

Five Elements of the Jewish Blessing

“He blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him” Genesis 49:28.

There are many variations on how the blessing is made in Jewish homes today. The most common custom is for the father to put his hands on the child's head and recite the blessing. In some homes the blessing is followed by a kiss, and in other homes it is followed by personal words of praise. In some homes the mother gives the blessing together with the father, in other homes the mother gives the blessing in addition to the father, and still in other homes the mother gives the blessing instead of the father. In some homes each child gets up at the table and stands before the parent to get the blessing, and in other homes the parent walks around the table and blesses each seated child.

Whatever procedure is followed, the blessing is sure to make the child feel special and loved and give the child fond memories of family-together time. In the book entitled The Blessing (Pocket Books, 1986), Gary Smalley and John Trent give five elements that were important to blessings that parents gave to children in the Bible.

1. Meaningful Touch

Standing close, putting your hands on the child's head, and perhaps a kiss to seal the event are all tactile. This speaks especially to children whose love language is physical touch. Meaningful touch communicates love and personal acceptance.



2. Spoken Words

Our children need to hear why we believe in them and what we value. Children who get only silence from their parents interpret that to mean they are unworthy of attention, that something's wrong with them. It can set them on a lifelong search for approval. The following is taken from Lisa Katz, Your Guide to Judaism:

The Blessing for a Son

The blessing for sons asks God to make them like Ephraim and Menashe (usually found in English Bibles as “Manasseh”).

English

May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe

Tranliteration

Ye'simcha Elohim ke-Ephraim ve'chi-Menashe

Why?

Just before he dies, Jacob blesses his two grandsons, Ephraim and Menashe. He says they should become role models for the Jewish people in the future.

On that day Jacob blessed them, he said, "In time to come, the people of Israel will use you as a blessing. They will say, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe'."
Genesis 48:20.

Ephraim and Menashe did in fact become role models worthy of emulation. Unlike those before them, including Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers, Ephraim and Menashe were not rivals. Rather, Ephraim and Menashe were brothers united by their drive to perform good deeds.

The Blessing for a Daughter

The blessing for daughters asks God to make them like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

English

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

Tranliteration

Ye'simech Elohim ke-Sarah, Rivka, Ra-chel ve-Lay'ah



Why?

Each of the matriarchs has qualities that qualify them to be role models.

The matriarchs were strong and laudable women. They endured difficult home lives, hardships in marriage, infertility, abduction, envy from other woman, and difficult children. Nevertheless, these righteous women, through their individual passion, their partnerships with the patriarchs and their loyalty to God, succeed to build a nation.

The Blessing for Children

After a blessing for a son or daughter, some continue with a blessing for boys and girls.

English

May God bless you and watch over you.
May God shine His face toward you and show you favor.
May God shine His face toward you and grant you peace.

Tranliteration

Ye'varech'echa Adonoy ve'yish'merecha.
Ya'ir Adonoy panav eilecha viy-chuneka.
Yisa Adonoy panav eilecha, ve'yasim lecha shalom.



The words at the left come from the blessing the priests were ordered to put on the Israelites. See Num 6:24-26.

3. Word Pictures of High Value

A blessing gives words of affirmation to your child. Jacob blessed his son, Joseph with word pictures which were affirming:

“Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, because of your father’s God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb. Your father’s blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.” Genesis 49:22-26.

Speak about one of your child’s specific positive traits. For example, "You bring light and joy with you wherever you go." Or, "You keep your integrity even when others pressure you to cave in." Express your appreciation for his or her potential. This shouldn’t be a prediction (e.g., I know you’ll be a doctor just like your grandfather). Rather it should reflect awareness that this child is a work in progress, someone developing with mighty potential for good.

4. Picturing a Special Future

Jacob was the son of Isaac. The blessing was supposed to go to the eldest son, Esau, but Jacob deceived his blind father into giving him the covenantal blessing instead. Here is the picture of the future that Isaac gave to Jacob:

*“Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
that the Lord has blessed.
May God give you of heaven’s dew
and of earth’s richness—
an abundance of grain and new wine.
May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
May those who curse you be cursed
and those who bless you be blessed.*

“Bless me--me too, my father.” Genesis 27:34. In these words you can hear Esau's anxiety and desire to receive a blessing from his father, Isaac. But Isaac had no blessing to give Esau. Instead Esau received a curse:

*“Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness,
away from the dew of heaven above.
You will live by the sword
and you will serve your brother.
But when you grow restless,
you will throw his yoke
from off your neck.”* Genesis 27:39-40.



Esau had no special future to look forward to and revenge filled his heart. *“So Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to*

himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'" Genesis 27:41.

Our kids need hope that the future holds a place for them. You can illuminate a path of promise for them based on their true gifts. For example say, "I can see that your gift for music is going to bring the world a lot of joy."

5. A Commitment to Seeing the Blessing Fulfilled

This means you are declaring your intention and willingness to do whatever it takes to fulfill this blessing for your child. You promise to be there to guide, support, coach, and do whatever it takes to help your child achieve a worthy future. You vow to tend to his or her best interests, which you will discover by becoming a student of your child.



The blessing of children can be a very fruitful activity that personalizes your love and God's favor upon your children.

Jesus and Blessing

You may remember seeing a picture of Jesus with little children or perhaps you have read about the event in the Bible. Here is how Mark 10:13-16 describes the scene:



And they were bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Jesus wasn't just holding the children. He was involved in the Biblical activity of blessing them – meaningful touch, spoken words!

It may surprise you to learn that Jesus' final action upon the earth was to give a blessing. Jesus' disciples gathered around Him on the Mount of Olives for His ascension into heaven. Luke tells us: *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.* (Luke 24:50-51)