

Oath of Asaph [Third Century – Seventh Century AD?]

The Oath of Asaph and Yohanan (6th c.?)

(From: Sefer ha-Refuot, The Book of Medicines)

[1] This is the pact which Asaph ben Berakhyahu and Yohanan ben Zabda made with their pupils, and they adjured them with the following words:

[2] Do not attempt to kill any soul by means of a potion of herbs, [3] Do not make a woman [who is] pregnant [as a result of] of whoring take a drink with a view to causing abortion, [4] Do not covet beauty of form in women with a view to fornicating with them, [5] Do not divulge the secret of a man who has trusted you, [6] Do not take any reward [which may be offered in order to induce you] to destroy and to ruin, [7] Do not harden your heart [and turn it away] from pitying the poor and healing the needy, [8] Do not say of [what is] good; it is bad, nor of [what is] bad: it is good, [9] Do not adopt the ways of the sorcerers using [as they do] charms, augury and sorcery in order to separate a man from the wife of his bosom or a woman from the companion of her youth, [10] You shall not covet any wealth or reward [which may be offered in order to induce you] to help in a lustful desire, [11] You shall not seek help in any idolatrous [worship] so as to heal through [a recourse to idols], and you shall not heal with anything [pertaining] to their worship, [12] But on the contrary detest and abhor and hate all those who worship them, put their trust in them, and give assurance [referring] to them, [13] For they are all naught, useless, for they are nothing, demons, spirits of the dead; they cannot help their own corpses, how then could they help those who live?

[14] Now [then] put your trust in the Lord, your God, [who is] a true God, a living God, [15] For [it is] He who kills and makes alive, who wounds and heals, [16] Who teaches men knowledge and also to profit, [17] Who wounds with justice and righteousness, and who heals with pity and compassion, [18] No designs of [His] sagacity are beyond His [power] [19] And nothing is hidden from His eyes.

[20] Who causes curative plants to grow, [21] Who puts sagacity into the hearts of the wise in order that they should heal through the abundance of His loving-kindness, and that they should recount wonders in the congregation of many; so that every living [being] knows that He made him and that there is no saviour [other] than He. [22] For the nations trust in their idols, who [are supposed] to save them from their distress and will not deliver them from their misfortunes [23] For their trust and hope is in the dead. [24] For this [reason] it is fitting to keep yourselves separate from them; to remove yourselves and keep far away from all the abominations of their idols, [25] And to cleave to the name of the Lord God of spirits for all flesh, [26] And the soul of every living being is in His hand to kill and to make live, [27] And there is none that can deliver out of His hand.

[28] Remember Him always and seek Him in truth, in righteousness in an upright way, in order that you should prosper in all your works [29] And He will give you help to make you prosper in [what you are doing], and you shall be [said to be] happy in the mouth of all flesh. [30] And the nations will abandon their idols and images and will desire to worship God like you, [31] For they will know that their trust is in vain and their endeavor fruitless, [32] For they implore a god, who will not do good [to them], who will not save [them].

[33] As for you, be strong, do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded, [34] The Lord is with you, while you are with Him, [35] If you keep His pact, follow His commandments, cleaving to them, [36] You will be regarded as His saints in the eyes of all flesh, and they will say: [37] Happy the people whose [lot] is such, happy the people whose God is the Lord.

[38] Their pupils answered saying: [39] We will do all that you exhorted and ordered us [to do], [40] For it is a commandment of the Torah, [41] And we must do it with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might, To do and to obey [43] Not to swerve or turn aside to the right hand or the left [44]. And they [Asaph and Yohanan] blessed them in the name of God most high, maker of heaven and earth.

[45] And they continued to charge them, and said: [46] The Lord God, His saints and His Torah [bear] witness, that you should fear Him, that you should not turn aside from His commandments, and that you should follow His laws with an upright heart, [47] You shall not incline after lucre [so as] to help a godless [man in shedding] innocent blood. You shall not mix a deadly drug for any man or woman so that he [or she] should kill their fellow-man, [49] You shall not speak of the herbs [out of which such drugs are made]. You shall not hand them over to any man, [50] And you shall not talk about any matter [connected] with this, [51] you shall not use blood in any work of medicine, [52] You shall not attempt to provoke an ailment in a human soul through [the use of] iron instruments or searing with fire before making an examination two or three times; then [only] should you give your advice.* [53] You shall not be ruled - your eyes and your heart being lifted up - by a haughty spirit. [54] Do not keep [in your hearts] the vindictiveness of hatred with regard to a sick man, [55] You shall not change your words in anything, [56] The Lord our God hates [?] [this?] being done, [57] But keep His orders and commandments, and follow all His ways, in order to please Him, [and] to be pure, true and upright.

[58] Thus did Asaph and Yohanan exhort and adjure their pupils.

*Bodleian MS variant of [52]: You shall not provoke an ailment in a human soul. Do not cause a defect in a man through haste in breaking open the flesh of man with an iron instrument or with searing by fire before making an examination two or three times; then you should give your advice.

(Translation: Shlomo Pines, 224-226)

Source: Shlomo Pines, "The Oath of Asaph the Physician and Yohanan Ben Zabda. Its Relation to the Hippocratic Oath and the Doctrina Duarum Viarum of the Didache." *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanitis* 9, 1975: 223-264.