

## Bereshit 12:1-9 (Lech L'cha)

**בְּרֵאשִׁית יב : א-**

1. God said to Avram, "Go, take yourself  
from your land  
and from where you were born,  
and from your father's house  
to the land that I will let you see [reveal]:

**2. I will make you a great nation  
And I will bless you,  
I will make your name great.  
And be a blessing.**

**3.** I will bless those people who bless you  
And those that curse you, I will curse;  
And all the families of the earth shall find  
blessing through you [by way of you].

**4. Avram went, as God had told him, and Lot went with him. And Avram was seventy-five years old when he went out of Haran.**

5. Avram took Sarai, his wife,  
and Lot, his brother's son,  
and all their belongings that they had gained,  
and the people they had made their own  
in Haran; and they went to go to the land of  
Canaan.

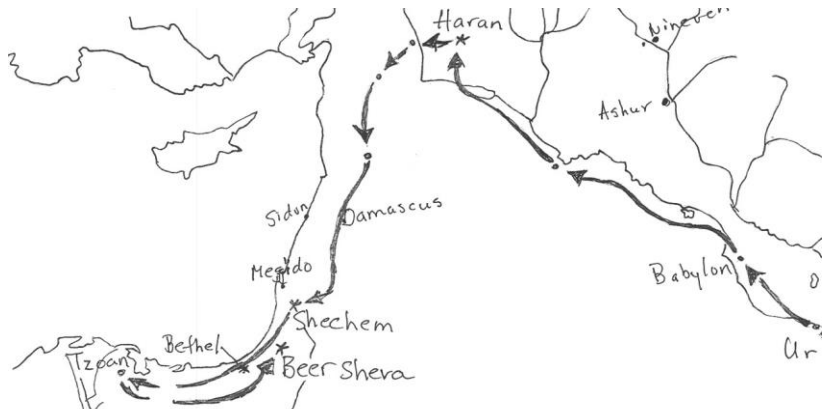
א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֵךְ-לָךְ  
מֵאֶרֶץ  
וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ  
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ,  
אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ.

**ב** וְאַעֲשֶׂה, לְגוֹי גָדוֹל,  
וְאַבְרָכָה, וְאַגְדִּלָּה שְׁמִי;  
וְהָיָה, בְּרָכָה.

ג וּבִאֲבֹרָכָה, מְבָרְכֶיךָ,  
וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ, אֶאָר; וּנְבָרְכֻךְ בָּךְ,  
כָּל מְשַׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה.

ד וילך אברם, באשר דבר אליו  
 יהוה, וילך אתו, לוט:  
 ואברם, בן-חמש י'  
 בצאתו, מחרן.

ה וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ  
וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו,  
וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ,  
וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן; וַיֵּצְאוּ,  
לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן, וַיְבֹאוּ, אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן.



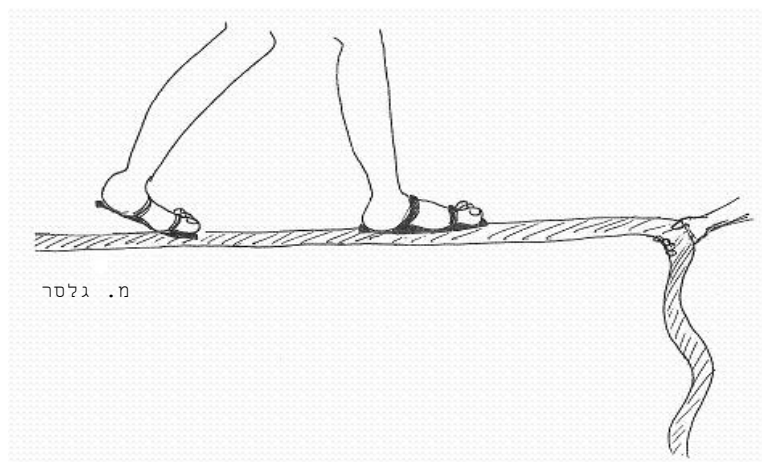
### Leading Idea: Thinking about Journeys and Journeying

The books of Bereshit and Shemot are full of journeys. Several ideas are explored here that prepare students for the pieces of narratives that they will encounter. In this regard the first set of discussion plans and activities can act as induction exercises to 'journeying' in general, as well as being used to explore more deeply questions students raise. Attention is drawn here to two aspects of journeying that can prepare students for thinking about this Parashah.

- (i) The meaning of journeying – what makes something a journey and what does journeying involve?
- (ii) The act of going on a journey – what do the things people take on a journey tell us about the kind of journey they are on?

### Discussion Plan: Journeys and Journeying

1. Does a journey need to have a place of departure? Explain
2. Does a journey need to have a set destination? Explain
3. Are there different kinds of journeys? What makes them different?
4. If I start walking but end up back where I started from, have I taken a journey?
5. Can I end up in a different place *without* taking a journey?
6. Can I take a journey without moving at all?
7. Can journeys be good or bad, or is it the things that happen on them that are good or bad?
8. Could a trip to the end of the street become a journey?
9. Is there a difference between a journey I take on my own and a journey I take with others? If so, what are some of the differences?
10. In what ways might a journey change you?
11. In what ways might a journey surprise you?
12. Is there a difference between a journey someone instructs you to take, and a journey you choose to take? If so, what are some of the differences?
13. Explore this image of journeying and its possible meanings.



## Exercise: Journeys

*This exercise strengthens our reasoning skills by asking us to reason toward the best explanation. If someone sets out with these items (amongst others) on a journey, what might you infer about:*

1. *Where they might be going;*
  2. *What they might be planning to do;*
  3. *How they plan on getting there.*
- 
- a) Sunscreen, thick boots, compass, a water bottle and a back pack with a box of worms
  - b) Shorts and T-shirt, a leather jacket, gloves, goggles, a beach towel and book.
  - c) A can of gasoline, bottle of water, spare tire, MP3 player, and horse in a trailer
  - d) A 50ft rope, pegs, hammer, hard helmet, 4 wheel drive
  - e) Iced chocolate cake, change of clothes, a CD wrapped in wrapping paper, train schedule, candles

*As a variation, in pairs prepare to tell the story of this journey to the rest of the group.*

***Returning to the Lech I'cha text – what do we know about what Avram took with him? What might we infer from this about his thoughts about the journey he is making?***



<http://www.openfotos.com/view/steps-in-desert-4510>

### Leading Idea: Different Meanings of Lech L'cha

'Lech l'cha' is generally taken as an expression meaning "Go forth". But this isn't the only way of reading it. While Lech l'cha on its own is a command (like sit! or stop!), lech on its own means 'go' and l'cha on its own generally means 'to you'. What might these mean when put together? In this unit we explore the following different readings of the phrase 'Lechl'cha'.

1. **Go forth:** move forward, leave where you are (pick up your tent and go pitch it elsewhere)
2. **Go for yourself:** for your own benefit, for your own material good (financial, social, etc)
3. **Go to yourself:** discover yourself - go to greater self-understanding (as an inner existential journey - become aware of who you currently are, get in touch with yourself)
4. **Go to the person you will become:** Go toward you're the person you will one day be (eg, your 'better self' or your destiny, or the person you are striving to be – as in the joke that has a mother describing her 6yr old son as 'my son the doctor') – this captures the idea that we are all on a journey of self-formation, and we become who we are over time.

Each of these offers a different understanding of Avram's journey. The resources here both provide voices from within our tradition that speak to these interpretations and resources for students to apply the distinctions in their own lives and thus to come to internalize the different meanings as resources for making sense of different kinds of 'Lech!' in their own lives..

*Lech l'cha: lech (go, walk) involves an outward movement. The word l'cha (for, to yourself) is an inwards movement.*

*Lech l'cha is a movement both outwards and inwards at the same time.*

Go forth, to walk or go, the sense of separating, "taking leave of"

*Can you think of Journeys that are both inward and outwards?*

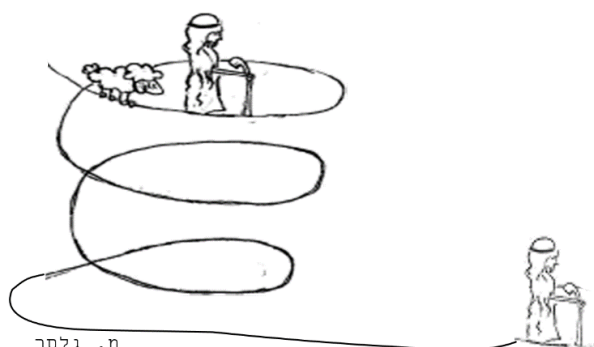


## Exercise: Different Meanings of “Lech L’cha”

Read the sentence on the left – which kind of “Go Forth!” do you think is invoked here? You can mark more than one, but make sure you can explain what you mean in each case. If you mark more than one, explain what it would mean to ‘go’ for each one you marked (eg, going camping might be ‘go forth’ because going to camp means you are moving geographically, but it also may be ‘go to yourself’ because when you are camping you discover you are now capable of doing things that you never would have thought you could do).

	<i>Go forth</i> – leave where you are for somewhere else	<i>Go for yourself!</i> (go for your own benefit – eg, financial or physical benefit)	<i>Go to your yourself</i> (go to greater self- understanding – to understand who you are now better)	<i>Go - to the person you will become</i> (the person you will one day be – fulfilling your destiny, or becoming a better person)
Kate: “I’m going to miss you when you leave, but I know the job in Boston pays a higher salary.”				
Eli: “I went on this retreat to get in touch with the ‘real me’ – it was very cool. I learned lots about myself.				
Zaitlan: “Going to summer camp last year was really important – I really became more self-confident and independent.				
Esti: “We are moving to Israel – I don’t want to go, but my parents say it is the only place we can truly grow up to be ourselves. But I think I am my best self right here.				
David: “Getting up early for basketball training is not fun, but I know that I’ll appreciate the fact that I made this effort when I make it to the championships.”				
Sam: “Once a week after school I go with my mum to the home where my grandparents live. I help them to go down to the dining room and sometimes I sing for them because they like that.				

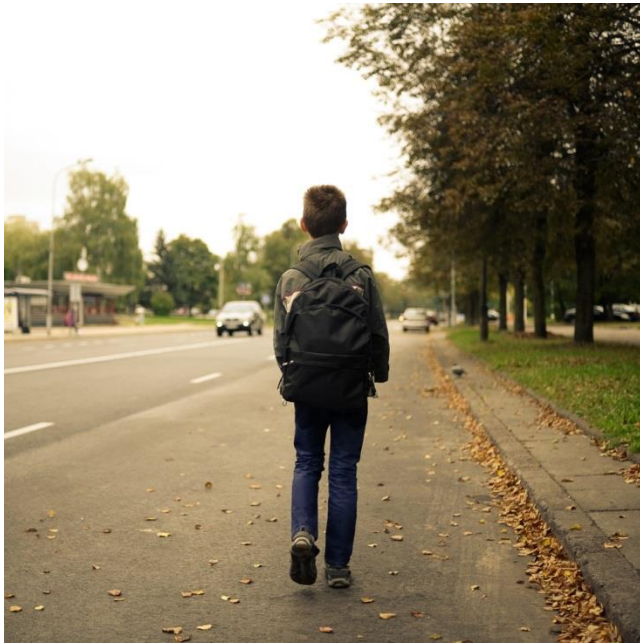
**Go back to the Biblical text – if we view Avram’s journey through each of these lenses, how might we understand the meaning and significance of his journey ?**





## Exercise: Leaving home

Where do you think they are going? What might be the purpose of their journey? What kind of journey (Lech L'cha') do you think they are on?



## לך לך

### (i) Rashi:



**Go forth:** Heb לך לך , literally go to you, for your benefit and for your good, and there I will make you into a great nation. If you stay here I won't give you children. Moreover. If you go, I will make your character known in the world.

*Rosh Hashanah 16b, Tan.*

*Rashi (רש"י) is shorthand for RAbbi SHlomo Itzhaki). Rashi was a medieval French rabbi who wrote many commentaries on the Talmud and on the Tanakh. His writings are still widely read and thought about today.*

Picture: By Guillaume de Paris, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=41460972>

- (ii) **Avivah Zornberg** *was born in London and grew up in Glasgow, Scotland, where her father was a Rabbi. She studied with him from childhood; he was her most important teacher of Torah. For the past thirty years, she has taught Torah in Jerusalem.*

*Photo: <http://www.avivahzornberg.com/>*



“Lech L’cha” – start travelling – this is a travel narrative. Not to go to a particular place to do business, but as an open-ended travel. To discover something about the place you are in – like in Gulliver’s Travels or the Odyssey – it seems the journey itself offers you something you wouldn’t get by staying home... You can never know how it will change you, but the journey itself changes you.

(Matan lecture: <http://www.matan.org.il/eng/show.asp?id=35416>)

- (iii) **Joel Lynn** was a journalist for a New Jersey newspaper. He now lives and teaches in Israel. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com>



A look at the **Hebrew** in this sentence reveals something.

- The word "*Lekh*" is the command form of the word, "*L'lekhet*"--"to go."
- The next word, "*I'kha*," tells us that the previous word is directed to a second person (for example, "*Ten I'kha*" would mean "give to you").

... Commentators offer various meanings of this extra word, translating the sentence as "Go for yourself," "Go by yourself" or "Go to yourself."

... [My] favorite of the three is "Go to yourself."

While Abraham had many difficult tests to overcome in his lifetime, the most important one is the first one we read about in the Torah: "Go to yourself." Realize what your mission in life is. Recognize your potential. Become YOU. Without this, there would never have been a covenant, a circumcision, a binding of Isaac, or a founding of the Jewish people.

- (iv) **Rabbi Naftali Citron (The Carlebach Shul, New York)**

<http://isabellafreedman.org/email/biweeklies/20091028/email.html>

*Rabbi Citron is now serving as Rabbi of the Carlebach Shul in New York.*

*Picture: <http://carlebachshul.org/About%20Us/Future.ht>*

This week's Torah reading, *Lech Lecha*, is especially significant because it represents the first Divine encounter of our forefather Abraham. The words "Lech Lecha" are often translated as "Go forth!" but these words may also mean that Abraham is supposed to "travel more deeply into himself." As we begin our spiritual inner journeys modeling those of Abraham and Sarah, it is important to experience the depth of our own souls as we *go forth* to face the world. The word that is often associated with such intention and devotion in Judaism is *kavanah*.





**Leading Idea: Circles of attachment. (Bereshit 12:1)**

When God tells Avram “Lech lecha” he mentions three kinds of leaving:

- Leave your country
- Leave your birthplace
- Leave your father’s house

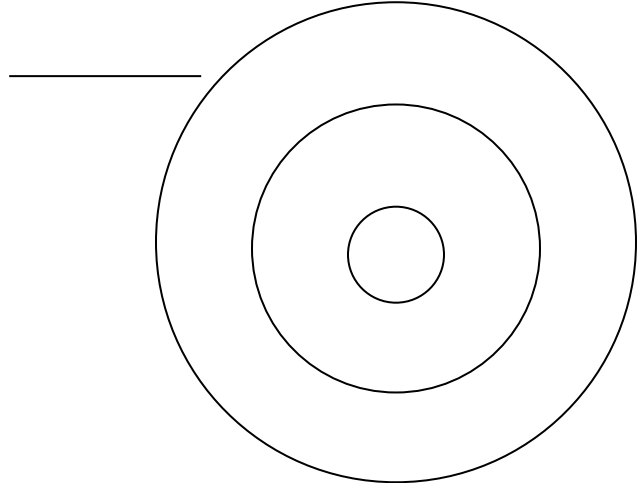
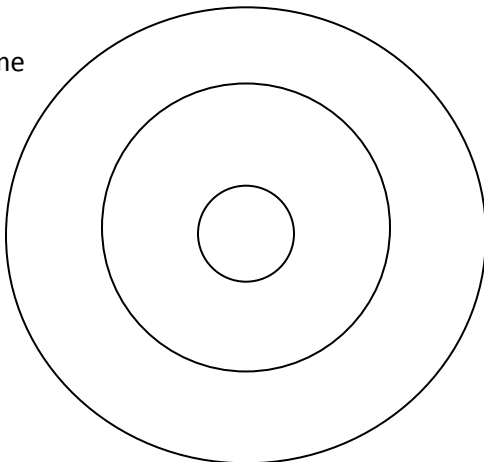
Several scholars have noted that it seems strange to list the circles of attachment in this order. The text from Nechama Leibowitz and the commentary *Haktav Vehakabala* both offer an interpretation for this.

This next set of exercises and discussion plan explore these different ‘layers of leaving’.

**Exercise: Circles of Attachment - PS, MS**

What in your life are you most attached to? Think of your home – if you were to leave home, what would be most difficult to leave behind? What not as difficult? Draw three circles. In the centre put the thing it would be most difficult to leave, then move out in the circles with things that would be less difficult to leave (from hardest to less hard). Pick a different community you are part of (school? sports team?) – what would be hardest to leave behind if you were leaving that community?

Home



**Nehama Leibowitz:** from Studies in Bereshit, pp.113

**"לך-לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך"**

**"get you out of your country, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house..."**

scholars have spoken about the unusual order of 'leaving' here. The verse should have read, in the ordinary way: **"מבית אביך, ממולדתך ומארצך"** (**from your father's house, your birthplace and from your country.**) This is the logical sequence, since a person first leaves home, then his place of birth and then his country.

The commentary *הכתב והקבלה* (*Haktav Vehakabala*)\* suggests that there we are referring to a spiritual rather than physical withdrawal, beginning with more distant connections and ending with the most personal. Leaving your place of birth is not so hard as cutting the connection to your family.

First, therefore, Abraham was told to cut his connection with his country, then his city and finally the most intimate bond, that of home.

*\*Haktav Vehakabala: Was written by Rabbi Yaakov Tzevi Mecklenburg, a German Jewish scholar of the 19th century. Rabbi Mecklenburg served as Rabbi of Koenigsburg, East Prussia for 35 years (1831-65). Haketav Vehakabbalah was first published in 1839.*



**Nehama Leibowitz** -1905-1997, was a famous Israeli Bible scholar who developed a particular style of Bible study that was very popular around the world.

Picture; [www.lookstein.org/nechama\\_biography.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/nechama_biography.htm)

### Discussion Plan: Leavings

- 1) Do we all have to 'leave home' in order to grow up? Explain.
- 2) Abram took his extended family with him – so what was he really leaving behind?
- 3) If you go away but you still think about people a lot, and text them/e-mail them, have you left them behind?
- 4) If you still hear them speaking to you – telling you what to do – have you left them behind?
- 5) In growing up – do you think the important thing is *what you are leaving*, or *what you are heading towards*?
- 6) Are you connected to places as well as people? Describe one of those places.
- 7) Do you think that places are tied to who you are *in the same way* as people are? Explain.
- 8) Which do you think would be more difficult – to leave individual people, or to leave your language and culture?

## Leading Idea: Blessings and Curses

In this passage, God makes three kinds of claims regarding how Avram will be blessed:

1. I will bless you
2. You shall be a blessing
3. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by/through you

What is a blessing? What does it mean 'to be blessed'? What might it mean to regard yourself blessed by the presence of someone else?

How might *giving or receiving a blessing* be different from *being a blessing*? Or *being blessed*? Whereas the activity of 'giving or receiving blessings' suggests a kind of transaction - with something being passed on from one person to another, the state of 'being a blessing' and 'being blessed' suggests some state of being – some inner active quality of a person. Here there is an interesting question - is 'blessing' being used transitively or intransitively? There is a difference between verbs used non-transitively (like "she is standing over there" OR "she is crying" and transitive verbs (like "Sam was hitting the pillow"). Whereas non-transitive verbs like standing and sitting don't have any direct object, you can only be 'hitting' if there is some object that directly receives your action (to hit you have to be hitting *something*).

A lot of verbs can be used both ways – and this seems to be the case with blessing. In this way 'being blessed' might grammatically be more like '*being kind*' than '*being happy*' - to say someone is being kind is to point to the way they interact with others and the world – it is doubtful you could be kind if you were totally alone on a desert island. (where there was no-one/nothing to be kind *toward*). While being happy is an inner state.

Another way of thinking about "being a blessing to others" might be the sort of thing that we might have in mind when we say of someone: "she is such a calm person, when she is here she has a calming influence on the whole room." (or spiritual person, or agitated person – the point being their state of being has an impact on their environment). We might also think of ways that we are blessed because of the presence of other people in our lives.

How might these meanings shed light on the text?

In addition to blessing Avram, God says he will bless all who bless Avram and curse all those who curse him. This not only suggests that people (as well as God) are capable of blessing and cursing – but opens up the moral question of what it means for God to act toward others according to how others treat Avram. What are we doing when we bless and curse people? Is it just another way of wishing them something (for instance, good or bad luck?). Can the idea of giving or receiving a blessing have significance even if you don't believe in 'a God who blesses or curses'?

### In Summary:

We might see being a blessing / being blessed as :

- An Inner Quality or state (non-transitive)
  - Could just be in you
  - Could also radiate out from you (like a person who is calm can make the room calm by their presence – the person impacts their environment)
- A quality you have that expresses itself outward to an object (like hitting – where you are hitting *something*)
  - Something you pass on to someone else through the act of blessing them
  - Through your interactions with others, their lives change in a substantial way (eg., they become a great nation)

We might understand blessing as:

- Wishing or hoping
- Something only God can give or something people can also give, or both.
- the person being blessed is the one being changed, or the person giving the blessing is the one being changed, or both.
- Having meaning only if you believe in God or having meaning even if you don't believe in God?

These are fine (and somewhat complex) distinctions, but getting the students to think about these ideas is guided by different discussion plans – for example, the discussion plan on "giving and receiving blessings" explores the transitivity of 'Blessing'.

### Discussion Plan: Being Blessed

1. Can a person's life be blessed? If so, did it need someone to bless it? Explain,
2. Can a person be blessed with good health? If so, what does this mean?
3. Can we be a blessing to our parents? If so, what does this mean?
4. Can a day be blessed? Explain
5. Is there a difference between 'being blessed' and 'receiving a blessing'?

### Discussion Plan: Everyday uses of the term "Bless"

**What is meant in each of these cases?**

**Does "Bless" mean the same thing in each case?**

"Sam was blessed with children"

"Sam blessed his children"

"Sam's children thought they were blessed to have him as a father"

"Sam was blessed with kindness"

"Sam saw kindness as a blessing"

Sam said to his friend: "Being late to the party is a blessing in disguise"

### Discussion Plan: Giving and receiving blessings

1. Can *anyone* receive a blessing?
2. Can *anyone* give a blessing?
3. Can you give a blessing without realizing you have done so?
4. Can you ask for a blessing? If so, what do you think happens when you are 'being blessed'?
5. Can you demand or force someone to bless you?
6. Can you believe in blessings without believing in curses?
7. Can you believe in blessings without believing in God?
8. What blessing would you wish for?
9. What blessing would you like to give to someone else?



## What is the meaning of “blessing”?

1. If I bless you saying “May God grant you long life”, is that the same as *wishing* you a long life?
2. If I bless you saying “May God grant you long life”, is that the same as *hoping* you will have a long life?
3. Can people give blessings, or only God? If people can give them, do you think there is a difference between *a blessing given by God* and *a blessing given by a person*? Explain.
4. Can you ‘give a blessing’ without *blessing someone /something*?
5. Is there a difference *being blessed* and *being a blessing*?
6. If a quality of ‘being hot’ is that the thing that is hot gives off heat – then is it possible that a quality of ‘being blessed’ is that the thing that is blessed gives off blessings?
7. Could you ‘be a blessing’ if you had no effect on those around you?

*In Verse 3 God says:*

וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחַת הָאֲדָמָה

**And all the families of the earth  
shall find blessing through you.**

*What do you think this means?*

### **Activity:**

*This is the way Cohenim hold their hands when giving the priestly blessing – the fingers form a Shin to represent Shaddai (God’s name.) Can you hold your hands this way? Look up the blessing **Bamidbar 6:23–27**.*

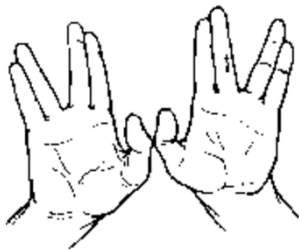


Image from: [http://ggorelik.narod.ru/LeHaim\\_W/LeHaim\\_W1.htm](http://ggorelik.narod.ru/LeHaim_W/LeHaim_W1.htm)



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## Divine and Human blessings.

Which of these blessings are asked for and which given without asking? Do you think this makes a difference? Who or what are the blessings directed toward – how does it change the thing being blessed?

### Divine Blessings

Does the blessing recognize something (a quality) that is already present or does it create something new? What is the meaning of the blessing? What is intended by the blessing?

- God blesses Avram - Bereshit 24:1  
וַאֲבִרְהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמַי וַיהוָה בֵּרַךְ אֶת אֲבִרְהָם בְּכָל.
- Yaakov demands a blessing from the man-angel – Bereshit 32:25-27  
וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחְנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁלַחְךָ כִּי אִם בִּרְכָתִנִּי...
- God blesses the 7th day – Bereshit 2:3  
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ אֹתוֹ...

### Human Blessings

Does the blessing create something new or recognize something (a quality) that is already present? Is the blessing freely offered? What is intended by the blessing?

- Yitzak blessing Yaakov - Bereshit 27:30  
וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלָה יִצְחָק לְבָרֵךְ אֶת יַעֲקֹב
- Yakov blesses Yoseph – Bereshit 48:15  
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר
- The blessing we recite over food  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם...
- Parents bless their children  
יְבָרְכֶה יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶה

## Activity: Blessing the Children

This custom is a nice way of bringing gratitude and spirituality into your family on Shabbat and at other special occasions. There are different **customs as to when the blessing is recited**. Some families bless their children immediately before or after **Kiddush**. Others prefer to bless just after lighting the **Shabbat candles**. Usually the person giving the blessing places one or both hands on the child's head. Some parents bless each child in succession, others bless all of the girls together, and all of the boys together, while other families have developed their own rituals around this practice.

*In Pairs, take it in turns to give the blessing one to another – do it with Kavanah (focused intentionality). What did it feel like to give the blessing? What did it feel like to receive the blessing? (Physically, how did you experience it? How did the relationship with the other person feel during this experience?)*

The words of the blessing are taken from the **priestly blessing** (Bamidbar 6:24-26) and traditionally the introduction is constructed differently according to the gender of the person being blessed. Some people like to 'mix this up' and include both male and female figures in blessing their child.

For males:

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאַפְרַיִם וּכְמִנַּשֶּׁה  
May you be like Ephraim and Menashe.

For females:

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה  
May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. .

*For both genders, the rest of the blessing is:*

יְבָרְכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ  
יֵאָר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחַנֶּנְךָ  
יֵשָׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַשֵּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם  
May God bless you and guard you.  
May God show you favor and be gracious to you.  
May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

### **Discussion Plan: Giving and Receiving Curses**

1. Can you be cursed with bad health? If so, what does this mean?
2. Can a day be cursed? Explain
3. Can a person's life be cursed? If so, did it need someone to curse it? Explain,
6. Can we be a curse to our parents? To our teachers? If so, what does this mean?
7. If I curse you by saying "May all your friends abandon you" is that the same as wishing that all your friends would abandon you?
8. Can people give curses or only God? If people can give them, do you think there is a difference between a curse given by God and a curse given by a person? Explain.
9. Can having someone curse you ever be a good thing?
10. Does giving a curse guarantee that the content of the curse will happen or come true?
11. Can you believe in blessings without believing in curses?
12. Can you believe in curses without believing in God?

**[N.B. the discussion plans above can be adapted to look at curses if that is the question / interest students raise.]**