SHABBAT UNPACKED

OLAMI MENTORSHIP

Session 13

Creation through Borer/Selecting
(Category 12 of 39)

BURST OF INSPIRATION

Did you know that in June 2025, an Israeli Channel 12 News poll revealed a surprising trend: it is actually the young people of Israel who are drawing closer to Shabbat observance. The data shows that 53% of Israelis aged 18–29 observe Shabbat according to Jewish law – the highest percentage among all age groups.

Despite the common perception that younger people are distancing themselves from tradition, the poll indicates a renewed connection specifically among this group – including full Shabbat observance, refraining from driving or using a phone, and a connection to spiritual values.

At the same time, 14% of the 18-29 age group respondents noted that while they do not fully observe Shabbat, they make kiddush or attend synagogue, as signs of a growing connection to tradition. The trend among the younger generation has strengthened since Oct. 7th; key among the renewed connection to Judaism is embracing the power of Shabbat.

Hey, if you are learning this curriculum, you are in really good company!

CREATION THROUGH BORER/SELECTING (CATEGORY 12 OF 39):

The creative category of borer refers to the Torah prohibition of selecting or separating items on Shabbat. It was performed in the Mishkan when they sorted and separated grains for the meal offerings or dyes for the coverings of the sanctuary.

Borer is defined as any type of “selecting” or “separating” of unwanted items from a mixture — specifically removing the bad from the good, or separating different types of items.

Selecting is permitted only when three conditions are met:

1. **Good**: One must take the good from the bad, not the other way around.
2. **Hand**: The separation must be done by hand, not with a utensil designed for sorting.
3. **Immediate**: The selection must be for immediate use, typically understood as right away or within the next mealtime.

CREATION THROUGH BORER/SELECTING (CATEGORY 12 OF 39):

There is one permissible way to remove an unwanted item from a mixture. **You may remove the good along with the bad.**

What does that look like? It means scooping broth along with the chicken bone from your soup or removing onions and cucumber (assuming you dislike onions) from your cucumber salad.

This is possible in most situations.

Here are a few practical examples of borer that come up throughout a typical Shabbat along with the conditions they meet/don't meet.

1. **Permitted**: You are preparing a salad for immediate consumption and pick the tomatoes (that you want to eat) from a bowl with tomatoes and cucumbers, using your hands.
   Prohibited: You remove onions (which you don't want) from a salad bowl.

CREATION THROUGH BORER/SELECTING (CATEGORY 12 OF 39):

2. **Permitted**: It is Shabbat morning and you have a bowl of mixed nuts in front of you and you want to pick out the almonds which you love to eat on the spot.
   Prohibited: You want the almonds for seudah shelishit (dinner).

3. **Permitted**: removing coleslaw from its juice using your hand (you are wearing a glove of course).
   Prohibited: You use a slotted spoon to remove the coleslaw.

4. **Permitted**: Picking out one toy from a box to give to a child to play with right away.
   Prohibited: Sorting Legos by color.

5. **Permitted**: Picking out socks from a pile of laundry for immediate use.
   Prohibited: Sorting a pile of laundry.

6. **Permitted**: Eating chicken, meat or fish off the bone.
   Prohibited: Removing the bones from the meat.

CREATION THROUGH BORER/SELECTING (CATEGORY 12 OF 39):

This can be tricky so here are some tips to make eating without selecting easier:

- To avoid borer, one should remove the good (the meat) from the bad (the inedible bone), by eating it off the bone. If this is not practical, one may hold the bone steady, and pull the meat away from it.
- With fish bones, things are more complicated as the bones are so small. Therefore, the ideal method is to eat normally and spit out the bones, just like one would with watermelon pits. This is considered the regular way of eating, and is permitted.
- If that's not possible, one should take a piece of fish together with the bone, and remove the bone while eating.
- When feeding young children or the elderly, the feeder may remove the bones just before they eat, since it would otherwise be very difficult for them to eat the food properly.

7. **Permitted**: Selecting silverware to set the table for your upcoming meal.
   Prohibited: Selecting silverware to set the table for a future meal.

CREATION THROUGH BORER/SELECTING (CATEGORY 12 OF 39):

Note: Different silverware utensils, i.e. spoons and forks, are considered separate item “types” in halacha. This makes borer relevant when it comes to setting the table, clearing it, or storing utensils. Therefore, there is a Shabbat friendly way to set the table:

- When preparing for a meal that will take place immediately, there’s no issue—you may set the table with all necessary silverware.
- Setting up in advance: When the meal isn’t happening right away, it depends.
  - ➡ If the silverware is already sorted, and each type is in its own section or container—then there’s no “mixture,” and borer does not apply. You’re free to set the table.
  - ➡ If the utensils are all jumbled together in a single group, it would be a classic case of borer. In that situation, you may not separate them to set the table in advance.
  - ➡ In the case of a mixture of utensil types: Pour or drop the mixed silverware gently onto a flat surface. This simple action scatters the pieces and effectively breaks up the mixture, making it permissible to then pick out what you need.
  - ➡ If the person setting the table enjoys the beauty and order of the table setup, that aesthetic pleasure itself qualifies as “immediate use.” According to this reasoning, someone who takes satisfaction in a well-laid table may be allowed to set it in advance, even in advance of the meal.

CREATION THROUGH BORER/SELECTING (CATEGORY 12 OF 39):

8. **Permitted**: Peeling a banana, orange, or egg.
   Prohibited: Peeling a cucumber with a peeler.

   - In a case where the only way to get to the "good" is by removing the "bad," such as peeling fruits or eggs, it is permitted to peel them even though one is removing the bad from the good as long as it is for immediate use.
   - Even so, it is ideal to refrain from using a peeler as it is a tool specifically designed for this purpose. Instead, try using a knife.

9. **Permitted**: Removing an onion from your chicken soup by scooping both the onion and some broth out.
   Prohibited: Selecting just the onion.

As a reminder, all these details can seem daunting at times but they serve to keep us focused on Shabbat and give the day the elevated significance it deserves as we focus on the greater purpose for which we were created.

Please note: We have provided the above general categories. There are many additional details and exceptions within these categories. For practical inquiries, please contact your LOR (local Olami rabbi).

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