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Dear Rabbi,

Would the Old Testament government established by God (with respect to the economic model/system) be considered conservative/capitalistic or socialistic/communal?

Thank you for your time!  
Chris L

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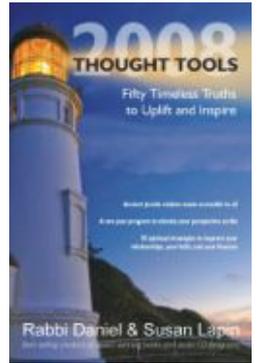
By Rabbi Daniel and Susan Lapin  
Publication Date - December 1st, 2008

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Thought Tools 47

**Take This With a Pinch of Salt!**

November 20th, 2008

22nd day of Cheshvan, 5769

Issue # 47

[Forward to a Friend](#)

"Pass the potassium, please." "This soup needs some more iron filings." Do those words sound funny to you? After all, our bodies need many minerals for healthy functioning.

Yet, the one mineral people frequently ask for is salt. Even in today's health conscious times, we put out a salt shaker rather than other seasonings. There even used to be a popular custom of seating the honored guest near the salt. It seems as if salt occupies some symbolic role that lies beyond mere habit or taste.

I am convinced that the reason why western civilization places a container of salt on every dining table, go back to Leviticus 2:13:

*And every offering shall you season with salt; do not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.*

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There seems to be a theme here! Ancient Jewish wisdom teaches that repetition in the Bible does not mean an incompetent editor, it means this: pay special attention! The significance of the repetition goes way beyond the context of the verse. In other words, don't for a moment suppose that this verse is just about adding salt to offerings on the altar. That could have been covered with only one mention.

The Divine message here is that something special and spiritual happens when humans eat. Animals eat for only physical reasons. They need to fuel their metabolisms and maintain their body temperatures. If that is all there was to humans eating, we'd simply gobble up our food straight out of the can, use our fingers, rip the meat with our teeth, and make whatever natural noises that would inevitably accompany such a process.

But that is not how we eat. Our mothers made us use a knife and fork. They admonished us not to eat while standing but only while seated at a table, which was usually set with a table cloth. Someone took trouble over the food, ensuring that it was not only nutritious but also tasted delicious and looked enticing. You were constantly told, or at least I was, not to eat like an animal. Ah, there is the point exactly. No animal cares how food is presented; people do.

For humans, eating is only partially a physical experience. It is also an opportunity to emphasize our unique human qualities. It is even a chance to draw closer to God. Each time we sit at a table instead of gobbling something while standing by the open refrigerator, we are sitting at an altar. Each time we say a blessing before eating, we are sitting at an altar. Each time we put another spoonful of food into our mouths, we can be making an offering to God.

Not surprisingly, this civilizing concept that our dining table is an altar, was enhanced by obeying Exodus 2:13 and placing salt on our tables. Not iron, potassium, or iodine, only salt, just as God said.

And why salt? Salt, that enhancer of our food is comprised of sodium and chlorine. Each of these, by themselves, is poisonous. However if you mix them together, they transform into something necessary and tasty.

This reminds us of another difference between people and animals. Animals are perfectly content to eat alone. When they graze in company, they often push each other aside; their focus is on their own satisfaction. Restaurant managers have told me that people are uncomfortable eating alone. For most people, the dining experience is enhanced when shared with others – even if it means getting a little less.

That is exactly how the good Lord intended. One purpose of the altar was to bond people. That's what shared meals do too. That is why so many business deals and romances are sealed over a meal. And salt is the sign that this bonding is exactly the idea.

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