

Understanding the Seder Plate: “Charoset”

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Background:

Over Pesach, we have the opportunity to eat so many different kinds of “*geshmak*”¹ foods. Many of us eat matzah, matzah-brei, matzah pizza, matzah and cream cheese, matzah balls, matzah sandwiches, chocolate covered matzah, matzah chips, matzah and jam, and even matzah covered matzah!

The best part about all of these foods is that they not only taste delicious, but they are also filled with so much meaning and symbolism. This week, we’ll learn about the history, purpose, and symbolism of ***charoset*** together.

Food for Thought (pun intended):

- What does your family’s charoset ***look*** like?
- What does your family’s charoset ***taste*** like?
 - *WHY* do we eat charoset over Pesach?

The Source of the Scrumptious Sauce:

Is Charoset a Mitzvah?

1. Mishnah, Pesachim 10:3

הביאו לפניו, מטביל בהזרת, עד שמגיע לפרפרת הפת. הביאו לפניו מצה וחרזת וחרזת ושני תבשילין, אף על פי שאין חרזת מצוה. רבי אליעזר ברבי צדוק אומר, מצוה.

They bring everything before him. He dips the lettuce (chazeret) before he reaches the course following the matzah. [Then] they set before him matzah, chazeret, ***charoset***, and two cooked foods (i.e. the egg and the

¹“Geshmak” is Yiddish for “yummy!”

shankbone), although charoset isn't a mitzvah. Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Tzadok says: It is a mitzvah.

What Is Charoset? Why Do We Eat It?

According to the opinion that charoset isn't a mitzvah:

2. Gemara, Pesachim 116a

אף על פי שאין חרוסת מצוה: ואי לא מצוה משום מאי מייתי לה? אמר רבי אמי משום קפא. אמר רב אסי קפא דחסא חמא קפא דחמא כרתי [קפא דכרתי חמימי] קפא דכולהו חמימי אדהכי והכי נימא הכי קפא קפא דכירנא לך ולשב בנתיך ולתמני כלתך:

If charoset isn't a mitzvah, then why is it brought to the seder? Rabbi Ami says, [charoset] removes the toxin (or rare insect) called "Kappah," [which is found on some marror]...

3. Shulchan Aruch HaRav, 475:11

ועכשיו אין נוהגין לשקעו פלו, אלא בטבול מקצתו. ויש שמישבין המנהג, לפי שקפא זה אינו מצוי בינינו, ואין מטבילין בחרסת אלא משום מצוה.

Nowadays, we don't immerse the marror entirely, rather, we only dip part of the marror [into the charoset]. Some justify this practice by saying that the Kappah toxin/insect isn't common anymore. [Therefore,] the only reason why we dip into charoset, is because it is a mitzvah.

According to the opinion that charoset is a mitzvah:

4. Gemara, Pesachim 116a

רבי אלעזר בר' צדוק אומר מצוה וכו': מאי מצוה רבי לוי אומר זכר לתפוח ור' יוחנן אומר זכר לטיט אמר אביי הלכך צריך לקהוייה וצריך לסמוכיה לקהוייה זכר לתפוח וצריך לסמוכיה זכר לטיט. תניא כוותיה דרבי יוחנן תבלין זכר לתבן חרוסת זכר לטיט אמר רבי אלעזר ברבי צדוק כך היו אומרים תגרי חרך שבירושלים בואו וטלו לכם תבלין למצוה:

Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Tzadok says [that charoset] is a mitzvah. What is the nature of this mitzvah? Rabbi Levi says that it reminds us of **"the apple."** Rabbi Yochanan says that it reminds us of **the mortar.** Abaye said, therefore, charoset must be both tart and thick. Tartness to

remember the apple, thickness to remember the mortar. It was taught in a braita, in line with the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan: The spices used in the charoset are in remembrance of the hay that our forefathers used, and the charoset itself is in remembrance of the mortar. Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Tzadok, said: When selling charoset, the small shopkeepers in Yerushalayim would say as follows: "Come and take spices for yourselves for the mitzvah [of charoset]."

a. Rashbam: What "Apple" Are We Remembering?

זכר לתפוח - במסכת סוטה (דף יא:) שהיו יולדות שם בניהם בלא עצב שלא יכירו בהן מצריים...

[When Pharaoh wanted to throw all of the Jewish boys into the Nile,] the Jewish women would [go to the fields and] give birth, silently, [under the apple trees,] so that the Egyptians wouldn't know...

[This also reminds us of the miracles that HaShem performed to take care of the babies under the apple trees. The gemara in Sotah 11b teaches: "HaShem would send an angel who would take care of the babies... then, the angel would gather for them two round stones...and the babies would nurse from that which would flow out of them. One of the stones flowed with oil and one of the stones flowed with honey..."]

b. Mordechai, Missechet Pesachim, HaSeder B'Ktzara

בירושלמי דערבי פסחים [הלכה ג'] למה נקרא שמו חרוסת זכר ללבינה שהוא מעשה חרסית ריב"ל אומר צריכה שתהא עבה זכר לטיט והלבנים...

Why is "charoset" called "חרוסת?" It reminds us of the bricks, which were made of clay, has the root "חרס," meaning clay?

c. Tosfot: What Are Some Other Reasons Behind Charoset?

צריך לסמוכיה וצריך לקהוייה - ובירושלמי אמר אית דעבדי זכר לדם ומשום הכי קרי ליה טיבולו במשקה וכן עמא דבר לסמוכי ובשעת אכילה מקלשין אותו בין וחומץ. ובתשובת

הגאונים מפרש לעשות חרוסת בפירות שנדמה לכנסת ישראל בשיר השירים. תחת התפוח עוררתך כפלח הרמון התאנה חנטה אמרתי אעלה בתמר אגוז אל גנת אגוז ושקדים על שם ששקד הקב"ה על הקץ:

[The gemara says that charoset] must be both **tart** and **thick**. The Talmud Yerushalmi says that the charoset should also remind us of the plague of blood, and therefore we call the act "dipping" like we call it with a liquid. And that is the accepted practice, to make it thick initially, and when it comes to eating it, one waters it down with wine or vinegar. In the Teshuvos HaGeonim, it explains that charoset should be made of the fruits that Bnai Yisroel are compared to in Shir HaShirim,...such as apples...pomegranate...fig...dates...nuts. [It should also include] almonds (שקדים), since HaShem hastened (שקד) the redemption.

Can you name all of the reasons why we eat charoset???

Hint: 1 may no longer apply!

Answers on the last page.

Extra points if you can make your OWN reason!



Rivka's Mommy's *World Famous Charoset*

Ingredients:

- 6 Empire Apples
- One 20 oz. container of dark raisins
- Two bags of ground walnuts
 - Ground cinnamon
 - Concord Grape Wine
 - Honey

Directions:

1. Peel and coarsely chop the apples.
2. Add the raisins.
3. Pour in 1.5 bags of walnuts.
4. Add a liberal amount of cinnamon to taste.
5. Add enough wine so it mixes that when mixed it becomes a paste.
6. Add honey to taste.
7. Add the rest of the ground walnuts and wine as needed to make the right consistency.
8. Adjust taste by adding more cinnamon, wine, and/or honey as you like.

Enjoy! <3

Charoset Answers:

1. *Removes the Kappah Poison/Insect*
2. *Zecher LaTapuach (The Apple)*
 - a. *The Jewish women gave birth in the wilderness, under the apple trees.²*
 - b. *We remember the miracles that HaShem did for the Jewish babies under the apple trees.*
3. *Zecher LaTit (Mortar)*
 - a. *Did you know that the word “חרוסת” has the root “חרס,” meaning clay?*
4. *Zecher LaTeven (Straw)*
5. *Zecher LaMakkat Dam³*
6. *Bnai Yisroel are compared to fruits in Shir HaShirim (which we read on Pesach). We remember how much HaShem loves us!*
7. *It contains almonds (שקדים), since HaShem hastened (שקד) the redemption.*
8. *[Insert your Torah here.....!]*



² The Maharsha explains that even though the Jews were enslaved in very harsh conditions, HaShem miraculously made them give birth to many children! (Chiddushei Aggados, Pesachim 116a “Zecher Latit”)

³ For this reason, many people put red wine or grape juice into their charoset.