

# Daf Seder דף סדר

## Charoset

The seder table is all about symbols. Over generations of interpretation, most items on the table developed multiple meanings and connections. *Charoset* is no exception, for through the eating of this sweet, tart, and thick dip made from apples, cinnamon, nuts, and wine, we recall the elements of slavery, the tales of misdrash (commentary) and the holiness of the Temple that once stood in Jerusalem. In many communities creativity runs wild with recipes for this famous spread, but even as traditions evolve, *charoset* still brings to life the ingredients of our past.

MISHNAH: “Even though *charoset* is not an obligation.”

GEMARA: If it is not an obligation, then why do we bring it [to the seder]? Rav Ami said, “it is because of *kappa*.” Rav Assi said, “The cure for [one who got sick from] *kappa* in lettuce [should eat] radish; the cure for *kappa* in radishes is leeks; the cure for *kappa* of leeks and all vegetables is hot water....

MISHNAH: “Rabbi Eleazar ben Tzadok says it is an obligation.”

GEMARA: What obligation is it? Rabbi Levi says, “it is *zecher tapuach* (apples),” Rabbi yochanan says, “it is *zecher latit* (working in mud),” Abayee says, “therefore [to fulfill both opinions] it must have a little sourness [from apples] to remember the apple tree; and it must be thick, to remember working in the mud. A baraita (tanaitic source) “*Charoset* is made with spices to remember the straw [used to make bricks]; it is ground finely, to remember mud.” R. Eliezer ben Tzadok says, grocers in Jerusalem used to say ‘Come buy spices for the Mitzvah!’

(Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 116a)

**זכר/Zecher** - To remember or make present.

**קפא/Kappa** - Either a worm or bacteria that lived in on on lettuce/greens.

**מצוה/Mitzvah** - A sacred obligation or commandment from God that appears in torah.

**תפוח/Tapuach** - Apple, or apple tree

Both men and women are obligated to eat a “k’zayit” - the size of an olive - of *maror* (bitter herbs). It is a symbol of the bitterness of our servitude, as the verse Exodus 1:14 states: “and they embittered their lives with hard work.” The sages delineated the types of vegetables with which one can fill this obligation: romaine lettuce, endive, horseradish, and bitter herbs. Optimally, one should use lettuce, for the sages said that it is especially remindful of our

הביאו לפניו מצה וחזרת וחרסת  
ושני תבשילין, אף על פי שאין  
חרסת מצוה. רבי אליעזר ברבי  
צדוק אומר: מצוה

They bring before him *matzah* and lettuce and *charoset*, and two cooked dishes, even though the *charoset* is not an obligation. Rabbi Eleazar ben Tzaok says [*charoset*] is an obligation. (Mishnah Pesachim 10:3)

slavery in Egypt – at first it is sweet and then becomes better, just as our servitude was at first sweet and unnoticeable and only later became bitter. The sages ordained that the *maror* be dipped into *charoset* so as to counteract the harmful substance (*kappa*) in the *maror*. **One should be careful, however, not to use too much *charoset* and thereby completely eliminate the bitter taste.**

(Eliyahu Kitov, *The Book of Our Heritage*, v. 2, p. 604)

**Zecher L'tapuach** - [Israelites] would have children between [the apple trees] and did not grieve, because the Egyptians did not know about [their births]. As is written in Shir Hashirim 8:5, "Under the apple tree I awakened thee..."

(Rashi, Pesachim 116a)

### The Gaonic Charoset Recipe:

The Geonim explain [that one should] make charoset from the fruits that appear describing Israel in Song of Songs:

Verse 2:3 - As an **apple** tree among the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.

Verse 2:13 - The **fig** tree puts forth her green figs and the views with the tender grape give a good smell.

Verse 4:3 - Thy plants are an orchard of **pomegranates** with pleasant fruits; **saffron, cinnamon**.

Verse 6:11 - I went down into the garden of **walnuts** to see the fruits of the valley.

Verse 7:7 - You are stately and tall like a **date** palm tree.

(Tosefot, Pesachim 116a)

### For Discussion:

What are the implications of charoset being an obligation or not?

Which is the most meaningful symbol expressed by charoset: mud, straw, apple tree, blood, or the Temple?

It appears that charoset (when added) takes the place of the morsel of the second type of paschal offering (one of the two cooked dishes) inside the Hillel sandwich. For Hillel, the sandwich symbolized the missing remnant of the Temple, eating only matzah and maror. What can this offering symbolize for you?

וַיִּרְעוּ אֶת־נֹוֹי הַמִּצְרַיִם - כִּמָּה שְׁנֵאֵמַר: הִבָּה  
נִתְחַכְמָה לּוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה, וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה  
מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם הוּא עַל שְׁנֵאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם בָּנוּ,  
וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ.

*A mixture of apples, nuts, wine, and spices,  
Represents the mixture of clay and straw  
From which in bondage  
we made our bricks.*

*It recalls as well  
The women of Israel  
Who bore their children secretly  
Beneath the apple trees of Mitzrayim.*

*And like the apple tree,  
Which brings forth fruit and only then  
Sprouts leaves to protect it,  
Our heroic mothers bore children  
Without any assurance of security or safety.  
We recall this beautiful, militant devotion  
Which sweetened the misery of slavery  
As we dip our bitters  
In the sweet charoset.*

*It is the story of this night:  
Bitter and sweet,  
Sadness and joy,  
Tales of shame that end  
In praise.*

*It is the story of our life.*

(Richard Levy, *On Wings of Freedom: The Hillel Haggadah*, p. 69.)

"The Egyptians were evil toward us" - as it says, "**Let us be clever about them lest they multiply** and in the event of war they be added to those who hate us and having waged war, leave this land."

(Haggadah excerpt - translated in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah*, v. 2, 9:12.)

The Jerusalem Talmud says only that charoset should be **murky or soft as a "remembrance of the blood"** associated with the first plague or smeared on the doorposts of the Israelite home to protect them from the last plague, the slaying of the Egyptian first born, (Pes. 70a, 10:37d). (Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah*, v. 1, p. 41.)