

They embittered their lives with hard work... All the labors that they performed with them were with crushing hardness. (1:14)

The *Talmud Pesachim* 39a explains that *Chazeres*/lettuce, which may be used for *marror*, bitter herbs, is representational of the type of crushing hard labor to which the Jewish People were subjected by their Egyptian taskmasters. *Chazeres* begins soft (at first, when one bites into it, it seems soft, almost sweet), becoming *marror* and bitter tasting overtime; likewise, the Egyptian initiated the Jewish slave labor with sweetness: either by offering them money in reimbursement for their time and toil; or by convincing them of the significance of their labor, etc.

Chazal's statement attributing the use of lettuce to its similarity with the manner in which the Egyptians initiated the Jewish slave labor is enigmatic. The primary purpose served by *marror* is to recall the bitterness that we experienced while we were slaves in Egypt. *Marror* is bitter; the slave labor was bitter! What more is there to say? How does the fact that the bitterness was at first sweet, that our slave experience began with a smooth tongue, add to the bitterness of the experience? How does the use of the word *pehrach*, a soft tongue, which is a homiletic rendering of *perach*, usually translated as crushing hardness; affect the bitterness which *Klal Yisrael* experienced??

Horav Yosef Tzvi Salant, zl, draws a distinction between one who experiences pain and troubles for which he is not responsible, and one who experiences pain and suffering for which he is responsible. The former is neither guilty of any infraction which would warrant his suffering, nor did he do anything to initiate it; the latter is himself the cause of his troubles, such as that he was convinced/fooled by others to do something for which he is presently paying bitterly. If the Jews would have suffered at the hands of the Egyptians for no reason other than that the Egyptians were an evil nation who subjected them to crushing labor out of their deep-rooted hatred for the Jews, we would have lived with it. Now, added to the pain of the bondage is the humiliation of our own involvement in our tragedy; it increases the nature of the pain of the slavery.

The Jews in Egypt experienced devastating pain as they slaved for their Egyptian taskmasters. In addition, *Klal Yisrael* realized that they had played a leading role in bringing this bondage upon themselves. Thus, as a remembrance of the folly and pain of their bondage, they established the custom of eating bitter lettuce, which is, at first, soft and, later, hard and bitter.

Rav Salant suggests that this might be another reason for dipping the bitter *marror* into the *charoses*, which is sweet: to recall the fact that the bitter labor had a sweet beginning. At first, the Egyptians acted as our best friends, who supposedly were looking out for our welfare and wanted us to earn some extra money. Later, we realized that it was all a ploy to convince us to work, so that we would fall under their domination.