

**Pesach:  
Charoseth: Harshness and Hope**  
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The sweet and sumptuous mitzvah of eating charoseth often gets overlooked during the Pesach seder. It gets folded in with Korach, Hillel's sandwich, eaten together with matzah and maror. There is no moment to point to it, discuss its origin or the meaning of the delicacy, and our seder is not contingent on its consumption. So, why do we bother? The Talmud in Pesachim 116a suggests that eating this nutty and apple mixture is required, either as commemoration of the apple tree "where the Israelite women gave birth to their children," or to commemorate the hard labor of Jewish slaves being forced to make bricks.

This one dish captures the duality of Pesach that we hold side by side throughout the holiday—remembering slavery and hoping for freedom. The apples in the charoseth are a symbol of the hope that the women held onto by continuing to procreate in spite of the devastating darkness that the people faced in Egypt. The women could envision a world beyond the austerity of their existence, and every baby brought with it renewed hope for a better life. The nuts in the charoseth, however, are a symbol of the mortar and bricks, commemorating the harshness of the world. The Shibbolei Haleket even records a custom of grinding a little brick into the mixture so that we experience first hand the bleakness of slavery.

Harshness and hope are the two realities that we most hold in tension with one another. The world is filled with pain and suffering. With disease and disaster. We will inevitably confront darkness, and feel enslaved to the world we have made for ourselves. Yet, we cannot let go of the hope for something more, for renewal and rebirth. By eating the charoseth, we are at once remembering the harshness of slavery but at the same time, committing to restore equilibrium and tranquility to our lives. To never give up hope that out of suffering can emerge life. That bitterness can, with our determination and faith, turn into sweetness.



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