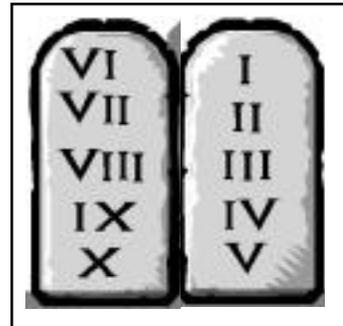


עֲשֵׂרַת הַדְּבָרִים לא תִשָּׂא - Word Number Three

THE THIRD WORD of the Ten words is:

“You shall not take the name of Adonai your God in vain, for Adonai will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”



The Third Word of the Ten Words prohibits taking God’s Name in vain. The Hebrew word “vain” is שָׁוְיָ, *shave*’ which has a basic meaning of “worthless,” “trivial,” “to treat badly,” “to act with injustice.”

The word may also have connections with “magic,” or “to cast a spell.” Some have suggested that taking the Name (literally, “lifting up the Name”) in vain may have to do with the attempt to use the Name of Adonai as an incantation, or to affect some sort of “magic.” In fact, those who claim that by pronouncing the Name, one is able to “move” God to act in one’s favor, may actually be breaking this commandment. But more likely the meaning is to use the Name in a trivial or worthless fashion—to forget that the Name of Adonai is a revelation of His holy character. As such, to use the Name in a worthless fashion is to proclaim that God is also worthless, or of no value. This is what we call “blasphemy,” to speak badly of God and to speak and act in such a way so as to deny the very existence and goodness of God.

What are some ways that this commandment is broken? Here are some suggestions:

- 1) By claiming that God agrees to something that is evil, wrong, or unrighteous (like using His Name in an oath that you don’t intend to keep, or to make a lie sound like it is the truth).
- 2) By attempting to control God by chanting His Name or thinking that somehow by using His Name you can control Him
- 3) By making His Name common, like any other name or word
- 4) By using His Name in a vulgar way (like cursing someone or loosing your temper)

How do we obey this commandment?

- 1) By carefully using God’s Name in a manner that proves I fear and love Him (like in praising Him, or honoring His character and His deeds).
- 2) By taking seriously the times I call upon God as a witness to the truth of my statements

The fact that the 3rd word adds the warning “for Adonai will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” led the Sages to reason that one who improperly used the Name of God had committed a sin without forgiveness. This being the case, the Sages sought to build a “fence” around this commandment so that it would never be broken. They did this by instituting the *halachah* that the Name should never be pronounced. Tradition has it that the Name was only pronounced by the High Priest (*cohen gadol*) on Yom Kippur, and then, in a kind miraculous kindness of God Himself, the people would each time immediately forget how the Name was pronounced. After the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash (Temple), the exact pronunciation of the Name was lost.