

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Vayikra**  
**March 19, 2016**

**פרשת ויקרא**  
**ט' באדר ב' תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 1:1-5:26  
*Maftir* for *Parashat Zachor: Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 25:17-19

In this *parasha*, God commands Moshe regarding various types of *korbanot* (animal and vegetative offerings): under what circumstances they should be offered, and what they should consist of.

An interesting verse appears in Chapter 2, which may shed some light on a popular tradition [verse 13]: “ וְכֹל-קֹרְבַן מִנְחָתֶךָ, בְּמִלַּח תִּמְלַח, וְלֹא תִשָּׁבֵית מִלַּח בְּרִית אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, מֵעַל מִנְחָתֶךָ ; – And every meal-offering of yours, you should season with salt; and you should not suffer the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your meal-offering; with all of your offerings you shall offer salt.”

Numerous rabbis consider this the reason that many of us put salt on our *challah* before we eat it at Friday night dinner and Shabbat lunch. It symbolizes both the meal-offering and the covenant with God.

Ramban [13<sup>th</sup> Century Spain/Palestine] and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch [19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany] offer further insights into the use of salt. Ramban says,

...the reason for this [use of salt in the offerings] is because salt is derived from water, and it is through the power of the sun which shines upon it that it becomes salt. Now the nature of water is that it soaks into the earth and makes it bring forth and bud; but after it becomes salt, it destroys every place and burns it... and the Empire of God, [is] just like salt which seasons all foods and helps to preserve them, but destroys them when they are over-saturated

with it... for the covenant is 'the salt of the world,' and by virtue of it, the world exists or may be destroyed.

Rabbi Hirsch further expounds upon the dual properties of salt both to season and destroy, saying,

Apart from the concrete use of salt as an indispensable taste-giver to all food, salt occurs both in concrete and allegorical sense as the means of suppression of all vegetable growth. A field is rendered sterile if it is 'sown' with salt... If we put this together with the other quality of salt, its conservative power of preventing decay, and remember that decay is nothing but the working of the beginning of a new structure, we can take salt generally to represent unchangeableness. It closes an object in to itself, and renders it not susceptible to exterior changing influences. To that extent, it completely expresses the idea of 'covenant', the basic underlying meaning of which we have already shown to be, separated and apart, quite independent and unaffected by outer influences. Whereas the covenant already in itself has the meaning of something that is to be kept under every possible condition and remain in all circumstances, the addition of the covenant of salt adds to it the quality of unalterableness. That which is designated as 'covenant' does not only remain permanently forever, but it also remains unchanged forever....

In the concept of salt, we have:

- A compound with the capacity to preserve or to destroy, reflecting the power of the Empire of God,
- A compound derived from the ocean, one of the first things to be created, reflecting God's promise to the waters to be recognized in cultic worship
- A substance that does not decompose and is unchangeable, reflecting our eternal covenant with God.

Not bad for something we barely notice on the dinner table. And it makes our Shabbat *challah* taste so much better, too!

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What other uses are there for salt? Do these uses enhance the surface to which it is applied or destroy it?
- Besides salt, what else can you think of that exists in nature and has the dual capacity to promote life or destroy it?
- What does it mean to make an indestructible covenant with someone? How is the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people indestructible?