



# Discover the Joy of Shabbos

Explore the deeper meaning of the Zemiros, Tefillos and Hanhagos of Shabbos.



## The Beauty of the Blessing

By HaRav Paysach Krohn (Shiur E1)

Adapted by Ephraim D. Becker

**Do you bless people? Do you seek to be a conduit for the welfare of others? How you give Brochos on Friday night is a window into your world of blessings.**

Everyone wants blessing in their lives. We want Hashem to bestow His blessings on us generously, with an open-hand and a willing heart. A part of us knows that we cannot thrive without blessings.

**Do not just want blessing, give blessing.**

But how many of us see ourselves as a conduit to bring those blessings into the world, for ourselves (through our Tefilos) and for others (through our Brochos)? The reality is that we have a wellspring of blessing in each of us. We just need to tap into our souls and find the wellspring of blessing. The ideal place and time to tap into the blessing of our soul is on Friday night as we give Brochos to those who surround us.

**Shabbos is associated with blessing**

It makes sense that Shabbos is the time to connect with giving Brochos since we know that Shabbos is the מקור הברכה – the source of all Brochos. Hashem uses Shabbos as the medium to bring blessing into our lives and we should tap into Shabbos to bless those whom we care about.

**Tradition of blessing children on Friday night**

Bestowing a blessing on one's children, grandchildren and those close by is a venerated tradition in Jewish homes. In many homes, the Brocha is a spiritual highlight of the night. The elder generously gives his or

her blessing and their offspring, with gratitude and humility, receive those blessings. The fuller one's heart is of love and well-wishing, the deeper is the wellspring of blessing that flows forth.

The Torah describes the blessings bestowed by a mere mortal, and a morally impoverished one at that. Lavan, the wicked father of the Matriarchs, blesses his children and the Torah captures the scene:

וַיִּשָּׂם לָבָן בְּפִקֵּר וַיִּנְשָׂק לְבָנָיו וְלַבְנוֹתָיו, וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָהֶם (בראשית לב:א)

*Lavan arose in the morning, kissed his sons and daughters, and blessed them.*

*Giving a Brocha is far from just ceremonial. It is a potent conveyor of the blessings of one's soul.*

The Sforno (ibid) wonders what lesson are we to learn from the actions of a wicked person. He answers:

סיפר ברכת לבן לבנותיו להורות שברכת האב אשר היא על בניו בכל נפשו בלי ספק ראוי שתחול יותר בסגלת צלם אלהים המברך כאמרו בעבור תברכך נפשי (לעיל כז, ד)

*The Torah records Lavan's blessings because when a father blesses his children it undoubtedly comes from the depth of his soul. As such, there is no doubt that it will have great effect since the soul, the image of Hashem, is giving the blessing. This is an echo of the instruction that Yitzchok gave his son Esav to prepare so that Yitzchok's soul would bless him. (see Bereishis 27:4)*

**Blessing with one had or with two?**

As if to underscore the significance of this moment of blessing there is even a technical discussion as to whether the blessing should be conferred with one hand (the right hand, which is always associated with greater



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power than the left) or with both hands above the head of the one receiving the Brocha. When dealing with something as significant as a Brocha, then we even analyze the small details.

The Torah Temima<sup>1</sup> reports, from a reliable source, that when the Vilna Gaon blessed R' Yechezkel Landau (the future נודע ביהודה, Posek of Vilna) at his wedding he did so with his right hand only, in keeping with his position that a two-handed blessing is only permitted to Kohanim when they confer their blessings. As a result, there are those whose custom it is to confer their Brocha with only their right hand.

On the other hand,<sup>2</sup> there are those who infer that a full Brocha should be given with two hands. Hashem instructed Moshe to bless his successor, Yehoshua, with one hand (וְסִמְכָתָ אֶת יָדְךָ עָלָיו)<sup>3</sup> while Moshe blesses him with both his hands (וַיִּסְמְךָ אֶת יָדָיו עָלָיו).<sup>4</sup> Rashi comments on Moshe's change from the instruction by saying that Moshe wanted to confer overflowing blessing on Yehoshua and so he employed both of his hands, even beyond that which he was instructed. Apparently, there is a source for using two hands for an abundant Brocha.

While both customs have a basis (and rabbinic counsel should be sought if one is in doubt regarding their own practice), they both serve to underscore that the matter of giving a Brocha is far from just ceremonial. It is a potent conveyor of the blessings of one's soul.

## The wording of the Brocha

The wording of the Brocha for a boy is ישימך אלקים כאפרים וכמנשה. Yaakov Avinu predicted and prescribed that when fathers bless their sons, they will use that

formula, *May Hashem establish you as Ephraim and Menashe*. When seeking the wording for the blessing for daughters we naturally reference the Matriarchs, *May Hashem establish you as Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah*. Why didn't Yaakov Avinu prescribe that fathers should invoke the Patriarchs when blessing their sons?

## Remaining a true servant of Hashem in the Exile

Perhaps the answer is that Menashe and Ephraim, like Yosef before them, represented the spirit of resilience in the Exile. They remained unfailingly loyal to Hashem and His Torah even though they were confronted with an alien culture which offered all the lures of the material world. Indeed, the Midrash<sup>5</sup> informs us that Yaakov was in awe of the resilience of Yosef.

And, so, perhaps, Yaakov Avinu was giving us a formula which we could take with us into Exile and pray for our sons to remain absolutely loyal even when confronted with the lures and challenges of the exile.

## A story about Friday night blessings

Dr. Nesanel Breningstall, a pediatric neurologist from Minneapolis, attends many conferences where advances in his field are discussed. At one conference, this one held in Israel, Dr. Breningstall noticed a Chasidish-looking fellow whom he did not recognize from the many such meetings that he had attended. He approached the man to give him a warm Shalom Aleichem and he learned that the man had come to the conference to learn what he could about the treatments for the neurological disorder that afflicted his little daughter.

<sup>1</sup> במדבר ו:כג

<sup>2</sup> Excuse the pun

<sup>3</sup> במדבר כז:יח

<sup>4</sup> שם כג

<sup>5</sup> בראשית רבה צד:ג



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The two found many occasions to converse, once over a meal and another time after a Tefilah, and an acquaintance was struck. When it came close to Shabbos the fellow invited Dr. Breningstall to join him for the Seudah on Friday night. 'You shouldn't spend Shabbos alone at the hotel, please come join us.' And he added, 'I am certain that you will not be able to detect which of our daughters is the one with the disorder.'

Dr. Breningstall accepted the invitation and they met after davening and went to his host's home. When the eating and zemiros and Divrei Torah were done the host turned to his guest and challenged him to see if he could detect which daughter was under discussion. Dr. Breningstall, in a whisper, correctly named the daughter. The host was very taken aback. 'How did you know?!' asked the host. 'You helped me know who it is,' replied Dr. Breningstall, 'I saw the special love and concentration that was written on your face when you blessed her when we came into the house.'

***Takeaway: I will try to bless those who are close to me, offering blessing without judgement.***