

Beyond Horseradish: Exploring Maror

How is turning to the text while farming Jewishly a liberating act?

1 Hour

Ages 10 and up

Program Overview & Guiding Questions

This program helps us explore and expand our relationship to Maror. After learning through a text study that the definition of Maror is different and also more expansive than we might have thought, participants will get to taste and then plant a wide variety of bitter leaves that could grow in their region in time for Passover.

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How does the Mishna define Maror?
 - 2) Why might Ashkenazi Jews have adopted Horseradish- which is not a bitter leaf or stem- as their interpretation of Maror?
 - 3) How does re-examining the text both challenge traditions and engage us to grow our own, regionally-appropriate Maror?
 - 4) How is this exploration an exercise in liberation?
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Goals

- 1) Read and explore the Mishna Pesachim's definition of Maror
 - 2) Taste a variety of regionally appropriate bitter leaves and decide which fits the Mishna's definition best
 - 3) Plant these regionally appropriate bitter herbs for Passover!
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Materials needed:

- Copies of the Mishna Pesachim
 - A variety of bitter leaves for tasting ex. In New England: Lettuce, spinach, dandelion, radish greens
 - A empty spectrum worksheet, where students can mark where the different herbs fall on the spectrum from bitter to sweet
 - Corresponding seed for the selected tasting greens
 - Seeding trays, pre-filled with potting soil
 - A place to grow out the greens, once planted
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Session Plan:

Exploring the Definition of Maror (20 min)

- Generate a group brainstorm about knowledge of Maror at the beginning of the session
- Pass out copies of the Mishna Pesachim, read together or summarize as is age appropriate
- Sharing an understanding of climate and regionally adapted crops, explore why Ashkenazi Jews might have adapted this definition to include Horseradish, and talk about what bitter leaves and stems might grow in this climate

Tasting and Selecting Bitter Herbs (15 min)

- Have participants taste the selection of regionally appropriate bitter herbs
- Ask participants to mark where each plant falls on the spectrum from bitter to sweet
- Have groups decide which plant best fits both the Mishna's definition and grows in their climate in time for Passover

Seeding Maror (15 min)

- Invite each group to seed their selected bitter herb into pre-filled seeding trays

Conclusion (10 min)

- In the big group, have participants share what they learned through this experience and how they can apply this exercise to other parts of their lives as they prepare for Passover

Student Reflection:

- Why was it a "liberating" experience to turn to the text? How did the different and more expansive definition of Maror in the text enable us to engage with Maror as farmers?

Many participants may have thought that only Horseradish qualifies as Maror. In fact, when we turn to the text, we learn that Maror is defined as a bitter leaf or stem, not a root at all. On the other hand, we also learn that many different plants, not just one, qualify as Maror. Because this definition is both different, and also more expansive than many participants might have thought, and also because Horseradish is clearly a cultural adaptation of the tradition given a colder ecosystem when Ashkenazi Jews migrated North, participants feel invited to re-engage with the tradition in a way that is appropriate to their climate as well as empowering as they are able to grow it themselves.

- What other traditions and cultural norms could we re-examine in this manner, as an exercise in liberation through engagement?

What other traditions in our lives could benefit from a re-examination of the origins and a re-engagement in the process? Participants will gain the skill of critical analysis through returning to primary sources and thereby feeling empowered to re-engage and adapt traditions to their own lives.

Anticipated Outcomes:

- Participants will practice reading a text
 - Participants will examine why and how traditions are created
 - Participants will feel empowered to engage with tradition in personalized and appropriate manners
 - Participants will taste and decide what plant is best to grow as Maror in their climate
 - Participants will learn how to plant and plant their own Maror for Passover
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References:

Mishna Pesachim 2:6

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