

Charoses: Why Don't We Recite a *Beracha*?

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Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS • '62YC, '67R

The Mishna (*Pesachim* 114a) lists charoses among the matza, maror and other items placed on the table as part of the Pesach seder. However, the Mishna also records a difference of opinion as to the status of the charoses. According to R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok, charoses constitutes a mitzva, just as the other components of the seder ritual. However, the Tanna Kamma rules that there is no mitzva of charoses per se. Rather, the Gemara (116a) explains that it is present at the table so that maror may be dipped in the charoses, "*mishum kapa*." Namely, the charoses neutralizes harmful contaminants that may be present in the maror.

Rambam, in his *Commentary on the Mishna*, states:

R. [Elazar B'Rebi] Tzadok who rules that charoses is a mitzva would require one to recite the blessing, "[He] who has sanctified us with his mitzvos and commanded us on the eating of charoses." This is not the common practice.

Rambam, Commentary on the Mishna, Pesachim 10:3

ור' צדוק שאומר חרוסת מצוה חייב לדעתו לברך אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על אכילת חרוסת. ואינה הלכה. פירוש המשנה להרמב"ם, פסחים י:ג

According to Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishna*, a natural extension of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok's opinion is that an additional *beracha* must be recited on charoses, "*al achilas charoses*." This follows the pattern of matza and maror and other mitzvos that are fulfilled when one eats certain foods.² Rambam concludes by stating that normative halacha is not in accordance with R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok, seemingly because our text of the Haggadah does not include a blessing for charoses, indicating that common practice follows the ruling of the Tanna Kama.

However, in *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam states as follows:

Charoses is a mitzva ordained by the Rabbis to commemorate the mortar used [by the Jewish people] when they were enslaved in Egypt. How is it made? One takes dates or dried figs or raisins or the like and crushes them.

החרוסת מצוה מדברי סופרים זכר לטיט שהיו עובדין בו במצרים, וכיצד עושין אותה לוקחין תמרים או גרוגרות או צמוקין וכיוצא בהן ודורסין אותן ונותנין

¹ Adapted by Rabbi Schachter's students from his *sefer*, *Eretz HaTzvi* no. 3.

² *Tur* (O.C. 475) rules that charoses is a mitzva. Nevertheless, he writes that a *beracha* is not recited because charoses is secondary to the maror with which it is eaten. Therefore, only the blessing "*al achilas maror*" must be recited. This may parallel the concept of *ikar* and *tafel* (primary and secondary) that pertains to *birchos hanehenin* (*Berachos* 44a). For further elaboration, see *Eretz HaTzvi*, pg. 15.

Vinegar and spices are added in the way that mortar is mixed with straw. Charoses is brought to the table on the nights of Pesach.

Hilchos Chametz U'Matza 7:11

לתוכן חומץ ומתבלין אותן בתבלין כמו
טיט בתבן ומביאין אותה על השלחן בלילי
הפסח.

רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:יא

This ruling stands in contradistinction with the words of Rambam in his *Commentary on the Mishna*. In *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam codifies the view of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok by stating that charoses is deemed a mitzva. Moreover, in *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam makes no mention of a *beracha* for charoses, whereas his *Commentary on the Mishna* identifies the blessing as a logical extension of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok's opinion.³

Rav Soloveitchik explained that Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, in fact, follows the opinion of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok. However, in order to understand why there is no *beracha* recited, we must understand the nature of the mitzva of charoses. Indeed, eating charoses or dipping maror in charoses are not mitzvos in the same formal sense applied to the eating of matza or maror. However, there is a mitzva to place charoses on the seder table because of the symbolic significance of *zecher la'teet*, a reminder of the mortar used by the Jewish people during the slavery in Egypt.

For this reason, Rambam emphasizes its placement at the table when he lists the components of the seder at the very beginning of his discussion of the seder in Chapter 7 of *Hilchos Chametz U'Matza*. This serves as the primary designation of the role of charoses at the seder. He describes the dipping of the maror in charoses only later in *Mishneh Torah* when he expands upon the protocol of the mitzvos of the seder in Chapter 8. The purpose of dipping maror in charoses is merely to establish a connection between the charoses and the meal in which it is eaten. Its presence at the table as a *zecher la'teet* is actualized through this incorporation into the *seuda* (festive meal) of the seder night.

The Rav understood Rambam's omission of the *beracha* for charoses in light of this explanation. As a rule, Chazal instituted blessings for mitzvos only in the context of a *ma'aseh mitzva* (an action used to perform a mitzva). In other words, when one fulfills a mitzva without performing a specific, prescribed action, no *beracha* is recited.⁴ Therefore, even according to R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok, Rambam rules that no *beracha* is said. The mitzva of charoses is achieved simply through its presence at the *seuda*. Dipping the maror is only a vehicle through which halacha recognizes the charoses' association with the seder; it is not a *ma'aseh mitzva* in its own right.

Rav Soloveitchik demonstrated that the aforementioned principle of *birchos hamitzvos* is manifest in other areas of halacha, as well. For example, Tosafos cite the opinion of Behag (Ba'al Halachos Gedolos):

³ See *Lechem Mishneh* who observes that Rambam must have reversed his ruling and rejected the opinion of the Tanna Kama. However, *Lechem Mishneh* does not suggest a solution to Rambam's omission of a *beracha* for charoses.

⁴ A related expression of this is the principle עובר לעשייתו עליהן מברכין עליהן, one always recites a *beracha* before its performance (*Pesachim* 7b). This highlights the performance (not the fulfillment) as the critical aspect of the recitation of the *beracha*.

Halachos Gedolos ruled that if one missed a day of counting the omer, he should no longer continue counting because we require “complete” [counting]. This opinion is very puzzling and should not be accepted.

Tosafos, Menachos 66a

פסק בהלכות גדולות שאם הפסיק יום אחד ולא ספר שוב אינו סופר משום דבעיא תמימות ותימה גדולה הוא ולא יתכן.
תוספות, מנחות סו.

According to Behag, if one omits counting one of the 49 days of the *omer*, the mitzva can no longer be fulfilled. Apparently, Behag views *sefiras ha'omer* as one mitzva with 49 requisite components. *Pri Megadim* (O.C. 489:13) questions Behag's opinion based on our practice to make a separate *beracha* on each night of the *omer*. Seemingly, the institution of individual *berachos* indicates that we fulfill 49 individual mitzvos, contrary to Behag's approach.

However, the Rav resolved Behag's opinion based on the above rule. We saw from charoses that a *beracha* is not recited in the context of a *kiyum mitzva* (fulfillment of a mitzva) in the absence of a *ma'aseh mitzva*. Thus, it is the *ma'aseh mitzva* that is the impetus for the recitation of a *beracha*. A *beracha* can be recited in the context of a *ma'aseh mitzva*, even when it does not constitute a *kiyum mitzva*. Even Behag agrees that each night of the *omer* affords the opportunity to perform a *ma'aseh mitzva* by counting the *omer*. While Behag believes that no *kiyum mitzva* exists until all 49 days have passed, a *beracha* can indeed be recited each time one counts the *omer*. The *beracha* is on the *ma'aseh mitzva*.⁵

⁵ Rav Soloveitchik also offered a different explanation to Behag's opinion. The reason why one who skips a day of counting may not continue counting with a *beracha* is because *sefiras ha'omer* requires consecutiveness. One who has skipped a day of counting cannot consider himself as “counting” because his count lacks consecutiveness. According to this explanation, Behag agrees that there are 49 mitzvos. If, for example, one misses the eighth night, it does not negate the fulfillment of the mitzvos that were performed on the first seven nights. It merely prevents someone from continuing to count on day nine because according to Behag, the number eight will always be lacking from his count. Based on this explanation, *Pri Megadim's* question is no longer valid. The question is premised on the fact that according to Behag, there is only one elongated mitzva. According to this explanation, Behag agrees that one fulfills a mitzva every night of the *omer* until one misses a night.