



Aseret Hadiberot -

The Third Commandment



You shall not take the Name of Adonai Your God in vain.

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא

la-shav el-lo-hey-kha et-shem-Adonai tis-sa lo'

to vanity your God the Name of Adonai you shall take Not

Revering the Name of the LORD

The third commandment prohibits "taking" (lit. carrying) the Name of the LORD in a "vain" or "empty" (i.e., untrue) manner. The word translated "in vain" (*lashav*) probably comes from another word that pictures a rushing and destructive storm (*shoah*).

Rambam notes that the phrase is not *lo tishava'* ("you shall not swear"), but the more general phrase *lo tisa* ("you shall not take"), and therefore considers it forbidden to mention God's Name unnecessarily *at any time*. The sages later referred to this as *motzi shem shamayim lavatalah*, "uttering the Name of Heaven uselessly" (*Terumah 3b*), and therefore established the *geizerah* (safeguard) of circumlocution when referring to the Name of God. The prohibition of vainly using the Name of the LORD applies to all seven Biblical Names of God as well as all of their construct forms:

אֱל	1	<i>El</i>	A common practice to avoid writing the Names of God is to substitute letters or syllables within the Name.
אֱלֹהִים	2	<i>Elohim</i>	
יְהוָה	3	<i>YHVH</i>	
אֲדֹנָי	4	<i>Adonai</i>	
אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה	5	<i>Ehyeh asher ehyeh</i>	
שַׁדַּי	6	<i>Shaddai</i>	
יְצַוָּה	7	<i>Tzava'ot</i>	

For example, you might see "Elokim" (for Elohim), "G-d" (for God), and "L-rd" (for Lord).

In many *Siddurim* (prayerbooks) and other Jewish religious literature, you will often see the Sacred Name written in an abbreviated manner as Yod-Yod:

יְהוָה ← יי



This is done to avoid casually reading or reciting the sacred Name of God.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews will not even pronounce a name of God unless it is said in prayer or religious study. The Sacred Name, Y-H-V-H (sometimes called the Tetragrammaton) is **NEVER** pronounced by these Jews but is always read as "Adonai," "HaShem," or sometimes "AdoShem."

In Jewish tradition, the word translated "Name" (*shem*) powerfully refers to the character or reputation of the one who bears it. The revealed name of the LORD (YHVH) thus can be understood as the invocation for the very presence of God Himself.

When we call upon the LORD (i.e., use His Name), we are actually invoking the one true God of the universe to manifest Himself to us. Since God is faithful and will be true to His Name, He will really be present whenever He is called. This is serious business. We should never take it lightly (much less should we use Adonai's name in a thoughtless, careless, or "stormy" manner).

Guilt from Desecrating the Name

כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׂוּא:

For the LORD will not clear the guilt of one who takes his Name in vain.

The keyword of the second part of this pasuk is the word *yenakkeh*, which derives from the piel of the verb *nakah* (be free, declared innocent). Often this word is used in contrast with the idea of sin (*avon*), and can therefore be understood to mean that the LORD will not "clear" one who swears falsely by His name. There is a sort of irony in this punishment: If someone regards the LORD as "empty," so the LORD will not empty them of their guilt. In other words, this is a *midah k'neged midah* ("measure for measure") punishment: When someone shows contempt for God, He returns the favor.

For this reason, the sages consider the desecration of the Name of the LORD as one of the most grievous of sins, since the consequences of God's punishment extend not only to the one who shows contempt, but for others as well. The Talmud (*Shabbos 33a*) states that in retribution for vain oaths, God sent various catastrophes upon Israel, including violent attacks by enemies, plagues, and famine.



This commandment is repeated in the Brit Chadashah in a number of places. For example, Yeshua the Mashiach told us:

Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matt. 5:34-37)

And James the Righteous said:

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. - James 5:12