

**TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY**  
**By Rav Moshe Taragin**

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***Shiur #10: The 5 Marror Species***

The *mishna* in *Pesachim* (39a) lists 5 different types of vegetables that are suitable for the *mitzva* of *marror*. The common denominator is that all 5 provide a bitter taste which is the central feature of the *mitzva*. Typically, *mitzva* items do not require a particular taste; the *mitzva* food is identified based upon specific criteria and as long as the particular specimen is classified as that food, the precise taste is irrelevant. For example, wine can be sweeter or more sour, but as long as it is considered halakhic wine, it can be employed for *kiddush*. How inherent is the bitter taste in defining acceptable vegetables for *marror* use? Can any bitter produce satisfy the *marror* requirements or must a specific species be employed?

The *gemara* provides very different impressions about this issue. By listing 5 species, it would appear that the *mishna* intended VERY SPECIFIC items, to the exclusion of others. Interestingly, the *gemara* cites at least 6 different lists or partial lists offered by various *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*. If any bitter object would suffice, these lists would seem quite unnecessary. Subsequently, however, the *gemara* quotes three opinions which argue about the qualifications of *marror*. R. Yehuda allows any bitter vegetable which produces sap, while R. Yochanan ben Beroka allows any vegetable which turns red if it is cut. Finally, a position is cited in the name of "Acheirim" which demands both sap production and the reddening effect upon being cut. All three opinions seem to allow ANY bitter vegetable to serve as *marror* as long as certain "*marror*-like" effects exist.

Finally, the *gemara* suggests several other bitter items, such as bitter parts of fish or animals, bitter bushes (*hirduf*), and other items. The *gemara* rejects these options because *marror* is compared to *matza* and must therefore be produce (not an animal) that is edible. If *marror* were limited to specific species, why not simply reject these items because they are one of the 5 species

listed? To conclude its discussion, the *gemara* questions the fact that there are actually 5 acceptable species. After all, the Torah employs a plural term, "*merorim*," which should indicate the possibility of only 2 species, not 5. The *gemara* responds that since *marror* is compared to *matza*, there are MANY species that are valid.

To summarize, it is difficult to infer from the *gemara*'s complex discussion whether any bitter vegetables may be employed for *marror* or only those mentioned on the list. The Shulchan Arukh (473:5) lists the 5 species of the *mishna*, implying a limitation to these particular items. The Rama, however, cites the Agur, who adds that if these species cannot be located, any bitter vegetable can be employed. (In fact, many *Rishonim*, including Rabbenu Dovid, the Ritva, and the Me'iri, asserted this claim in their comments to the *gemara* in *Pesachim* 39a.) Recognizing the uncertainty surrounding the Rama's *kula*, the Magen Avraham suggests that a *berakha* should not be recited on anything other than the 5 listed species.

It seems that two very different versions of *marror* emerge. One suggests that the Torah mandates eating CERTAIN food items which are distinguished by a bitter taste, although the *mitzva* surrounds the ingestion of those ITEMS and not the experiencing of a bitter taste. The alternative model claims that the only requirement is to experience bitter taste (as long as basic comparisons to *matza* are maintained).

An interesting statement of the Chazon Ish may be analyzed in light of the aforementioned question. He claims (*Orach Chaim* 124) that the vegetable must currently be bitter to be used for fulfilling the *mitzva*. Eating a species which will BECOME bitter but is presently SWEET (our common practice with lettuce) would not fulfill the *mitzva*. Evidently, eating a particular species would not be sufficient without experiencing the bitter taste. According to the Chazon Ish, the bitter taste is necessary but not sufficient, while according to the Rama (who allowed eating any bitter item in the event that one of the 5 species could not be obtained), it may be sufficient. The Peri Chadash and the Arukh Ha-Shulchan argue with the Chazon Ish and explicitly permit lettuce which will ultimately become bitter, even though it currently tastes sweet.

An interesting discussion in the *gemara* may yield an extreme position based upon the aforementioned concept that any bitter vegetable may be eaten. The *gemara* (*Pesachim* 39a) cites R. Ilya, who wanted to verify the use of *arkabalim* for *marror*. He tried in vain to find a colleague who would agree until he visited R. Eliezer ben Yaakov, who confirmed his position. It is unclear from the *gemara* why R. Ilya's suggestion was met with such unanimous rejection. The

Ritva claims that *arkabalim* is not a vegetable, but part of a tree's bark, which is bitter. R. Ilya was effectively allowing a non-vegetable for use as *marror*. Although his position was roundly rejected, it DOES indicate a focus on the bitter taste and a lack of concern for a particular species. Even items which aren't vegetables may be used.

Clearly, R. Ilya's position was a minority one, and was ultimately rejected. Yet an ambiguous Rashi may have asserted the same notion. One of the 5 vegetable species mentioned by the *mishna* is *charchavina*. The *gemara* identifies this as "*atzvasa de-dikla*," which Rashi defines as the bark of a tree. Most *Rishonim* are incredulous that Rashi could have allowed the bark of a tree for *marror*. Keep in mind that Rashi is explaining the MAINSTREAM position of the *mishna* and not a minority opinion of R. Ilya. The *Rishonim* overwhelmingly reinterpret Rashi; they claim he intended small vegetables which grow in the vicinity of trees rather than the bark, which grows literally around a tree. Yet the simple reading of Rashi does suggest that he would allow any bitter substance, even if it isn't one of the 5 species and even if it isn't a vegetable at all.

This dovetails nicely with an interesting remark by Rashi in his commentary to Shemot 12:8. He writes that any bitter herb is called *marror*. Although Rashi was not writing in a halakhic vein in this context, his comments do indicate a willingness to validate anything bitter which grows from the ground, even if it isn't one of the listed species.

Perhaps the most extreme position is staked by the Peri Megadim. He wonders about a bitter item which is so bitter that it isn't edible and isn't considered halakhic food. It seems that the *gemara* already considered this option and rejected it. The *gemara* suggests the use of "*hirzifu*," which Rashi identifies as poisonous seed. It rejects this because *marror* - like *matza* - must be edible food. Presumably, this bans the use of non-edible food. Evidently, the Peri Megadim would distinguish between items that are completely inedible and those whose extreme bitterness renders them inedible. If *marror* is merely a food with a bitter taste and not a particular species and not even a vegetable, it may also be extracted from something that isn't considered halakhic food. Of course, this is the most extreme position, but logically it seems to cohere with many previously stated positions.

*Chag kasher ve-sameach.*