BLESSING THE CHILDREN/BIRKAT HABANIM

Introduction to Blessing the Children/Birkat HaBanim

The Blessing for the Children has two parts:

1. Introduction
   For Boys: "*Yesimcha Elohim k'Efraim v'chi'Menashe*"
   (May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe)

   For Girls: "*Yesimeich Elohim k'Sara, Rivka, Rachel, v'Leah*"
   (May God make you like Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah)

   NOTE The formula asks God to make the boys like Ephraim and Menashe but to make the girls like Sarah, Rivka/Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. We might think that Sara, Rivka/Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah should be paired with their husbands, *Abraham*, Isaac, and Jacob instead of with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Yet, while Isaac and Jacob had the advantage of growing up in religious homes and in *Eretz Yisrael*, all of the fore-mothers as well as Ephraim and Menashe lived righteous lives even though all grew up in bad environments outside of *Eretz Yisrael*.

2. Priestly Blessing/*Birkat Cohanim* (Numbers/*Bamidbar* 6:24-26)
   This is the blessing that the priests (*cohanim*) use when blessing the Jewish people. For words to the blessing, please click here and scroll down to "*Birkat Cohanim*": http://practicalhalacha.com/blessings#B
   .

Blessing the Children: When To Bless

Bless children on:

- Friday night,
- Saturday night (this is so we start the new week with a blessing), and
- *Jewish festival* nights.

NOTE This is a non-binding custom, not a *halacha*.

Blessing the Children: Who Should Bless

Who should bless the children:

- Anyone may bless children, but it is best for both parents to do so.
- Parents may ask any other adult to be their emissary to bless their children.

Blessing the Children: How To Bless: How To Place Hands

You may use one or two hands when giving a blessing, such as when blessing children on *Shabbat* or *Jewish festivals*. You may hold your hands over the person's head or actually put your hands on their head--either is OK.

Blessing the Children: How To Bless: From Afar

Parents may bless their children by telephone if not nearby. This is a non-binding custom, not a *halacha*.

© Copyright 2026 Richard B. Aiken | www.practicalhalacha.com