

You Gotta Add a Little Salt To Your Life

Our table is an altar, we put salt in our sacrifices, and it's all Kabbalah...

What's Kabbalah?

Have you heard of Kabbalah? I'm sure you have. Not a week goes by that I'm not asked, "What is Kabbalah" or "Do you teach Kabbalah" or "Aren't you not supposed to study Kabbalah until you're 40?" The Kabbalah has become a real hit in our times. But what is it, really?

This week's Parsha, Tzav, we continue to read about sacrifices brought on the Altar.

When I was a child, I was constantly reminded that a table is like an altar. The adults always yelled at us that "you're not allowed to sit on a table because a table that's used for eating is like the holy altar in the Temple." The basis for this comparison is that just as the merit of the sacrifices offered on the great Altar caused long life so does the table lengthen the days of our lives. When we invite guests to our tables, especially when we feed the poor, we are rewarded with long life.

Chassidus explains that eating is an integral part of our serving G-d. When a Jew recites the proper blessings, eats only kosher foods and uses that energy to study Torah and do more mitzvos

he has transformed the food into words of Torah and into mitzvos!

Salt

There are many customs at mealtime that reflect this table/altar comparison.

Probably the most well-known is the custom to dip bread into salt. When asked why, I give the answer from the Shulchan Aruch (167:8), "It is the custom to put salt on the table since it is likened to the Altar and eating to the sacrifices. And all sacrifices must include salt..."

Now the question of, "why must every sacrifice include salt?" begs to be asked.

The explanation comes from a verse in Numbers (18:19) where G-d cuts "an eternal covenant of salt" with the Jewish people. Thus, we must always include salt in our sacrifices to remember our salt-like covenant with G-d.

Next question; what is a "covenant of salt" and why did G-d choose to make that covenant with us? Why couldn't he use something sweeter, if not real sugar then at least a little splenda©? Maybe then our history wouldn't have been so "salty"...

There is something unique about the nature of salt. (Does anyone know what that is?)

Rashi explains that the reason G-d compared his covenant with the Jewish people to salt is because salt will never spoil. Thus,

salt is the symbol of a covenant that will never be broken, no matter how the Jewish people will behave.

Additionally, salt has a preservative quality. That's why salted meat or fish will remain edible longer than their fresh counterparts.

But that's not all. Not only does salt never go bad and preserve other foods from spoiling, salt adds flavor to every food it touches.

Salt has so much symbolism. There is salt in our makeup as well. The body on its own is like a fresh piece of meat and it's only the soul that keeps it from rotting away. The soul is our salt.

The Three Qualities

In fact, there is salt in Torah. Our sages have compared Torah to the spiritual sustenance of the Jew and different parts of Torah can be compared to different types of food. The Alter Rebbe said, "The wisdom of Kabbalah is the salt of Torah." For though Kabbalah in and of itself may be too much for our understanding to bear (just as salt by itself is too strong for our taste buds), it certainly adds a wonderful flavor to all the other parts of Torah. (Likutei Torah, *Lo Sashbis Melach*).

Being the salt of Torah, the Kabbalah has the three qualities listed above.

The law and logic of Torah are the bread and meat but without the Kabbalah they're bland and lifeless. Kabbalah gives a rich flavor to Jewish life. It explains the theology of Judaism and

reveals the spiritual meaning behind each law. It is the soul of Torah.

Kabbalah also preserves the rest of Torah. When the inner meaning of a mitzvah is revealed, you get a new appreciation and connection to the mitzvah which heretofore had been a burden. The proof that Kabbalah has the ability to preserve Torah is that under Soviet communism it was only those Jews who studied Kabbalah that succeeded in remaining observant. All others faded into the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”

The third salty quality is that Kabbalah itself never spoils. When a Jew studies the law and logic of Torah it could lead to conceit, G-d forbid. One might think himself special or of a higher class because of his Torah knowledge, and that’s just rotten. When studying Kabbalah, on the other hand, which stresses the greatness of the creator and the insignificance of the creation, one cannot help but feel humble. Salt never spoils.

The Alter Rebbe goes on to say, “And this is the meaning of the Mishna, ‘One should eat bread with salt.’ Bread is the study of the revealed parts of torah, Mishna and Talmud... the salt refers to Midrash and Kabbalah.”

With a little salt the words of Torah are as fresh and exciting as they were when they were given at Sinai!