanuts and its skins, a person blows and disperses the skins. In fact, the *Arukh* (s.v. *zar*) writes that the prohibition of Winnowing prohibits **blowing with one's mouth** as well.

For anything perfected by means of the blowing wind, one is liable for Winnowing. If one takes food with waste or dust and blows on it with one's mouth – it is Winnowing.

Rabbeinu Hananel (74a) writes along the same lines. This opinion is codified by the *Eglei Tal* (*Zoreh* 5), the *Shevitat HaShabbat* (*Zoreh* 5), and others. It can also be inferred from the wording of the

Dispersing waste by blowing is prohibited due to Winnowing

Shulhan Arukh HaRav (*Piskei HaSiddur, Hilkheta Rabba LeShabbeta*, concerning a fly that fell into a cup) that it is prohibited to separate waste by means of blowing with one's mouth.

Arukh HaShulhan:
It is permitted to
disperse waste by
blowing

However, it would appear from the formulation of the **Arukh HaShulhan** (319:26) that it is permitted to disperse waste by means of blowing:

If one has wheat that was husked on Friday but remains mixed with its chaff, it is prohibited to sift it with a tray or with a plate, and certainly not with a sifter or a sieve, as this is Selecting, for which one is liable to bring a sin-offering. One may also not sift it with both hands, i.e., move it from hand to hand until the chaff falls away, as that is a weekday activity. Rather, the person should separate it with one hand with all of their might; i.e., take it in one hand and raise it and lower it until the chaff disperses, to accomplish it in an atypical manner. **It would appear that blowing with one's mouth is certainly permitted.**

Practical halakha:
It is prohibited

In his opinion, this action is not comparable to Winnowing, as the separation does not take place by means of the wind, but rather by means of a **person's power**. However, if it is prohibited to separate waste from food with wind, all the more so would it be prohibited to separate them by means of a person's power.¹ Therefore, **in practice, it should be prohibited to separate waste by means of blowing with one's mouth**, as this is explicit in the explanation of *Rishonim*, it is the conclusion drawn by most authorities, and this appears to be reasonable.

1. As mentioned, the labor of Winnowing teaches the novel concept that the Torah prohibits separating waste from food even in a case where one does not perform the separation by oneself, but rather with the assistance of natural forces. Therefore, when a person separates without external assistance, it is all the more obvious that there is liability. Even were it not prohibited due to the labor of Winnowing, there is room to prohibit it due to the labor of Selecting.