

Parshas Vayechi – Bircas Habanim – Avi Friedwald

י"ד טבת תשע"ו – 26th December 2015 – שבת פ' ויחי

וישלח ישראל את ימינו וישת על ראש אפרים והוא הצעיר ואת שמאלו על ראש מנשה...ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמור כך יברך ישראל לאמר
ישמך אלקים כאפרים וכמנשה... (בראשית מז:ד-כ)

"And Yisrael took his right hand and placed on the head of Ephraim...and the left on the head of Menashe...
and he blessed them on that day saying through you Yisrael shall bless saying 'may G-d make you like
Ephraim and Menashe'..."

The blessing that Yaakov gave to Yosef's children is the format traditionally used by parents for their children on Friday night, together with the pesukim of Bircas Cohanim.

There is some debate amongst the poskim as to whether it is acceptable for parents to place both of their hands on their children, or just one of them when giving this bracha:

The **Torah Temima** in a lengthy note (*Naso - note 128*) writes that it is inappropriate for anyone to bless with נשיאת כפיים (other than a Cohen during Tefilla) – even a Cohen giving a personal beracha. He quotes from a trustworthy source (איש אמונים) that the **Vilna Gaon** only blessed with one hand when giving a bracha to a Chasan under the Chupa, as he felt it wasn't appropriate for anyone to bless with *Nesias Kapayim* other than *Cohanim* in the Beis Hamikdash.

However, **Rav Yaacov Emden** in the *Sidur Yaavetz* strongly disagrees and states that the minhag is to use two hands. He says that although in this week's sedra we find that Yaakov only placed one hand on each of Yosef's sons, this was only because Yaakov wished to bless both children at the same time in order not to arouse (more) jealousy. It should not be taken as a proof that we should only use one hand when blessing our children.

The **Mishna Berura** in *Biur Halacha* (זר עובר – 128) discusses the custom of using the formula of *Bircas Cohanim* when blessing a friend, as the **Shulchan Aruch** quotes the *Gemara* in *Kesubos* (24b) that any non *Cohanim* who bless transgresses a positive mitzvah in the Torah.

He suggests three possibilities:

1. Only פריסת ידיים is forbidden (unclear if this is referring to putting out the hands or specifically to separating the fingers as the *Cohanim* do.)
2. Mitzvos need Kavanah (intention to fulfil the mitzvah) – and anyone giving a blessing outside *Bircas Cohanim* in davening doesn't have this intention – and therefore is doing nothing wrong.
3. Since Chazal made *Bircas Cohanim* part of davening – anyone who blesses someone outside this is assumed to have explicit Kavanah not to fulfil the mitzvah of *Bircas Cohanim* (which would work, even if we hold that Mitzvos don't need Kavanah).

Rav Nebenzahl in (שבת קדש ח"ב – עניני סעודת שבת) ירושלים במועדיה quotes another source (שד"ח) – presumably the **Sdei Chemed** who suggests that it is only forbidden for people to use the formula of *Bircas Cohanim* if the *Shem HaMeforash* (the ineffable name of *Hashem*) is used.

*Written with tremendous gratitude to Hashem for the birth of our daughter **Chaya Bracha** - who was
born a couple of months ago, on **21st Av 5775**.*