

An Understanding of Charoses and Karpas

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Charoses

One of the tastier items on the Seder table is the charoses, but the nature of the requirement to have it is not so clear.

[After the Karpas] they brought before him matzah, chazeres, charoses, and two cooked dishes. [charoses was brought] even though charoses is not a mitzvah. R' Elazar the son of R' Tzadok says it is a mitzvah.

Pesachim 114a

הביאו לפניו מצה וחזרת וחרוסת ושני
תבשילין, אף על פי שאין חרוסת מצוה.
רבי אליעזר ברבי צדוק אומר: מצוה.
פסחים דף קיד.

It is certainly not required by the Torah, as no mention of it is made there. This dispute thus focuses simply on whether or not there exists a mitzvah Miderabonon to have charoses. Everyone agrees, however, that in practice, one must have charoses at the table, and the only question is if it is a mitzvah or not.

The “Kappa”

The Gemara (Pesachim 116a) asks, according to the view that it is not a mitzvah, why we must have it at all, and answers that the charoses is needed because of the “kappa”. Rashi and the Rashbam (*s.v. mishum*) explain that this kappa is a very sharp tasting substance that is found in many vegetables, including some used for maror, which can actually be poisonous. The charoses thus serves, apparently, to weaken or even nullify the taste and the danger of this substance³².

The Rashbam (*s.v. tzarich*) and Tosafos (*s.v. kappa*) quote Rabbeinu Chananel there that this kappa is actually a kind of worm found in vegetables, which although allowed to be eaten, is, as Tosafos concludes, unhealthy or dangerous; the charoses somehow is able to destroy this worm by being in contact with or near it. According to this view, then, the purpose of charoses is to prevent any medical danger that may develop from eating maror.

³² The Gemara earlier (Pesachim 115b) discusses whether the maror must actually be dipped into the charoses or simply placed near it in order for this to work.

The Mitzvah

According to the second view in the above Mishna, however, that having charoses is a mitzvah (Miderabonon), what is the nature and purpose of this mitzvah?

What is the nature of this mitzvah? R' Levi says it is a commemoration of the tapuach. R' Yochanan says it is a commemoration of the clay. Abaye said, therefore, one must make [the charoses] tart and one must make it thick. Make it tart since it is a commemoration of the tapuach, and make it thick since it is a commemoration of the clay.

Pesachim 116a

מאי מצוה? רבי לוי אומר: זכר לתפוח. ורבי יוחנן אומר: זכר לטיט, אמר אביי: הלכך צריך לקהוייה, וצריך לסמוכיה. לקהוייה - זכר לתפוח, וצריך לסמוכיה - זכר לטיט. **פסחים דף קטז.**

The first opinion is that the charoses reminds us of the *tapuach*, a certain fruit. Rashi and the Rashbam (*s.v. zeicher*) explain this by referring to the Midrash on a Posuk in Shir Hashirim (8:5), also cited in the Gemara in Sotah (11b), which indicates that the righteous Jewish women in Egypt would encourage their husbands, exhausted and frustrated by the difficult labor, to continue to have children and perpetuate the nation with faith that they would soon be redeemed. When they were ready to deliver their babies, they would go out to the fields to escape the detection of the Egyptians, who wanted to destroy all the male Jewish babies, and give birth under the *tapuach* trees. To commemorate this righteousness and heroism, we have charoses, a principle ingredient of which is *tapuach*³³.

The second opinion in this Gemara is that, presumably because of its texture, the charoses commemorates the mortar with which the Jews had to work when building in Egypt, and the Gemara seems to accept both opinions.

Tosafos (*s.v. tzarich*) quotes a third opinion, found in the Yerushalmi in Pesachim (Chapter 10, Halacha 3, 70a) that the charoses is to remind us of the blood, a reference either to the first of the ten plagues, as suggested by the Pnei Moshe (*s.v. tzricha*) or to the spilled Jewish blood in Egypt, as suggested by the Korban Haeida (*s.v. milsei*).

Tosafos then notes a practical difference between these latter two opinions: if the charoses is to commemorate the mortar, its consistency should be chunky and thick, like mortar, whereas if it's to commemorate the blood, it should be more of a liquid, like blood. Tosafos thus suggests that initially one should make it thick, like the mortar, and keep it that way until just before dipping

³³ It should be noted that although in modern Hebrew, *tapuach* usually means an apple, and apples are indeed a basic ingredient of charoses in many Ashkenazic homes, in Biblical Hebrew, as pointed out by Tosafos in Shabbos (88a *s.v. piryo*) and in Taanis (29b *s.v. shel*), *tapuach* refers to a citrus fruit, like an esrog. In many Sephardic homes, therefore, apples are not used at all for charoses; it would thus seem proper that even if one does use apples, one should also include some citrus fruit or citrus juice in one's charoses, especially since the above Gemara in Pesachim (116a) states that the charoses should have a pungent flavor.

the maror into it. Then, one should add some wine and make it more of a liquid, thereby following both opinions.

The Ramo (O”C 473:5) rules that charoses should first be made thick and then have wine added to it, although he doesn’t say when to do this. The Chayei Adam (130:4) writes explicitly like Tosafos that one should add the wine before dipping the maror in the charoses. He also points out, as do the Magen Avraham (473:15) and others, that when the first night of Pesach falls on Shabbos, one cannot mix the wine in during the Seder, but must do it beforehand, unless he does it in a specific way³⁴.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz U’Matzah 7:11*) rules in accordance with the above view that having charoses is indeed a mitzvah Miderabonon. Tosafos there (*s.v. tagri*) indicates that this seems to be the implication of the Gemara. The Kol Bo (50) implies that actually, both of the above views are correct: having charoses is a mitzvah, but it also serves to prevent the health danger posed by the kappa, as described above. The Pri Chodosh (473:5) likewise suggests that even the authority according to whom charoses is a mitzvah agrees that it is also necessary for the kappa problem, and he posits that this is also the view of the above cited Rambam. He notes later on, though (475:1), that this kappa is no longer a problem in our times, an idea pointed out as well by the Shulchan Aruch Harav (473:11); we therefore have charoses only because it’s a mitzvah.

What is the Mitzvah of Charoses?

The above Gemara focused only on a requirement to dip maror into charoses, for whatever the reason, but did not mention any requirement to eat charoses. The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz U’Matzah 7:11*) implies that simply bringing charoses to the Seder table is a mitzvah, but makes no mention of eating it. In his Peirush Hamishnayos on Pesachim (10:3), however, the Rambam writes that there is a requirement to eat charoses, and one must even make a bracha (*al achilas charoses*) before doing so.

According to one version of the Mordechai (*Seder shel Pesach, 38b b’dapei harif*) one is required to eat a kezayis of charoses. The Bigdei Yesha (19) asserts that this requirement is not mentioned by the other poskim, but the Vilna Gaon (*Biur Hagra 471 s.v. v’yesh machmirim*) implies that some poskim may hold this way. Based on this, the Gaon explains the practice quoted (and rejected) by the Ramo (471:2) not to eat the fruits used for charoses on Erev Pesach, just like we don’t eat matzah on Erev Pesach. Since both charoses and matzah are mitzvos, we refrain from eating them on Erev Pesach in anticipation of the mitzvah to eat it at night.

The Shulchan Aruch (475:1) does not require one to eat charoses and indeed rules that after dipping maror into it, one should shake the charoses off in order not to diminish the maror’s bitterness. Of course, one may eat charoses if he wishes as part of the meal.

³⁴ See the Mishnah Berurah 473:48 and 321:65-68.

Karpas

[After Kiddush on the first cup of wine] they brought before him [vegetables for karpas]. He dips [and eats] chazeres before he reaches the course that is secondary to the matzah³⁵.

Pesachim 114a

הביאו לפניו מטבל בחזרת עד
שמגיע לפרפרת הפת.

פסחים דף קיד.

The Mishna indicates that after one has made Kiddush on Pesach night, he is given a certain vegetable which is to be dipped into something. This is the vegetable which we commonly call karpas.

The Bach (O”C 473 s.v. *velokeiach*) gives three explanations as to why we have karpas. First, it is a sign of freedom to be able to dip a vegetable. Second, it gives people a chance to eat something before the long Hagadah is read. Third, dipping karpas foreshadows the later dipping of the maror. Tosafos (Pesachim 115a s.v. *v’hadar*) quotes another reason, namely, we have karpas to make the *borei pri ha’adama* earlier, precluding the necessity to recite *borei pri ha’adama* over maror, which already has its own bracha.

The Mishna identifies this vegetable as chazeres (a kind of lettuce that we call maror), but the Gemara (114b) explains that it is preferable to use another vegetable for this dipping and not chazeres. The Mishnah Berurah (473:20) points out that it is preferable not to use for karpas the same kind of vegetable which one will use for maror because when one eats the vegetable for maror, he must first recite the bracha of *al achilas maror* and it is inappropriate to make such a bracha after having eaten this very same vegetable earlier. According to the Gemara, the Mishna mentions chazeres only to cover a case where one has no other vegetable besides chazeres, and to teach that in such a case he may use it both for this dipping and for maror³⁶.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz U’Matzah* 8:2) does not mention what vegetable to use for this dipping (see also Tur O”C 473), but writes in his Peirush Hamishnayos (Pesachim 10:3) that it can be whatever one has. Avudraham (*Seder Hagadah Upeirushe’ha*, p. 219) and the Kol Bo (50), however, both require a vegetable called “karpas” which Machatzis Hashekel (473:4) identifies as celery.

The Shulchan Aruch (473:4) writes that one should use either “karpas” (celery) or some other vegetable; the Magen Avraham (473:4) however, quotes that there is a preference for celery because the Hebrew letters of “karpas” hint at the phrase *samech perech*, meaning that 600,000 people were forced to do *avodas perech*, difficult labor, as mentioned in the Torah (*Shmos* 1:13).

³⁵ Rashi (s.v. *ad shemagia*) explains that this is a reference to the chazeres that is eaten after the matza for maror.

³⁶ See Rashi and Rashbam (s.v. *mevatel*).

The Shulchan Aruch Harav (473:16) expresses this preference as well. The Kaf Hachaim (473:49) adds some Kabbalistic reasons for this preference.³⁷

What is Karpas Dipped in?

The plain reading of the aforementioned Mishna in Pesachim indicates that there is a requirement to dip this vegetable into something³⁸. Rashi (*s.v. mevatel*) writes that it is dipped into the charoses, a position accepted by some cited in Tosafos (*s.v. mevatel*) as well as by the Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah ibid.*) and many others.

The Rashbam (*s.v. mevatel*), however, writes that one does not dip this karpas vegetable into charoses, a view agreed to by the Mordechai in Pesachim (*Seder Shel Pesach 38a b'dapei harif*) who writes that it is improper to use charoses. The Or Zarua (2:256 p. 59d) quotes an opinion that to eat charoses with karpas is to “jump the gun” similar to eating matzah on Erev Pesach. The Mordechai thus writes that the karpas should be dipped into vinegar or wine, and the Tur seems to accept this view.

The Rashbam (*s.v. mevatel*) and Mordechai (*ibid.*) however, write that one should not dip karpas into charoses. The Or Zarua (2:256 p. 59d) explains that to eat charoses with karpas is to “jump the gun,” just like eating matzah on Erev Pesach. The Shulchan Aruch Harav (473:14), however, rules that one may use charoses if he has nothing else to use.

Others write that karpas should be dipped either into vinegar, wine, salt water, or any of the above. For example, the Mordechai and Tur write that karpas should be dipped into vinegar or wine. It appears from Tosafos that Rabbeinu Tam would use either vinegar or salt water. The Beis Yosef also quotes a view that one should use salt water, as does the Or Zarua, in the name of the Yerushalmi (in a text which we don't seem to have). The Shulchan Aruch (473:6) writes that karpas should be dipped into vinegar, while the Rama (473:4) makes reference to salt water as well. The Mishnah Berurah (473:54) writes that karpas can be dipped into either vinegar or wine or salt water, but not charoses. The general practice today is to use salt water, as recommended by the Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (119:3) and others.

Tosafos quote an opinion that what the vegetable is dipped into depends upon what the vegetable is: if it is chazeres, i.e. maror, it must be dipped in charoses like maror, but if one has

³⁷ It is worth noting that the Magen Avraham questions the use of parsley for karpas, although the Chayei Adam (130:5) among others clearly states that the standard practice in Ashkenazic countries was indeed to use parsley, a practice which he clearly accepts. This may be based on the fact that the Yerushalmi in Shevi'is (9:1, 24b) identifies karpas as parsley, as pointed out by the Tosafos Yom Tov, commenting on a Mishna in Shabbos (9:5 *s.v. tavlin*).

³⁸ It is interesting to note that the Baal HaTtur (Vol 2 Hilchos Matza Umaror 133b) implies that there is in fact no obligation to dip anything at all. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kasher in his Hagadah Shleima explains that there is a question as to the meaning of the word in the aforementioned Mishna in Pesachim, which seems to require dipping (*mevatel*). He asserts that there may be others who agree that there really is no requirement to dip the karpas into anything. Nevertheless, the normative practice is that karpas is dipped before being eaten.

another vegetable, he should dip it into either vinegar or salt water. The Bach rules accordingly. However, the Rosh (Pesachim 10:25) cites Rabbeinu Yonah that it is unnecessary to use charoses even if one uses chazeres for karpas.

The Ramo (Darchei Moshe 473:15) writes that vinegar must be used, although he mentions that some authorities would mix charoses into the vinegar to satisfy all the opinions. The prevalent practice, says the Rama, is to use only vinegar for this dipping. (As noted above, the contemporary prevalent practice is to use salt water.)

How Much Must One Eat?

The Rambam writes that everyone at the table must eat at least a k'zayis of karpas. The Maggid Mishneh explains that this is because k'zayis is the minimum amount for all eatings required by halakha. The Rosh disputes this point, since there is no indication anywhere in the Gemara that karpas is a required eating; indeed, no *birchas hamitzvah* is recited over karpas, even though required eatings usually receive a *birchas hamitzvah*. Similarly, the Rashba (*Shut Harashba* 202) holds that one need not eat a k'zayis of karpas, because its purpose is merely to evoke questions from the children³⁹, as indicated by the Gemara (Pesachim 114b). The Hagohos Maimoniyos also holds that one may eat only the smallest possible amount of karpas, and he believes that there is an error in the text of the Rambam who, he writes, really believes that a k'zayis of karpas is not needed. Indeed, many poskim hold that one should actually avoid eating a full k'zayis so as not to become obligated to recite a berachah acharonah (see Shulchan Aruch 473:6 and Mishnah Berurah 53) and thereby allow the *borei pri ha'adama* said before the karpas to cover the maror as well (Mishnah Berurah 55).

³⁹ Rashi and the Rashbam explain that it is unusual to eat vegetables before the meal. When children observe this unusual practice, they assumedly will ask "why." The Tur, however, writes that the question is about dipping before the meal.