

All the sacred gifts that the Israelites set aside for the Lord I give to you, to your sons, and to the daughters that are with you, as a due for all time. It shall be an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord for you and for your offspring as well. --- Numb. 18:19

God entered into a covenant with Aaron, describing it by comparison with something which is healthy and lasting and makes others healthy. "Covenant of salt" means that like salt, it never spoils. --- Rashi, based on Sifrei 118

Salt seems to me to be a metaphor for preservation. Similarly ...*the Lord God of Israel gave David kingship over Israel forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt.* (II Chron. 13:5) *An everlasting covenant of salt* is one that will be preserved throughout the generations. The metaphor must be unpacked according to the topic under discussion. --- Rashbam (12th c., France)

Rabbi Yudan expounded: It is written, *But You are exalted (marom), O Lord, for all time.* (Ps. 92:9) [**Marom** implies the essence of] eternity (**romemut**) You give to Your world. You gave the priesthood to Aaron forever; as it says, *It is an everlasting covenant of salt.* You gave sovereignty to David forever; as it says, *the Lord God of Israel gave kingship...* You gave holiness to Israel forever; as it says, *Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, [for I, the Lord your God, am holy.]* (Lev. 19:2)

Since the kohanim are given these portions as compensation for their life of service and dedication to God and Torah, consciousness of their special role and status must permeate the Jewish people like salt permeates food. --- Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, 19th c. Germany (abridged)

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish taught: The word "covenant" is mentioned along with salt...and also in connection with sufferings, as it is written: *These are the terms of the covenant...* (Deut. 28:69, concluding the section dealing with what Israel would suffer for disobeying the covenant) Just as salt lends a better flavor to the meat, so do sufferings wash away a person's sins. --- Talmud, **Berakhot 5a**

Why were all the offerings to be salted? It is because the idolatrous nations would season their sacrifices with honey. --- Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III, ch. 46

They would avoid salting their offerings, so as not to absorb the blood therein which they did not want to miss! Thus we are to prepare them with salt, which absorbs the blood. --- Rabbenu Bachya, 12th-13th c., based on Maimonides

Scholars have noted references to salt in ancient Near Eastern treaty curses: according to these, if a treaty were violated one's land would be sowed or plowed with salt so as to impair its productivity. Similarly, the symbolic role of salt in rituals of hospitality has been mentioned in support of the notion that the use of salt in the sacrificial cult may have had a covenantal function. It is doubtful, however, whether any of this explicitly concerns...salting of sacrifices. **Berit** (here) should be understood to mean “binding obligation, commitment,” making the use of salt a duty, rather than attributing any covenantal function to salt per se. --- Prof. Baruch Levine, JPS Commentary on Leviticus, p. 13

It is regarded as a mitzvah to have salt on every table before breaking bread, for the table is compared to the altar and the food to the sacrifices, and the Torah tells us: *With all your offerings you must offer salt.* (Lev. 2:13) --- Rabbi Moses Isserles in **Shulchan Arukh**, O.H. 167:5)

Salt is an agent that acts to enhance and to bring out the taste of foods. The gifts that a person gives to the Kohen, as well as all personal resources shared with the needy, all have a similar effect vis-à-vis one's property. When a person reaches out and provides for the Kohen, he thus demonstrates his appreciation for the role of the Kohen, and when a person gives tzedakah to others he shows that he understands that his possessions are merely a means to serve a greater mission in life. He thereby elevates his entire profession and his pursuit of wealth to a spiritual level. Just as salt provides a taste to food, so does the giving of gifts to the Kohen and to tzedakah in general serve to give a sense of purpose to one's mundane pursuits.

People who spend their days accumulating financial resources without this quest of serving a higher purpose are ultimately void of personal contentment and satisfaction. Those who are fortunate to understand and subscribe to guidelines of the mitzvah of tzedakah are enriched with a sense of accomplishment and resolve. Their entire fortune is blessed and their efforts are invigorated with a spirit of holiness. --- **Ta'am V'Da'as**, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch (b. 1928)