



What is the Meaning of Bread, Salt and Water?

[Questions & Answers, Comments](#)

By Koozma J Tarasoff, January 17, 2010 — Link : goo.gl/7wQwFH

Question 28: Will you please define the meaning of "bread, salt and water" for the Doukhobors?

— Reader from Saskatchewan.

Answer

For Doukhobors, bread, salt and water collectively [represent the basic staff of life](#), life symbols, essentials of life; and the spirit of sharing and hospitality.

They are **not** a shrine, an [offering](#), a religious tradition, **nor** religious artifacts, symbols or icons. Canadian Doukhobors explanations and forms vary as the photos show.

'[These are on a table at all Doukhobor meetings and important events](#)'; and in homes as a kind of logo, '[the only visible symbols of their beliefs](#).' '[They represent life, hospitality and love to all mankind](#).'

For the [Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan](#) in 2007 I wrote:

'Doukhobors do not believe in creeds—nor do they rely on any formal church, the Bible, priests, or sacraments. The sole exception is the appearance in official religious and business functions of a loaf of bread, a bowl of salt, and a jug of water. These emblems are simply meant to affirm the slogan "Toil and Peaceful Life."

I published an extensive answer in my book [Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living](#) (2002): 371-373, in Chapter IV Wisdom of the Ages. In September 2013, I updated and expanded the 'Unified Doukhobor Beliefs' online, with much more about bread-salt-water in section [8. The Spirit of Sharing and Hospitality](#), my most thorough explanation.

At Doukhobor spiritual, cultural and business meetings, bread, salt and water are a reminder of honest humanity. In their presence, those gathered are assumed to tell the truth — somewhat like the [Mace when placed in the Canadian Parliament](#) symbolizes that a session has begun and all those present are united in a sacred trust to act with civility and tell the truth.

The combination of bread, salt and water is universal in the sense that these ingredients can serve as survival food. Through time, these items have become elements of [hospitality for at least the](#)

[Slavic peoples](#), but they can go beyond to include all peoples of the universe. They have served as bridge-builders when Slavs met different peoples. They brought people together as friends. And friendship means sharing food, being helpful, cooperative, kind and truthful.

More

- [Bread Salt and Water](#), by Eli Popoff, USCC Doukhobor website.
- [The Power of Bread, Salt and Water](#), Speech by Koozma J. Tarasoff delivered to Toastmasters International in Ottawa, Ontario, March 10, 1999.
- Google: [Doukhobor bread salt water](#)
- [Bread and Salt](#), Wikipedia.
- [Хлеб-соль](#), Wikipedia (Russian).
- [Doukhobors who Refused Alternate Service](#), photo made during WWII in Blaine Lake, SK, showing absolutists standing behind the table with bread, salt and water. Posted by Jonathan Kalmakoff, Doukhobor Genealogy Website [now Doukhobor Heritage].
- [Russian Kitchen: Why Russians greet guests with bread and salt](#), by Anna Sorokina, *Russia Beyond*, July 19, 2022.