

כרפס: KARPAS

A Taste of Marror



**Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, jziring@torontotorah.com
Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash, 5775-5778**

Currently: Ram and Educational Coordinator, Yeshivat Migdal haTorah, Israel

Twice during the Seder, we eat halachically significant vegetables. The more important of the two is *marror*, which is part of the biblical commandment of eating the Pesach offering and is currently a rabbinic obligation. The lesser of the two is *karpas*, the vegetable we eat towards the beginning of the meal.

Understanding Karpas

Karpas is merely a means to get the children to ask questions. (Pesachim 114b) Oddly though, a mishnah (Pesachim 10:3) states that one uses *chazeret* for *karpas*, the same lettuce that one may use for *marror*. The Talmud explains that really any vegetable can be used for *karpas*. The mishnah needed to teach that even when one has only lettuce, he should still have the two stages of vegetable eating. (See Pesachim 114a-b.)

The Talmud then offers a case in which these two acts synthesize into one obligation: when one only has lettuce to fulfill both of these obligations. Two opinions are offered as to when one makes the blessing on the *marror*, considering that the food used for *karpas* is the same as that which will be used for *marror*.

[What] is the halakha where there is only lettuce available? When should one recite each blessing? Rav Huna said: One initially recites the blessing: Who creates fruit of the ground, over the bitter herbs, i.e., the lettuce, and eats them. And ultimately, after the matza, one recites the blessing: Commanded us over eating bitter herbs, over the lettuce and eats it. Rav Hisda strongly objects to this opinion: Do you think that after one fills his belly with lettuce, he then recites another blessing over it? Rather, Rav Hisda said: Initially one recites two blessings over the lettuce: Who creates fruit of the ground, and: Commanded us over eating bitter herbs, and he eats it; and later in the seder he eats lettuce without a blessing. (Pesachim 114b-115a, William Davidson [Koren] Talmud)

Rav Huna rules that though one is physically eating the *marror* at the beginning of the Seder, one need not make the blessing on *marror* then. According to many commentaries (see, for example, Rabbeinu David and Meiri), this is because he believes *mitzvot tzerichot kavanah* - one does not fulfill obligations without intent. Thus, when one intends to eat the lettuce as *karpas* and not *marror*, he delays his fulfillment of *marror*, which enables recitation of the blessing later. Rav Chisda rules that one does not need intent. Thus, by eating the lettuce, one automatically fulfills both obligations. Therefore, he makes the blessing at the earlier point.

Tosafot, however, understands that according to both positions one needs intent to fulfill the obligation to eat *marror*. As such, one does not fulfill that obligation by eating the lettuce as *karpas*. Nevertheless, one is permitted to make the blessing at the earlier stage. This is puzzling, however. Blessings, under most circumstances, must be recited immediately prior to the performance of the mitzvah. (Pesachim 7b) In this case, the blessing will be recited at *karpas* while the mitzvah of *marror* will not be performed until after *Maggid*!

Tosafot explains that the blessing may nevertheless be recited because “he ate a little from it during the first dipping.” He suggests a parallel case. Tosafot (unlike Ramban) believes that the primary mitzvah of *shofar* is fulfilled with the second round of blasts, during the *Amidah*. Nevertheless, one makes the blessing before the first round of blasts, and the fact that one is performing the **act of the mitzvah, though not truly fulfilling it**, is sufficient to permit the early recitation of the blessing. The standard view follows Rav Chisda (Shulchan Aruch OC 475:2) and thus Tosafot’s explanation. This position can shed important light on *Karpas*, especially if we expand on Tosafot’s position.

How Karpas Enhances Marror

According to the Talmud, the *karpas* (either the eating of the vegetable before the meal [Rashi, Rashbam] or the dipping [Ran, Meiri]) is meant to generate curiosity. But Maharal (Gevurot Hashem 50) adds that the purpose is to highlight the uniqueness of the *marror*, as *karpas* creates a situation in which dipping the *marror* is extra. As such, *karpas* begins the process of making the night special. If so, eating the *marror* as *karpas* starts the act of making *marror* unique. Therefore, even when one is not using lettuce for *karpas*, **one should be cognizant that the very act of eating this first vegetable sets in motion a night of surprises that enable true education.**

Others contend that one need not recline for *karpas*, because the act of dipping the vegetable, especially in salt water, indicates this custom reminds us of the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt (see Pninei Halakha for a succinct statement of this). If so, ***karpas* is the conceptual start of experiencing the bitterness fully captured by the *marror*.**

Rav Uziel Eliyahu offers a fascinating formulation. He adds that one must eat something that captures bitterness because we “cannot speak about the salvation without **tasting a bit of the taste of the exile.**” (Emphasis added) As such, ***karpas*, like *marror*, is about tasting the bitterness so that our mouths are primed to discuss the miraculous Exodus.**

According to these views, *karpas* is our chance to warm up for a night in which tasting *marror* and its opposite orient our worldview. Even when we do not use lettuce for *karpas*, we should embrace this opportunity.

Did you know?

We are proud partners in the Mizrahi Beit Midrash, held Monday nights at BAYT!