Shevuoth, Chapter Four, Mishnah Thirteen

Introduction

Mishnah thirteen discusses different possibilities for the language of the adjuration.

# Mishnah Thirteen

1. [If he said]: “I adjure you”; “I command you”; “I bind you”; they are liable.
   1. “By heaven and earth!”, they are exempt.
   2. “By Alef Daleth”; “By Yod He”; “By God Almighty”; “By The Lord of Hosts; “By the Merciful and Gracious one”; “By the Long Suffering One”; “By the One Abounding in Kindness”; or by any of the substitutes [for the name], they are liable.
2. He who blasphemes by any of them is liable, according to the words of Rabbi Meir.
   1. And the Sages exempt him.
      1. He who curses his father or mother by any of them is liable according to the words of Rabbi Meir.
         1. And the Sages exempt him.
   2. He who curses himself or his neighbor by any of them transgresses a negative precept.
3. [If he said,] “May God smite you”; or “Yea, may God smite you”; this is the curse written in the Torah.
   1. “May [God] not smite you”; or “May he bless you”; Or “May he do good unto you [if you bear testimony for me]”: Rabbi Meir makes [them] liable, and the Sages exempt [them].

## Explanation

**Section one**: The first section of our mishnah establishes which words are valid as words of adjuration. If we look at Leviticus 5:1, the Biblical verse that discusses the oath of testimony, we will notice that the word “*shevuah*”, oath, is not used. Rather the Torah uses the word “*allah*” which can mean a curse but can also mean an oath. The Rabbis did not limit adjuration to the use of the word “*allah*” but extended it to included either a “*shevuah*”, or something similar. We will learn what an “*allah*” is in section five. This section discusses words that are similar to “*shevuah*” and therefore may be used in adjuration. Sections 1a and 1b contain invalid and valid substitutes for God’s name. “Heaven and Earth” are not substitutes for God’s name and therefore may not be used in adjuration. Heaven and earth were created by God but they are not potential substitutes for His name. However, the letters of his name, and various substitutes used frequently in the Torah are valid. “Aleph Dalet” are the first two letters of Adonay, which means “My Lord” and is a name frequently used for God. “Yod He” are the first two letters of God’s unpronounceable four letter name, YHWH. The rest are names for God used in the Torah or attributes of God.

**Section two**: There are three different types of blasphemies mentioned in this section: blaspheming God, blaspheming one’s parents and blaspheming oneself or another person. Blaspheming God or one’s parents is punishable by death. We learned in Sanhedrin 7:5 that one is not liable for having blasphemed unless he uses God’s name. According to Rabbi Meir, one who blasphemes using one of the aforementioned substitutes for God’s name is liable for the death penalty. According to the Sages he must use God’s specific name, meaning the full four letter name.

As an aside the mishnah mentions that blaspheming others and even blaspheming oneself violates a negative commandment. The commandment referred to is in Leviticus 19:14, “Do not curse a deaf person”. The Rabbis reason that if it is forbidden to curse a deaf person it is also forbidden to curse any other person. The Torah means to say, “Don’t curse even a deaf person, who cannot hear.”

**Section three**: The mishnah now explains that the “*allah*”, the curse mentioned in Leviticus 5:1 is saying “May God smite you [if you know testimony for me and do not testify]”. According to Rabbi Meir the “*allah*” may be phrased in the positive. Instead of saying “May God smite you”, the claimant may say something like, “May God be good to you if you testify for me”. According to Rabbi Meir from the positive statement you can conclude that the claimant means to say that if you do not testify may God not be good to you. According to the other Sages the “allah” must be stated in the negative, as a curse. Stating the adjuration in the positive does not allow one to conclude the negative.

**Questions for Further Thought:**

* **Section three**: Why don’t the Sages hold that one could phrase the “allah” in the positive?