

## JUDAISM 101: BLESSING YOUR CHILDREN

The tradition of family blessings, in which parents bestow their love and blessing on their children, has a rich history in Judaism. In the Torah, Jacob blesses his children as well as his grandchildren. Aaron, the High Priest, famously blesses all the children of Israel and at the end of his long life Moses blesses each of the tribes of Israel. By rabbinic times in the Talmud, the custom arose for parents to bless their children before sitting down to Shabbat dinner. This brief but lovely ritual allowed parents to express their pride, love and appreciation for their children each week.

The blessing for boys invokes the shining examples of Jacob's grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh, who, although raised in Egypt, did not lose their identity as Jews. The blessing for girls refers to the four matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, all of whom were known for their concern and compassion for others. The family blessing then concludes with the priestly benediction invoking God's protection and peace.

For boys, parents gently place both hands on his head and recite:

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאַפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה.

Yisemcha Eloheem k'Efraim v'cheemenasseh

May God make you like Ephraim and Menasseh.

For girls, parents approach each daughter and gently place both their hands upon her head and recite:

יְשִׁימְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּסָרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה,

Yesimech Eloheem k'Sarah, Rivka, Rachel v'Leah

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

For both boys and girls, conclude with the priestly benediction:

יְבָרֶכְךָ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּהּ,

Yevarechecha Adonai v'yishmerecha

May God bless and keep you.

יָאֵר יי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנֶּךָ,

Ya'er Adonai panav eylecha veechuneka

May God's Presence shine and be good to you.

יֵשָׂא יי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Yisa Adonai panav eylecha veyasem lecha shalom.

May God's face turn toward you and give you peace.

