

~ חזרת מתוקה ועוד ענינים באכילת מרור ~

The use of lettuce for Maror when it is not bitter and other aspects of Maror

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Maror is eaten twice during the Seder. One Kzayis is eaten by itself for Maror and a second Kzayis is eaten together with Matzah for Korech. The Mitzvah Deoraisa of eating Maror only applied when the Korban Pesach was eaten. The obligation to eat Maror nowadays is Mideraban¹.

Five Species of Maror

The Mishna² lists 5 species that can be used to fulfil the Mitzvah of Maror; Chazeres, Tamcha, Charchavina, Ulshin and Maror. The Kzayis volume can be made up of a combination of all of these types. An alternate version³ of the Mishna lists the species in a different order; Chazeres, Ulshin, Tamcha, Charchavina and Maror. The sequence in the Mishna has halachic significance, which will be discussed below.

Even though Maror means bitter, our sages explain that the Torah is referring to specific species which are called Maror⁴. The Gemara identifies these species using names that were used in their time. The Rishonim and Acharonim identify the species by the names that were used in their times. We also find arguments and differences in identification of each of the species.

For the purpose of this article, we will only discuss the 2 species which are commonly used for Maror – Chazeres and Tamcha. The vast majority of Poskim and the accepted identification in both Halacha and practise, identify Chazeres as lettuce and Tamcha as Chrein (horseradish). When using lettuce it is customary to use romaine lettuce.

Chazeres - the preferred specie for Maror

The Gemara records that Ravina saw Rav Acha son of Rava searching for Merirsa (the specie identified as Maror) to use as Maror, presumably because it is the most bitter. Ravina said that even though it is bitterer, the optimal Mitzvah is to use Chazeres which is listed first in the Mishna.

Rava brings additional proofs why Chazeres is the preferable vegetable. The Gemara identifies Chazeres as Chasa. The word Chasa can mean pity, alluding to how Hashem took pity upon us when He took us out of Mitzrayim.

Further, Rabbi Yonason taught that the Egyptians resemble Maror. Just as Maror at its beginning is soft but in the end it is hard⁵, so too the Egyptians were soft at the beginning but in the end they

¹ Pesachim 120a, Rambam Hichos Chametz Umatzah 7:12

² Pesachim 39a

³ This is the order quoted in Rif and is found in the Yerushalmi. It is the standard text found in the Mishnayos (as opposed to the Mishna as recorded in the Talmud).

⁴ Shulchan Aruch Harav 473:27 quoting Chok Yakov

⁵ Rashi understands the Gemara literally, referring to the stalks becoming harder. The Alter Rebbe explains that when the stalks harden, the lettuce becomes more and more bitter, just as the Egyptians started off sweet in their treatment of the Jews only to become bitter in the end

were harsh. This refers to the Midrash that initially the Egyptians paid the Jewish people for their labour but eventually enslaved them without pay⁶. This explanation refers specifically to Chazeres.

After hearing these proofs, Rav Acha retracted his practise and would use Chazeres.

Whilst the Rambam does not write the ruling of the Ravina that Chazeres is preferable, the Tur rules like Ravina that the preferred Mitzvah is to use Chazeres. This is also the accepted Halacha in Shulchan Aruch⁷. One should give precedence to Chazeres even if it is more costly than the other types⁸. The Alter Rebbe⁹ explains that the hiddur of spending additional money to obtain Chazeres is equivalent to spending money on obtaining a Mehudar Esrog.

Chazeres that is not bitter

The Alter Rebbe¹⁰ rules that Chazeres is still the preferred Maror specie, even when it is sweet. Even though Chazeres is not bitter, since if it were left in the ground the stalks would become hard and bitter. It is for this reason that Chazeres is called Maror. The main thing is not to taste bitterness, but to use a specie that is called Maror. This is also the opinion of many other noted Acharonim¹¹.

There are those who argue¹² that one must be able to taste bitterness and therefore should not use lettuce that is not bitter. They rule that one may not use 'sweet' lettuces that are commonly sold in the market and that one must wait until the lettuce has become bitter.

Common practise follows the Poskim who permit sweet lettuce to be used. This is also implied in the Beis Yosef¹³. Rabbi Yakov Emden in his Siddur Yavetz, writes that it is preferable to use lettuce - not like those ignoramuses (בורים) who try to use bitter vegetables. Mishna Halachos¹⁴ in his Teshuvah on the topic concludes; "let the humble ones eat and rejoice and embitter their mouths with sweet lettuce – Chasa, that Hashem should have pity on us always and forever".

In the absence of Chazeres, the order of preference follows the order in which the species are listed in the Mishna¹⁵ (following the second order listed above).

Using Chrein - horseradish

Chacham Tzvi¹⁶ writes that Chazeres is lettuce leaf which is called Salad, which meets all of the criteria described in the Gemara. The custom in Ashkenaz and Poland of using Chrein was because Chazeres was not available (or because they were not proficient in the names of the species to be able to identify them). He writes that this actually gives rise to the following problem; one needs to

⁶ Rashi

⁷ 473:5

⁸ Beis Yosef 473

⁹ 473:30

¹⁰ 473:30

¹¹ Levush 473:5, Chok Yakov 473:17, Chayei Adam 130:3, Rabbi Yakov Emden (Siddur) and Aruch Hashulchan 473:16 and Chacham Tzvi quoted below.

¹² Ridbaz on Yerushalmi Brachos chapter 6 and Chazon Ish 124. See also Chazon Ish. For a discussion and refutation on the position of the Chazon Ish Orach Chaim 124, see Mishna Halachos volume 6 siman 92 and volume 7 siman 68. Mishna Halachos proposes that this is actually a Machlokes Rishonim.

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ 7:68

¹⁵ Tur and Beis Yosef 473 based on Hagahos Maimonios Hilchos Chametz Umatzah 7:20

¹⁶ Teshuva 119

eat a Kzayis volume of Maror. Since Chrein is so strong, people would not be eat the required amount. He also writes that using Chrein presents an issue of Sakana.

The Ba'er Heitev¹⁷ records that the Minhag in Ashkenaz was to use Tamcha (Chrein). Teshuva Meahava¹⁸ writes that the custom in Prague was to use Chrein, since the preferred species including Salata (lettuce) was not available. The Aruch Hashulchan similarly writes that in their locale, only the ministers has lettuce at that time of year.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger is of the opinion that one should specifically use Chrein. Even in a case of illness, he was loathe to follow the Chacham Tzvi who identified Chazeres as lettuce. Many communities have the custom of using Chrein. There are many halachic issues discussed concerning the use of Chrein for Maror including whether and when it should be grated, if one may eat it in its full strength and whether it can be soaked to weaken its bitterness.

Checking the lettuce

Chasam Sofer writes that in his Shabbos Hagadol Drosha he would warn the community that even though Chazeres is the preferred Maror, unless one has proficient, G-d fearing people to check and clean the lettuce from bugs, it is preferable to use Chrein. Even though Tamcha is only listed as the 3rd preference and Chazeres is listed first, it is far worse to transgress the many Issurim of consuming bugs, especially since Maror nowadays is only Rabbinic.

Other Achronim give similar warnings. Kaf Hachaim¹⁹ writes that because of a concern of infestation, one should only use the stalks of the lettuce and not the leaves, unless they are G-d fearing and trustworthy enough to check properly and patiently.

Ben Ish Chai²⁰ writes about a Chacham who entered a courtyard on Erev Pesach and saw a woman washing 2 large baskets of lettuce for the seder. She was washing the lettuce quickly. The Chacham said to her that she would have more aveiros as a result of consuming bugs than she has hairs in her head. He told her that she should rather use the stalks only (where bugs are not found).

Washing and checking lettuce should not be given to a kitchen aid or cleaner to do. Nor should it be done by children. Checking of lettuce is a serious matter and one needs to know what to look for and how to identify bugs which can be small and green, making it difficult to see on the lettuce leaf.

It is worthwhile to note that the Gemara²¹ teaches that for each water bug consumed one violates 4 Torah prohibitions. For each 'land' bug one violates 5 Torah prohibitions. For each flying bug that a person eats they violate 6 Biblical prohibitions.

Because levels of infestation differs from place to place, one should follow the guidelines of washing and checking from their local Kashrus Vaad.

Kosher bugs in the Maror?

The Maror must be dipped in Charoses before it is eaten. The Gemara²² explains that this is to negate the harmful effects of Kappa that is found in the Maror. Rashi and Rashbam explain that the

¹⁷ 473:11

¹⁸ 2:262

¹⁹ 473:90

²⁰ Parshas Tzav

²¹ Makkos16b

²² 115b

Kappa refers to a poisonous sap that is present in Maror. Rabbeinu Chananel however identifies the Kappa as a type of worm. The Tosefta²³ refers to the Kappa as a bug that is found in vegetables.

The multiple Torah prohibitions on consuming bugs discussed above, do not apply to bugs that grow within a vegetable. The Tosefta teaches that Kappa in the vegetables is permitted to be eaten. However if the bugs emerge and are separated from the place that they had grown, they become forbidden.

The Gemara teaches us that even though the bugs that grow within the Maror are not forbidden, they are potentially poisonous and therefore must be neutralised by dipping the Maror in Charoses.

The Alter Rebbe²⁴ follows the explanation of Rabbeinu Chananel. However he suggests that the Kappa discussed in the Gemara is no longer found in our Maror. With this he justifies why we do not completely submerge the Maror in Charoses.

In the absence of Kappa, the function of Charoses is only as a reminder of the mud that was used to make bricks. For this reminder it suffices to dip only part of the Maror. The Rebbe (Haggadah)²⁵ adds that nowadays it is preferable not to submerge the Maror entirely in Charoses so as not to negate the bitter taste of the Maror.

The Maror should be dipped before the Bracha over the Maror. Either way, the Charoses should be shaken off so that none of it remains on the Maror (Haggadah, Levush 475:1)²⁶ when it is eaten.

Deeper meanings

The Kol Bo connects the word Chazeres to its literal meaning – to return. Using Chazeres for Maror alludes to how Hashem returned the Jewish people back to His service though the bitterness that they endured in Mitzrayim. Sefer Hamanhig²⁷ similarly writes that at the time of the Exodus, Hashem returned us to Him and had pity (Chasa) upon us to redeem us.

The Posuk in Mishlei²⁸ says טוֹב אֲרֵחַת יֶרֶק וְאֶהְבֶּה-נֶשֶׁם מִשּׁוֹר אֲבוֹס וְשִׂנְאָה-בּוֹ – “Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened ox where there is hate”. The Midrash²⁹ teaches that this Posuk refers to the meal of Matzah and Maror (vegetables) that the Jewish people ate in Mitzrayim. The word ארחת spelled in full with a Vov (ארוחת) has the same Gematria as חזרת (Chazeres)³⁰.

Tamcha תמכא is the Roshei Teivos of אל-ל כבוד מספרים, ‘they constantly speak the praises of Hashem’³¹. This teaches us that even in times of bitterness, the Jewish people still praise Hashem.

Chabad custom

²³ Terumos 7:12

²⁴ 475:11

²⁵ Haggada – Likutei Taamim Uminhagim

²⁶ Haggadah, Levush 475:1

²⁷ Siman 78

²⁸ 15:17

²⁹ Midrash Rabbah Balak 20:18

³⁰ Rokeach 283

³¹ Chasam Sofer

In the instructions on setting up the Kaarah, the Alter Rebbe writes that the Chazeres used for Korech is placed below the Maror. Many Haggadahs refer to the Maror used for Korech as Chazeres, to differentiate between it and the Maror that is eaten earlier on its own.

The Rebbe's Haggada – Likutei Taamim Uminhagim – writes that based on the different names used in the Haggadah, some would use different species for Maror and for Korech, even in a place where lettuce was available. The Rebbe discusses the possible rationale for doing this, but concludes that the preference is to use lettuce for both Maror and for Korech. Indeed, in his Shulchan Aruch³² when describing the Kaarah, the Alter Rebbe refers to both as Maror – Maror and the Maror for Korech. The different names used in the Haggadah have Kabbalistic significance.

The Rebbe concludes that Chabad custom is to use a combination of both Chazeres (identified as lettuce) and Tamcha (identified as Chrein) for both Maror and Korech.

Based on the discussion above, Chazeres (lettuce) is more Mehudar and remains the preferable vegetable for Maror at the Seder and one does not require any Chrein at all. Adding Chrein is a matter of custom (perhaps to have something with a bitter taste even though it is not halachically required). Therefore, if one can obtain a small amount of Chrein to add to the lettuce to fulfil the Minhag it would be good to do so. However, if Chrein is not available or if one is unable to eat Chrein, one can fulfil the Mitzvah Lemehadrin using only lettuce.

Based on the Kabbalah of the Ariza"l³³, the Seder plate is set up with the Zeroa (bone), Beitza (egg), Maror, Charoses, Karas and Chazeres, ordered in the shape of 2 Segol vowels³⁴. This reflects the Divine Sefiros that are arrayed in 3 columns; the right side, the left side and the centre.

The right side (the Zeroa and Charoses) is associated with the attribute of Chesed (kindness). The left side (the egg and Karpas) is connected to the attribute of Gevurah (severity). The Maror and Chazeres are placed on the middle line, reflecting the attribute of Rachamim (mercy or compassion).



Seemingly, it would be more appropriate for the Maror to be placed on the left side since bitterness is an expression of Gevurah.

The Alter Rebbe explains that the bitterness of Maror refers to the bitterness that a person feels when self-reflecting on their distance from Hashem. This bitterness arouses a sense of Rachmanus on one's soul and the situation that it finds itself in. When we have Rachmanus on our spiritual situation, Hashem responds with Rachamim Rabim (abundant mercy) from above to help us. Since the Merirus leads to Rachamim, the Maror is placed on the middle column.

As discussed at the start of this article, in the absence of the Korban Pesach, the Biblical Mitzvah of Maror no longer applies. The Rabbis instituted a Rabbinic Mitzvah to eat Maror at the Seder as a Zecher L'Mikdash – a remembrance of how the Mitzvah was observed when the Beis Hamikdash

³² 473:26

³³ Pri Eitz Chaim Shaar Chag Hamatzos chapter 6

³⁴ Shulchan Aruch Harav 473:26

stood. The reason for such Gezeiros is so that we do not forget about the Beis Hamikdash and more importantly that we do not forget the Mitzvos so that we will be able to observe them when the Beis Hamikdash is speedily rebuilt.

May we be zoche to the coming of Moshiach before Pesach so that we may once again fulfil the Mitzvah Maror Mideoraisa.