

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

We memorialize the bitterness of Egypt, the harsh labor and persecution, with the *marror*, bitter herbs, which we eat on *Pesach* night. *Chazal* teach us that while there are a number of vegetables that are suitable for the *mitzvah* of *marror*, leaf lettuce is preferred. Among the vegetables, leaf lettuce provides the most apt comparison with the type of labor to which the Egyptians subjected the Jewish people. At first, the Egyptians convinced the Jews to work with them. Later on, they embittered their lives with harsh labor. At first, the lettuce seems almost sweet to the palate, but subsequently, its bitter taste is manifest. This reason for preferring leaf lettuce for *marror*, is enigmatic. We seek to remember the bitterness of the Egyptian exile. Yet, we eat a vegetable that recalls the "sweet" beginning of our bondage. Is the memory bitter or sweet?

Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, z"l, notes two forms of suffering. One type of suffering is inflicted upon a person by others. This is undoubtedly difficult to bear, but it is more tolerable than the pain and suffering that is self-inflicted when one has become complicitous in creating his own misery. Had the Egyptians originally conscripted the Jews into slave labor without pretext, the Jews might have been able to accept the concept of bondage, as painful as it would have been. The circumstances preceding the Egyptian slavery were different. The Jews had never thought their "good" friends and neighbors would actually enslave them. The sweetness compounded the bitterness, for the Jews had participated in bringing the misery upon themselves.

Perhaps this is the idea behind the custom of dipping the *marror* into the sweet *charoses*. We recall the bitterness with which we lived as a result of accepting the Egyptian blandishments. The Egyptians smiled at us, making us feel good. Our own insecurity led to our ultimate torment. If we would only learn a lesson from the message of the *marror*, it might prevent other tragedies from occurring--even in our own time.