

The Future, the Past, and the Present

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In Talmud Pesachim, Rava teaches, "A person who swallows matzah without chewing fills the mitzvah, the commandment, to eat matzah. However, a person who swallows maror without chewing doesn't fulfill the mitzvah to eat maror."

Matzah is Biblical fast food. Matzah is flat because the Hebrews were in such a hurry to get out of Egypt, they didn't wait for their bread to rise. They rushed out, eating crackers, because they had to eat something. Matzah is optimistic, portable, light and undemanding.

Rashbam says that the mitzvah of eating matzah isn't connected to taste. It's connected to story. The Seder ends with a literal countdown, numbering the days until Shavuot, the holiday when the Hebrews get the Torah. Matzah is the food of the future. We eat matzah on Passover to remind us that we're on our way.

Charoset and Maror are the tastes of the past. Charoset is a sweet memory. Maror is a bitter encounter made fresh. Charoset is the sweetness of family, Maror the bitterness of Holocaust. These are our roots as individual people and as a People. Maror wants attention, and loves to get a reaction. Charoset is sweet, and also thick and heavy. Charoset is said to be the material the Hebrews used to make bricks. Sweetness between people and bricks are made of the same material. The presence of both forms a foundation.

The Hillel sandwich is the three of these together. Matzah, Maror and Charoset. Together, they are the present.