

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY
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The Mitzva of Karpas

The Seder provides us with a colorful array of mitzvot linked together by the controlling objective of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim - discussing and identifying with the Exodus from Egypt. Many of the mitzvot are de'oraita - Biblical in origin and some are de'rabanan. This article will explore the mitzva of karpas - a vegetable eaten immediately after kiddush prior to beginning the narrative of yetziat Mitzrayim.

The source of the mitzva of karpas is a Mishna in Pesachim (114a) which announces "They deliver vegetables to him (the conductor of the meal and the Seder) and he dips the chazeret (a vegetable which is commonly used as of marror)." The gemara analyses this aspect of the Seder and concludes that this exercise was instituted "kedei sheyish'alu ha-tinokot" so that the children would notice the strange behavior (eating immediately after kiddush before formally beginning the seuda with bread) and begin to ask the questions which are so crucial to the Seder experience. Taken as such, karpas represents a separate or independent element of the Seder which the Chakhamim instituted solely to stimulate interest and questions.

If this were the entire picture of karpas we might question the reason that it is dipped. Why not merely eat a vegetable before the bread - itself an abnormal interlude and thereby generate interest. The simple reading of the mishna ("metavel" - he dips) confirms that the karpas must be dipped. Interestingly enough the Rambam in his commentary to the Mishna struggles to redefine the word metavel so that dipping is not required. He claims that the word metavel can be taken as a synonym for eating in general without referring to dipping in particular. The simple reading of the Mishna however infers that the karpas must indeed be dipped. Why must the karpas - an external part of the Seder intended as a mere stimulus be dipped?

The dipping itself might not be so surprising. If dunking is a form of cherut (experiencing liberty and royalty) possibly any 'additional foods' which are eaten this evening are dipped. Matza might be the only food which isn't dipped to preserve its status as "lechem oni" - poor man's bread - unadorned and without any flavor enhancers. In addition, the dunking of the karpas might further arouse the child's interest and prompt him to inquire. What might be more revealing is the dip itself used for karpas. Though our minhag is to use salt water several Rishonim disagreed. Tosafot (114a) for example cite the opinion of Rashi and Rav Yosef that the karpas should be specifically dipped in charoset. To be sure, if a person uses romaine lettuce (typically eaten for

marror) as his karpas dipping in charoset would appear to be necessary to mitigate the 'sting' of the marror. This is the reason supplied by the gemara (115b) as to why the marror itself is dipped in charoset. It would stand to reason that if the exact same "marror lettuce" were used for karpas it too should be dipped in charoset. However, it appears from Tosafot that karpas is dipped in charoset even if alternate vegetables are used. Why dip karpas, merely an external prop, SPECIFICALLY in charoset?

To explain Tosafot, we might consider the following question. Surely the MOTIVE behind the initiative to eat karpas was to stimulate interest and provoke questioning. However what was the nature of the takana. Did the Rabanan institute a totally new and independent action or did they merely adapt an existing mitzva of Pesach night and schedule it at the beginning of the Seder to arouse interest? By instituting karpas the Chakhamim might have been duplicating the Biblical mitzva of eating marror and prescheduling it in the early stages of the Seder to arouse interest and questions. Karpas is not a new eating; the chakhamim merely required us to eat 'marror' immediately after kiddush. If this is true we fully understand the position which requires that the karpas be dipped in charoset. This dipping highlights its status as 'pseudo-marror.' (see the Ran in Pesachim who offers an approach similar to this to explain this position).

SUMMARY:

Karpas was implemented to generate curiosity and questioning. Was it a new and independent eating which was inserted, or a broadening of the extant mitzva to eat marror?

We might glimpse this concept through the prism of an interesting machloket Amoraim cited in Pesachim (114b). What happens if a person does not have a second vegetable for karpas but must use his romaine lettuce both for 'marror' (marror proper) and for karpas. Rav Huna maintained that he eat the lettuce once at the karpas stage (reciting borei pri ha-adama) and a second time during the marror slot (reciting al akhilat marror). Essentially nothing about the Seder is altered, and the lettuce is utilized twice - once for the purposes of karpas and a second time for the purposes of marror. The berakhot as well remain intact. Rav Chisda argues and claims that although the lettuce should be eaten twice both berakhot should be recited during the 'karpas' eating and none during the marror eating; all the berakhot should be recited when he first eats this lettuce. Tosafot has an interesting description of the relationship between these two eatings of lettuce according to Rav Chisda. Indeed, the primary mitzva of marror is fulfilled by the second eating - after matza; this is why the lettuce must be eaten a second time. Yet on the other hand the birkat ha-mitzva (al akhilat marror) is recited during the first eating. Tosafot asserts "Even though the principle marror mitzva occurs during the second eating, the berakha recited during the first eating applies (even though it didn't immediately precede the act of the mitzva) just like the berakha recited on the initial tekiyot (before Mussaf) apply to the second round of tekiyot (sounded during Mussaf)." Tosafot's aim is to

explain the phenomenon whereby a berakha recited on the first round of a "two-staged" mitzva applies equally to both segments (even though he spoke in the middle or was involved in different activities). He uses the two rounds of tekiyot as the model and bases karpas and marror upon this model. Evidently, he viewed karpas as the early phase of marror. In general, since you use a different vegetable for karpas you delay the berakha of "al akhilat marror" until the ACTUAL marror, but if you use the same lettuce for both stages the berakha is recited earlier before karpas - the first stage of the mitzva of marror.

The Ritva (in his commentary to the Haggada page 9 in the Rav Kook edition) examines why no birkat ha-mitzva is recited upon karpas. His point of inquiry assumes that this eating is not merely staged to elicit response. As merely an external prop no formal birkat ha-mitzva would be required. Evidently, according to the Ritva's line of questioning karpas is a formal mitzva and might require a formal birkat ha-mitzva. Might the Ritva have been suggesting by his question that karpas, as an expansion of marror can be viewed as a formal mitzva?

The answer of the Ritva is particularly interesting: "Since this dipping is not a PRINCIPAL PART of the Seder but only performed to arouse the interest of the children, it was scheduled prior to the actual mitzvot of the Seder and to signal its not being a mitzva - no berakha was attached." Might the Ritva in his conclusion view karpas as a separate mitzva completely unaffiliated with marror, and as an external proper to the evening and NOT THE EXPANSION OF A MITZVA, something undeserving of a birkat ha-mitzva?

SUMMARY:

Based upon the question of karpas's relationship to marror we have investigated several issues. First we inspected the halakha of dipping karpas and particularly in charoset. The second issue which might be impacted is the possibility of reciting the actual birkat ha-mitzva of marror during the eating of the karpas (in an instance in which the same romaine lettuce is used for both). Finally, we inspected the Ritva's deliberation as to whether karpas deserves its own birkat ha-mitzva.

What about the identity and quantity of karpas itself? First of all what may be eaten as karpas? The Mishna describes taking 'chazeret' which is a vegetable (and one of the five species which can be used as marror!!). Why specifically was a vegetable chosen. Tosafot (115a) cites the position of Rav Yosef Tov Eleim that a vegetable was assigned as karpas so that its borei pri ha-adama should 'cover' the ultimate marror (thereby avoiding a potential safek about reciting an independent borei pri ha-adama of the marror which is eaten after the meal has officially begun and ha-motzi has been recited). According to this position the need to eat a vegetable for karpas is based solely upon the desire to recite the berakha which precedes a vegetable - ha-adama. Fruits upon which ha-adama is recited would also qualify (thus the

minhag of many to use bananas - a fruit, but one which carries a borei pri ha-adama). If we were to view karpas as an expansion of marror we might insist that it be fulfilled with a VEGETABLE and not merely with a fruit upon which a ha-adama is recited.

What about the type of vegetable? Assuming it must be a vegetable may any vegetable be used or only specific ones. To a certain extent if karpas is truly an extension of marror we might have expected karpas to be the exact same vegetables which may be used for marror. Indeed, the Ritva writes that for karpas one should eat BITTER VEGETABLES - confirming the relationship between karpas and marror. In truth, we might reject the Ritva and claim that despite karpas's being an extension of marror it still is essentially a distinct mitzva - related but different - and optimally the same vegetables should not be used. Yet many Rishonim still maintain that karpas should evoke, to some degree, the same imagery and associations which the marror embodies. The Orchot Chayim claims that the vegetables of karpas remind us of the vegetables which the Jews used to heal or cure wounds in Egypt. The Manhig interprets the term 'karpas' as related to the word PEREKH - hard labor, reminding us of our bondage. If karpas were merely an autonomous vegetable inserted to 'drum up' interest it should not necessarily - in name or in the type of vegetable taken - refer to our suffering and bondage. Reminding us of bondage is the role which marror plays this evening. Evidently, when Chazal instituted this mitzva they linked it to marror and it too serves as a symbol for slavery.

One final question pertains to the quantity of karpas which must be eaten. Our minhag follows the position stated by the Rashba in a responsum (1;241) that less than a ke-zayit should be eaten so that no berakha acharona is necessary. If we were to eat a ke-zayit we would face a halakhic question whether to recite a berakha acharona or wait until the actual meal and recite birkat ha-mazon. To avoid this quandary we eat less than a ke-zayit. The Rambam however (Hilkhos Chametz U-matza) writes that a ke-zayit of karpas must be eaten. The Hagahot Maimoniyot (comments upon the Rambam) argues that no ke-zayit is necessary since the karpas is only to generate questions. The Rambam himself have felt that although the incentive for karpas is to elicit questions, when Chazal instituted the mitzva they broadened marror. Hence karpas like marror requires a ke-zayit!!!

METHODOLOGICAL POINTS:

1. Often a Rabbinic institution is based upon an already existing halakhic structure. If this is true we might expect certain guidelines of the de'rabanon to mirror the de'oraita.
2. When considering a takana of the Chakhamim two different questions must be analyzed:
 - a) What was their motive?
 - b) What was the nature or essence of the takana they established?

Oftentimes one factor serves as motive but once Chakhamim institute a halakha which has an essence independent of the original motive. The purpose of karpas was to generate curiosity but the essence of the takana might have been a broadening of marror.