

Oath of Asaph ha Rophe (slightly abridged and modified) ^{1, 2, 3}

And this is the Covenant contracted between Asaph ben Berechiah, and Yochanan ben **Zabda**, with their students:

“Take heed that you kill not any man with the sap of a root. Do not dispense a potion to a woman with a child by adultery to cause her to miscarry. Do not lust after beautiful women to commit adultery with them. Do not follow the statutes of sorcerers or join them to divine by magic or use witchcraft with intent to separate a man from his beloved wife or a woman from the husband of her youth.

“Do not disclose secrets confided unto you. Do not take a bribe to cause injury or kill. Do not harden you heart against the poor and needy but, instead, have pity on them and heal them. Do not call good evil and evil good. Do not desire riches or bribe with malicious intent.

“Do not make any assurance of cure by means of words and practices connected with idol worship but detest, abhor and hate all such practices and those who trust in them and also those who make promises by such means for all such practices are worthless.. .for are they not - and the satyrs - but dead spirits? Their corpses will not save nor are they able to deliver the living.

“Instead, trust in the Lord, thy God, the God of truth the living God for it is He who kills and grants life, smites and heals. He teaches knowledge which will be of use. He wounds with righteousness and justice and He heals with loving kindness and compassion. No crafty device can be concealed from Him, for naught is hidden from His sight. It is He who causes medicinal plants to grow. He implants in the hearts of wise men the skill to heal . . .The gentiles (non-Jews) trust in their idols which do not save them from their distresses and do not rescue them from their troubles since their expectations and hopes are in dead gods.. .And you be strong and let not your hands slacken for there is a reward for your **labours** (as) God is with you when you are with Him. If you will keep his covenant and adhere unto His statutes, you shall be as saints in the eyes of all men...”

And the students answered: “All that you have admonished us and commanded us we shall obey for these are the commandments of the law and it is our duty to perform them with all our hearts and soul and might, to do and to obey and not to turn aside or stray from the straight path.. .”

And Asaph and Yochanan continued to testify unto them, “. . .**Do not seek ill-gotten gains in order to help an evildoer shed blood. Do not mix poisons for any man or woman to slay his or her friend. Do not reveal which roots are poisonous or give them to anyone. Do not speak about their actions. Do not cause shedding of blood by any manner of medical treatment.**

“Take heed that you do not cause malady in any man. Lest you cause an injury by hastening to cut through the flesh of man with an iron instrument or by branding, you shall first observe twice or thrice and then only give you **counsel. Let** not a spirit of haughtiness cause you to **lift** you eyes and you hearts in pride. Do not bear a grudge or any hatred against a sick person. Alter not your prescriptions for them that hate the Lord thy God but keep His ordinances and commandments and walk in His ways that you may find favour in His sight by being pure and upright.”

References

1. The sixth-century manuscript bearing this oath is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. This translation is by Dr. Samuel J. Aptekar from the copy published in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 3, 675-676, 1972. ('ha Rophe' = the doctor, 'ben Berechiah' = the son of Berechiah.) Asaph is said to be the oldest medical writer in Hebrew.
2. Muntner Sussman: Hebrew medical ethics and the Oath of Asaph. *JAMA* 205, 96-97, 1968
3. Friedenwald Harry: The ethics of the practice of medicine from the Jewish point of view. Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin No. 3 18, 256-266, 19 17.