

❁ BLESSING OF THE CHILDREN / ברכת הבנים ❁

THERE IS A WIDESPREAD CUSTOM FOR PARENTS TO BLESS THEIR CHILDREN – YOUNG AND OLD – BEFORE LEAVING TO THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE EVE OF YOM KIPPUR.

FOR A SON:

יְשַׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה.*
 << and Menashe.* < like Ephraim < May God make you

(1) *Genesis* 48:20.

❁ סְעוּדָה הַמִּפְסָקָה / THE MEAL BEFORE THE FAST ❁

Immediately after the *Minchah* services, one should begin the *seudah hamafsekas*, the festive last meal before the fast. At this meal the *challah* is dipped into honey (as it is at the Rosh Hashanah meals). Strong wine and other intoxicating beverages should not be taken at the meal. Fish (especially salty fish), spicy foods, and hot food whose primary ingredient is milk, eggs or garlic, are not eaten. It is customary to serve light foods, such as chicken, rather than heavy foods such as beef (*Mishnah Berurah* 608:16; *Matteh Ephraim* 608:1).

If one finishes his meal much before the time to begin fasting, it is preferable that he have in mind or state orally that with the conclusion of the meal he does not wish to assume upon himself the restrictions of the fast. Thus, if he chooses, he may eat or drink even after the meal is over. However, even if one did not make this declaration and he wishes to eat or drink, he may do so, provided that he had not decided — mentally or orally — to assume the restrictions of the fast (*Mishnah Berurah* 608:15; 553:2; *Matteh Ephraim* 608:6).

❁ בְּרִכַּת הַבָּנִים / BLESSING OF THE CHILDREN ❁

It is customary for parents to bless their children, young and old, before leaving for the synagogue, after the final Erev Yom Kippur meal. The flow of Divine beneficence and blessing which comes with the onset of this sacred day makes this a particularly auspicious time for such blessings. Both hands should be laid upon the head of the child to signify that the blessing is conveyed with complete generosity of spirit. Each parent may add personal blessings to the customary text, as he sees fit (*Beis Yaakov*).

יְשַׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה — *My God make you like Ephraim and Menashe*. This blessing is taken from Jacob's blessing to the two sons of Joseph. He prefaced his blessing with the words, . . . בְּךָ יְבָרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָמֵר . . . *by you (with the blessing given your children) shall Israel invoke blessing, saying . . .* Thus Jacob himself pronounced the text of the blessing that Jewish parents would give their children throughout history.

Ephraim and Menashe were singled out as the models for blessing because they were unique. Although they were Jacob's grandchildren, he elevated them to the status of his sons, granting each his own portion of *Eretz Yisrael* and the same rights as the other tribes. Therefore, in effect, the Blessing of the Children implies that each child so blessed should be granted heavenly assistance to rise to greatness.

A central feature of Jacob's blessing is that he gave priority to the younger son, Ephraim, over his older brother (see *Genesis* 48:13-20). Joseph was upset that his father slighted Menashe, but the two sons reacted differently. Menashe was not jealous of his brother's superiority, and Ephraim did not display arrogance as a result of his preferred status. Seeing this, Jacob declared that this display of unselfish brotherhood should become the model for the entire nation. When Jews seek to bless their children, they can find nothing better to wish upon them than such sterling perfection of character (*Agra d'Pirka*).

Yalkut Yehudah finds another reason for the choice of these two as Israel's blessing. They were the first Jews born and raised in exile. What is more, they were raised in Pharaoh's court at a time when there was no Jewish

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה * וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ. יְאָר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ

< for you < His coun- < May HASHEM << and safeguard < May HASHEM bless you*
tenance illuminate you.

וַיַּחֲנֶךָ. יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיַּשֵּׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם.¹

<< peace. < for < and < to you < His coun- < May HASHEM << and be gra-
you establish tenance turn cious to you.

IT IS PREFERABLE TO SAY THE FOLLOWING PRAYER IN THE LANGUAGE ONE UNDERSTANDS.

וַיְהִי רְצוֹן * מִלְּפָנֵי אָבִינוּ שֶׁבְּשָׁמַיִם, שִׁיתֵן בְּלִבְּךָ

< in your < that He << Who is in < our Father < before < the will* < May
heart instill heaven, it be

אֲהַבְתּוֹ וַיִּרְאַתּוֹ. וְתַהֲיֶה יִרְאַת יְהוָה עַל פָּנֶיךָ כֹּל יְמֵיךָ,

<< your < all < your < upon < of < the < May << and awe < love of Him
days, face HASHEM fear there be of Him.

שֶׁלֹּא תַחֲטָא. וַיְהִי חֲשֵׁקְךָ בַּתּוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת. עֵינֶיךָ

< May << and the com- < for the < May your << sin. < so that
your eyes mandments. Torah yearning be you not

לִנְכַח וַיִּבְיטוּ;² פִּיךָ יִדְבֵר חֲכָמוֹת;³ וְלִבְּךָ יִהְיֶה אֵימוֹת;⁴

<< with < meditate < may your << wisdom; < speak < may your << gaze; < straight-
trepidation; heart mouth forwardly

יָדֶיךָ יַעֲסֹקוּ בְּמִצְוֹת; רַגְלֶיךָ יָרוּצוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן אָבִיךָ

< of your < the < to do < run < may << in the com- < be < may your
Father will your feet mandments; engaged hands

שֶׁבְּשָׁמַיִם. יִתֵּן לְךָ בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת, צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנוֹת,

<< and righteous < [who are] < and < sons < you < May He << in heaven.
women righteous men daughters grant

(1) Numbers 6:24-26. (2) Proverbs 4:25. (3) Cf. Psalms 49:4. (4) Cf. Isaiah 33:18.

religious life in Egypt except within the intimacy of their own family. That they grew up to be sources of pride to the Patriarch makes them eminently worthy to be the exemplars of Israel.

וַיְבָרְכֶךָ — *May HASHEM bless you.* These verses are the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26; see pages 927-932). In the verse following these blessings, God states that when the *Kohanim* (priests) bless the nation, He will confer His *own* blessing upon the Children of Israel. This makes clear that *Kohanim* have no independent power

of blessing; rather they are the instruments through which God allows His blessing to rest upon Israel (*R' Hirsch*). Similarly, parents are the agents whose love and devotion to their children is the conduit for God's infinite blessing.

וַיְהִי רְצוֹן — *May it be the will.* One should bless his children that he merit to raise them to Torah, marriage, and good deeds; that they be truly God fearing with no ulterior motives but with complete sincerity; that they live long lives

עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת כָּל יְמֵיהֶם. וַיְהִי מְקוֹרְךָ

< May the source << their days. < all < and the com- < in the < engaged
[of your posterity] be mandments Torah

בְּרוּךְ. ¹ וַיִּזְמִין לְךָ פְּרֻנְסָתְךָ בְּהֵתֵר, בְּנִחַת וּבְרִיחַ,

<< and with < with << in a permit- < your < for < May He << blessed.
abundance, comfort ted manner, livelihood you prepare

מִתַּחַת יָדוֹ הִרְחַבְהָ, וְלֹא עַל יְדֵי מַתְנַת בֶּשֶׁר וְדָם;

<< and < of < the gifts < through < and << that is < His < from
blood; flesh not generous, hand beneath

פְּרֻנְסָה שֶׁתְּהִיָּה פְּנוּי לְעִבּוּדַת יְהוָה. וְתִפְתָּב וְתַחֲתֵם

< and < And may you << of < for the < free < such that < a livelihood
sealed be inscribed HASHEM. service you will be

לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְאָרְכִים, בְּתוֹךְ כָּל צְדִיקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

<< of Israel. < the < all < among << and long, < that is < for a life
righteous good

אָמֵן.

<< Amen.

FOR A DAUGHTER:

יִשְׁמְרְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה.*

<< and Leah.* < Rachel, < Rebecca, < like Sarah, < May God make you

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ. יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֵלֶיךָ

< for you < His coun- < May HASHEM << and safeguard < May HASHEM bless you
tenance illuminate you.

וַיַּחַנְךָ יֵשָׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֵלֶיךָ, וַיִּשֵׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.²

<< peace. < for < and < to you < His coun- < May HASHEM << and be gra-
you establish tenance turn cious to you.

(1) Proverbs 5:18. (2) Numbers 6:24-26.

dedicated to the service of God and to His Torah in utter truth; that they have children and grandchildren who will engage sincerely in Torah and the commandments; and that they merit both tables [spiritual growth and achievement and material wealth and comfort] according to God's abundant compassion and unlimited kindness (*Besamim Rosh*).

יִשְׁמְרְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה — *May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.* Unlike that of sons, this blessing is not a Scriptural quote. However, it is logical to bless Jewish girls that they be like the Matriarchs who grew up in alien surroundings and surmounted infertility and other difficulties to become the mothers of the nation.

IT IS PREFERABLE TO SAY THE FOLLOWING PRAYER IN THE LANGUAGE ONE UNDERSTANDS.

וַיְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֵי אָבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם, שִׁיתָן בְּלִבָּךְ

< in your < that He << Who is in < our Father < before < the will < May
heart instill heaven, heaven, it be

אֲהַבְתוּ וִירָאֲתוּ. וְתִהְיֶה יִרְאֵת יְהוָה עַל פְּנֵיךְ כָּל יְמֵיךְ,

<< your < all < your < upon < of < the < May << and awe < love of Him
days, face HASHEM fear there be of Him.

שְׁלֹא תַחֲטְאִי. וַיְהִי חֲשֵׁקךָ בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת. עֵינֶיךָ

< May << and the com- < for the < May your << sin. < so that
your eyes mandments. Torah yearning be you not

לְנֶכַח יִבְיִטוּ;¹ פִּיךָ יִדְבֵר חֲכָמוֹת;² וְלִבְךָ יִהְיֶה אִימּוֹת;³

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trepidation; heart mouth forwardly

יָדֶיךָ יַעֲסֹקוּ בְּמִצְוֹת; רַגְלֶיךָ יָרוּצוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן אָבִיךָ

< of your < the < to do < run < may << in the com- < be < may your
Father will your feet mandments; engaged hands

שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם. יִתֵּן לָךְ בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת, צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנוֹת,

<< and righteous < [who are] < and < sons < you < May He << in heaven.
women righteous men daughters grant

עוֹסְקִים בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת כָּל יְמֵיהֶם. וַיְהִי מְקוֹרְךָ

< May the source << their days. < all < and the com- < in the < engaged
[of your posterity] be mandments Torah

בְּרוּךְ. וַיִּזְמֵן לָךְ פְּרֻנְסָתְךָ בְּהֵתֶר, בְּנִחַת וּבְרִיחַ,

<< and with < with << in a permit- < your < for < May He << blessed.
abundance, comfort ted manner, livelihood you prepare

מִתַּחַת יָדוֹ הִרְחַבְהָ, וְלֹא עַל יְדֵי מַתָּנַת בֶּשָׂר וְדָם;

<< and < of < the gifts < through < and << that is < His < from
blood; flesh not generous, hand beneath

פְּרֻנְסָה שְׂתִהְיֶי פְּנוּיָה לַעֲבוּדַת יְהוָה. וְתִכְתְּבִי וְתִחַתְּמִי

< and < And may you << of < for the < free < such that < a livelihood
sealed be inscribed HASHEM. service you will be

לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְאָרוּכִים, בְּתוֹךְ כָּל צְדִיקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמֵן.

<< Amen. << of Israel. < the < all < among << and long, < that is < for a life
righteous good

(1) Proverbs 4:25. (2) Cf. Psalms 49:4. (3) Cf. Isaiah 33:18. (4) Proverbs 5:18.