

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

WHY THERE'S LETTUCE ON YOUR SEDER PLATE

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Take a look at your seder plate. Are there separate places for chzeret and maror? What do you put there? Chazeret means lettuce. So then the question becomes: why should lettuce be on the seder plate at all? What does it symbolize? The Yerushalmi has the answer:

R. Hiyya in the name of R. Hoshayah said: The Egyptian experience's very essence is compared to lettuce: Just as lettuce initially is sweet and eventually, when left in the field, becomes bitter, so the Egyptians treated our ancestors in Egypt, initially very hospitably saying to Joseph and his brothers, "The land of Egypt is open before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. (Genesis 46:6)" and afterward, "Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with harsh labor at mortar and bricks. (Exodus 1:14)" (Y. Pesachim 2:5)

Besides the fact that lettuce probably tasted good with the Hillel sandwich as it was eaten during the days while the Temple still stood (lamb, sweet relish, horseradish and lettuce, wrapped in a soft taco), the sages assign it this symbolism. But this is left out of most haggadahs, so we are left with the lettuce on the seder plate without really knowing why it was there in the first place.

The meaning the Yerushalmi assigns the lettuce would reflect some of Jewish history to that point and certainly foreshadowed a great deal of Jewish history in the centuries to come. Many times, Jews were welcomed into a country and then forcefully (and sometimes brutally) made to leave.

Discussion Questions:

1. The questions I'd really like answered is, "Why did the lettuce stay on the seder plate? And how was the meaning lost?"