

Two lit candles in ornate holders, one on the left and one on the right. Each candle has a flame and radiating lines around it, suggesting light. The holders are detailed with multiple tiers and a wide base.

# Let's Celebrate Adoption!

A Guide for the  
Jewish Community



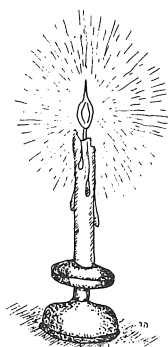


©1993 by Carolyn Flanders McPherson and  
Hillel (James E.) Rosenfeld

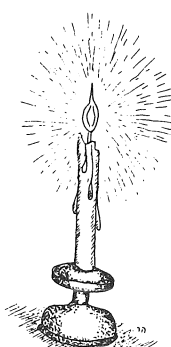


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## Table of Contents



Let's Celebrate Adoption! .....	1
What Is This Guidebook About? .....	2
Adoption Is Different--and Beautiful! .....	3
Adoption Is Jewish .....	5
Chesed and Adoption: Eighteen Steps of Kindness .....	7
Ceremonies for Celebrating Adoption .....	13
Adoption-Friendly Language .....	16
For Further Study and Support: Eighteen Resources .....	17

Notes

Acknowledgments





# Let's Celebrate Adoption!

Our years of waiting are almost over. Our anticipation, preparations, excitement, joy and, yes, even our anxieties, have surpassed everything we've ever imagined or experienced: bar or bat mitzvah, graduation, wedding. Today we are adopting a child.

We may be a young couple once filled with hopes for many babies, now coming to terms with our infertility. We may be a single woman or man, having no partner and longing to build a family. We may be an older couple, our offspring grown, finding ourselves still with much love to give the children of the world.

We are all part of the Jewish community, welcoming a new child into our family.

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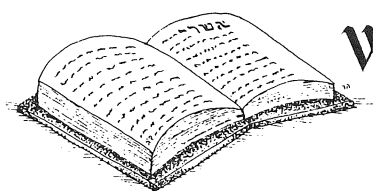
## Song of Welcome

The child is here!  
 Let her name be written in stars  
 across the heavens,  
 Let his name be  
 the planets' new song.  
 And may our voices  
 in harmony with the rustle  
 of young leaves and spring buds,  
 and wind-scoured skies  
 hung with rainbows,  
 and birds of scarlet, yellow and blue,  
 proclaim across the hilltops and meadows,  
 "Daughter! Son! Welcome!  
 We rejoice,  
 for we have long awaited you."



--Carolyn Flanders McPherson<sup>1</sup>

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## What Is This Guidebook About?

This is a guidebook about adoption in the Jewish community. It is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of adoption: there are hundreds of books and articles available to the reader with a general interest in the subject.

Rather, this guide is an introduction to adoption as it touches Jews today. Those of us considering adoption, those who have already adopted, and those of us who wish to encourage and support someone who is adopting: this guidebook is for all of us.



## The Changing Face of Adoption



The face of adoption in the United States has changed dramatically in the last few years. Jewish infants are seldom available for adoption, yet there are many Jewish adoptions. These involve infants and toddlers, older children, children with special needs, children born abroad, and stepchildren.

Adoption offers all of us--adoptive parents, family, friends, teachers and community members--a marvelous opportunity to open our lives to children with a wide variety of capabilities and backgrounds.

Throughout history, Jews have endured bigotry, ostracism, the separation of parents and their children, and the exile of families from their homeland. It is our belief that the Jewish community is uniquely prepared to be sensitive to and accepting of all children who are in need of permanent, loving families.

## Adoption Is Different--and Beautiful!

Adopting a child is not the same as giving birth to a child. Yet adoption is a beautiful opportunity to build a family while fulfilling the Jewish community's commitment to finding families for children who have none.



### Adoption Is Different



How is adoption different? First, those wishing to adopt may be infertile. As Michael Gold writes in *And Hannah Wept*, for many people “childlessness is like a death.”<sup>2</sup> Few bystanders with birth children understand the medical struggles, the sense of trying and failing, and the depth of the loss those who are infertile feel, or how important mourning this loss is if healing is to occur.

For those who decide to adopt, adopting is different from giving birth in a second important way: prospective parents can be “expectant” for years. They will be subjected to personal questions and intense scrutiny that may feel invasive. They may feel they have lost control over their lives as they await the actions and judgments of others. Some may encounter rejection because they are Jewish.

Those who adopt will often have anxieties birth parents do not. Birth parents rarely ask themselves, “Will my child like me?” Adoptive parents often do. They may worry, too, about their child’s life before he or she joined their family. “Did our child suffer traumatic experiences? Am I equal to this challenge?”

Adoption differs from giving birth in another exceedingly important way: adoptees begin their lives with other parents, their birth parents. This means that adopted children may have roots quite unlike those of their adoptive parents,



including different race, ethnic background, heredity, ability and experience.

In later life, adoptees and birth parents sometimes seek each other out. This does not mean the adoptee was dissatisfied with his or her adoptive family, but is usually a facet of the search that human beings have conducted for centuries, striving to learn "Who am I?"

Truly understanding the life-long experience we call adoption requires that we understand there are *four* parties to every adoption: the child, the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the community. All four will have many questions. Even if the child was in the care of the birth parents for only a brief time, he or she will inevitably wonder: "Why couldn't my birth parents keep me?" The birth parents will wonder: "Whatever happened to my child?" The adoptive parents will ask themselves, "How will I cope with the unknown?" Finally, the community will ask, "How can we help?"



Parenting, like life, has its high and low moments, its sorrow and its jubilation.

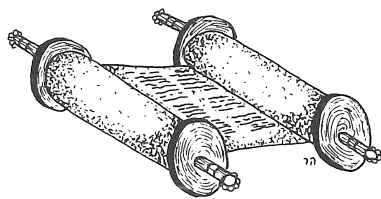
During every stage of adoption--from the moment the first thought of adoption enters the parent's awareness to the moment the child's adoption is finalized--and in the years beyond--family and friends will be an invaluable support if we are aware of and sensitive to adoption's uniqueness, complexities and joys.

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*As long as there are children in need of homes, and loving homes in need of children, adoption should be encouraged as an act of piety and love.*

--Daniel Shevitz<sup>3</sup>

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## Adoption Is Jewish

The Torah and other writings make reference to adoption, including Jacob's adoption of his grandsons Menashe and Ephraim, and Mordecai's adoption of Esther. More important, Jewish texts and traditions strongly support the *principle* of adoption, as well as the responsibility of the community to children without parents. As Maimonides counsels, "A man ought to be especially heedful of his behavior toward widows and orphans."<sup>5</sup>

In the Talmud, the sages write: "Whoever brings up an orphan in his home is regarded, according to Scripture, as though the child had been born to him."<sup>4</sup> The man or woman who rears a child--particularly if that adult provides moral guidance and instruction--is the child's parent.

Families are the social foundation of Judaism; children who need families are a community responsibility. In the modern Jewish world, this responsibility for helping children without parents transcends geographic boundaries.

Just as our understanding of geographic boundaries has changed, so has our use of the word "orphan." Today we rarely use the term because most children who are available for adoption have parents who are living, but unable to care for them. For those children who need families, and those families who need children, adoption is a joyous prospect indeed.

There will be those who forget the Jewish roots of adoption. Prompted by the adoption of a child from another racial or ethnic background, they may say, "But she doesn't *look* Jewish!"

The question "Who is a Jew?" is enormously complex, and beyond the scope of this guidebook. Those who feel it is an important concern should consult a rabbi, who can also address such issues as the conversion of children born of non-Jewish parents.

It is the responsibility of the Jewish community to accept every child who becomes a member of the Jewish family. As we welcome these children, we remember that Jews live in every corner of the world, and are of every race and nationality. This is not a recent phenomenon: the wife of Moses was dark-skinned and a convert. Ethiopian Jews are black, and there are Japanese and Chinese Jewish communities. A stroll down any street in Israel vividly demonstrates how diverse our people are.




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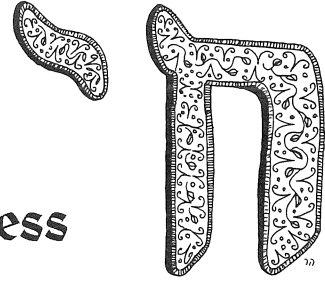
### Will My Lullaby

Will my  
lullaby  
sing you to sleep,  
small one?  
Your first tunes  
were jungle rains,  
shifting sands,  
snow sweeping across  
frozen plains,  
whispering bamboo:  
melodies to  
soothe you.  
Will my song, too?


-- Carolyn Flanders McPherson<sup>6</sup>

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# Chesed and Adoption: Eighteen Steps of Kindness



Children are our community's most precious treasure. The arrival of a child, whether by birth or adoption, is the occasion for our interest, encouragement, support, help and our unbounded joy.

Here are 18 ways (in Jewish tradition, the number 18 is  "Chai," which means "Life") we can support and celebrate adoptive families. Let's begin the Eighteen Steps of Kindness--chesed--from the moment parents decide to adopt.

## 1. Let's show we understand.

The wait for a child can last years and be extremely stressful. Those who experience difficulties and disappointments deserve our encouragement and our support in their wish to be parents.

## 2. When the child arrives, be welcoming.



Let's be "greeters" Jewish-style. Wish the family and their new child "Mazel Tov!" "L'chaim!" and "Shalom:" "Hello" and "Peace be with you."

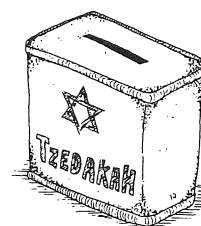
## 3. Appreciate the family.

We need to show the adoptive family we value them as they are.

#### 4. Encourage celebration.

Let's celebrate the arrival of the child by planning or helping with a joyous occasion: a brit, naming, adoption party or a neighborhood get-together. Or several of these! Some families will choose to create unique adoption ceremonies that include adoption literature, poetry or psalms.

☆ For several examples, see page 13.



#### 5. Give tzedakah.

☆ Bring the newly adopted child a welcoming present just as we would a newborn baby.

☆ Make a donation to a charity in the child's name.

☆ Plant a tree in Israel: a cypress for a daughter or a cedar for a son. This beautiful tradition marking a child's birth is just as appropriate for a child's adoption.

#### 6. Offer help.

Having a new child in a family can be exhausting. Let's make specific offers of help: "What would be the best day for mowing your lawn?" "May I bring you dinner Wednesday night?"

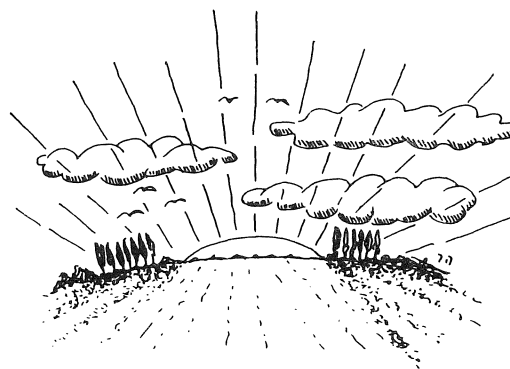
#### 7. Offer respite.

Most families will appreciate offers of respite: "Why don't you two go out to dinner? I'll give your Miriam her supper and then we'll go to the library."

## 8. Offer emotional support.

After the arrival of their new child, parents may experience ambivalence, doubt, worry, and the strains any new family situation--even a happy one--can create. If the child has a handicap, anxiety about being an effective parent may be magnified.

Ask the parent, "How are you doing today?" Even if we imagine we have nothing to offer in the way of useful suggestions, our willingness to listen, encourage, and problem-solve with the new parent will be invaluable support.



## 9. Offer spiritual support.

Adoption challenges some to think about the spiritual. They may ask, What is God's will? What are my goals? Are these compatible? Am I equal to this responsibility?

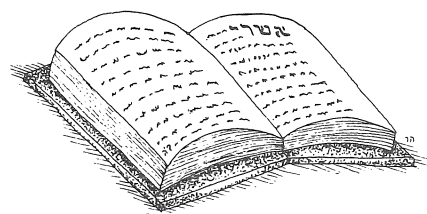
Our willingness to discuss ethical and spiritual issues will help our family and friends sort through these important spiritual considerations, to distinguish between "signs, trials, and miracles."

## 10. Share life experiences.

Let's talk about the challenges--our doubts and questions--as well as the joys of parenthood. New parents find it comforting to be reminded that, in the endeavor called parenting, we all start as amateurs!

## 11. Be adoption-sensitive.

Life-cycle events--a bar or bat mitzvah, High Holy Days, Mother's Day, even a birthday--may raise a variety of emotions in families created by adoption. We need to be particularly sensitive at such times.



## 12. Use adoption-friendly language.

Adoption often raises sensitive issues, including the pain of infertility and its disappointment, and adoption anxieties. We need to avoid expressions that stigmatize or negatively label adoption. Adoption is a wonderful opportunity, not an unfortunate last resort.

☆ For a brief list of adoption-friendly phrases we can use and teach others, see page 15.

## 13. Get involved.

The Jewish world offers a wide variety of experiences and approaches to life cycle events. Let's be aware of and sensitive to adoptive families and their needs. We can, for example, help them find or organize adoption support groups for parents, younger children, teens or the entire community.

## 14. Become adoption literate.

Much has been written about the adoption experience. We can all become better informed on this interesting and important subject.

☆ A brief list of resources for further study and support appears on page 16.

## 15. Share information and resources.

Let's share adoption information and resources with others.

## 16. Begin an "adoption celebration chain."

Let's talk to friends and acquaintances about the value and beauty of adoption, and encourage them to speak to others. Our excitement will be contagious!

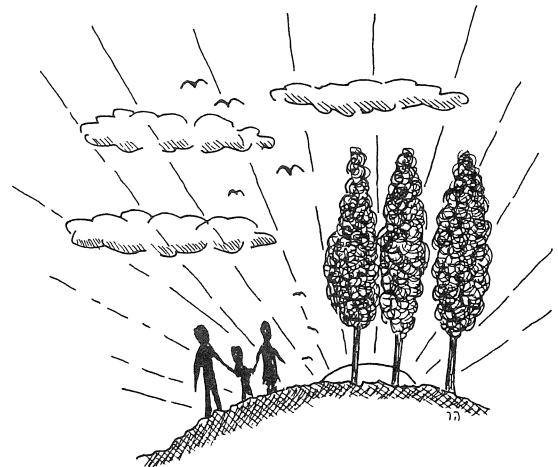
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## The Naming

Who is like unto God? *Michael*.  
 And gracious? *Hannah*.  
 Sarah, the princess,  
 and God's judge, *Daniel*.  
 Blessed creatures, *Tabitha*, the gazelle,  
 the bee *Deborah*  
 and the dove, *Jonah*,  
 and by the stream, the ewe, *Rachel*.  
 May *Ruth's* friendship,  
*Esther's* star and *Aaron's* light,  
 beloved *David* and *Benjamin*,  
 son of the right hand,  
 guide you through the night,  
 sons and daughters,  
 to our promised land.

-- Carolyn Flanders McPherson<sup>7</sup>

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## 17. Encourage community leaders.

Let's encourage community leaders--our rabbis, synagogue boards, principals, teachers and other community organizations--to promote the understanding and integration of adopted children into the synagogue, classroom, and neighborhood.

Let's encourage our schools, temples and synagogues to acquire books and other resources about adoption.

We can help our community leaders understand that seemingly ordinary events, such as drawing a family tree in school or celebrating a birthday, may raise painful issues for the child and family.

## 18. Let's stay involved.

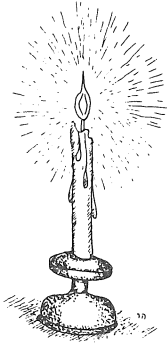
Adoption is a life-long process. We must stay involved. Problems *can* arise in adoptions, at any time of life. It is not unusual for children to question their parents or their adoption, and this can be exceedingly painful.

Most of life's difficulties can be dealt with if we become more knowledgeable about our adversity, learn coping skills, and give and receive emotional support. Jewish families are uniquely equipped to face such problems because our tradition is based on strong family unity.

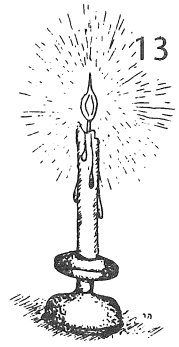


Behold, how good and pleasant it is,  
when people live together as one.

Psalm 133



## Ceremonies for Celebrating Adoption



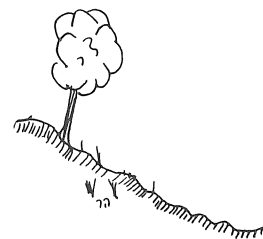
There is rich diversity within the Jewish community in our manner of celebrating life cycle events. As with other rituals and ceremonies, the rituals celebrating adoption may take place in the synagogue or in the home, as the parents and family choose, and might include any of the following:

1. the brit milah (ritual circumcision) for a son
2. the conversion of a child born of non-Jewish parents
3. a naming ceremony for a daughter or son
4. ceremonies created especially for adoption

The following are two of many possible sources for an adoption celebration.

### 1.

In their adoption ceremony, one couple used poems from *Perspectives on a Grafted Tree*, edited by Patricia Irwin Johnston and containing many beautiful poems about adoption. The anthology is published by Perspectives Press, PO Box 90318, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46290-0318, and copyright 1983.



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Adoption celebrations . . . have another, pedagogic function: to educate one's friends and family about the source of blessing, the occasion for pride, and the opportunity for holiness that attends an adoption.

-- Daniel Shevitz<sup>8</sup>

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## 2.

This ceremony was written by one couple for the occasion of their son's adoption.

### *Brit Imuts*

#### *The Covenant of Adoption*

The baby is carried into the room by one grandparent and handed to others if they are present. The parents explain the nature of the ceremony and tell the story of the baby's name, commonly selected to honor the memory of a relative who has died.

The baby is placed on the knees of his adoptive parents, who then take the following oath.

"We solemnly swear, by the One who is called loving and merciful, that we will raise this child as our own. We will nurture him, sustain him, and guide him in the paths of Torah, in accordance with the duties incumbent upon Jewish parents. May God ever be with him. We pray for the wisdom and strength to help our child, (name), become a man of integrity and kindness.

May the One who saved me from all evil bless this boy, and let him be called by our name and the names of our ancestors, and may he multiply throughout the land." [See note below.]

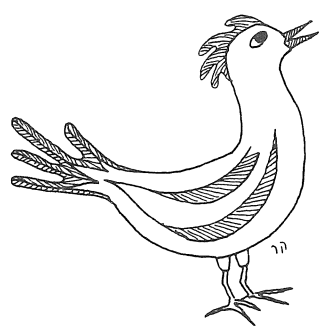
The priestly benediction is recited, followed by the *sheheheyanu* [prayer of Thanksgiving].

The child is showered with wishes and blessings from family and friends.

*Kiddush* [the blessing recited over the wine on Shabbat and holidays] is recited, and a meal to celebrate the occasion, a *seudat mitzvah* [feast or banquet], is served.

Note: For a girl, the following quotation from the Book of Ruth may be substituted: "Be blessed of the Lord, daughter, and have no fear. I will do on your behalf whatever you ask. For you will be a fine woman."

-- Daniel and Susan Shevitz<sup>9</sup>



## Adoption-Friendly Language



It's easy to lapse unintentionally into phrases that are hurtful, that speak negatively of adopted children or that ignore the adopting parents' worry and pain.

It is not impolite to correct people who use disparaging phrases. And when we ourselves use adoption-friendly language, we help others to learn and understand. As one adult adoptee said, "All I want is for our community to be sensitive to adoption."

### Phrases to avoid:

Too bad they couldn't have children of their own!

It's amazing how often women get pregnant after they adopt. Maybe that will happen!

The baby doesn't *look* Jewish!

How do they *know* she's Jewish?

The older child is obviously theirs.

They're so brave (or wonderful). My friends adopted, and they had a dreadful experience with that child. . . .

Of course, they'll have to expect less from their adopted child than if he was *really* theirs.

### Adoption-friendly phrases to use:



Their child (instead of "their adopted child")

The child's biological (or birth) parents (instead of "the real parents")

A child from abroad (instead of "a foreign child")

A child with special needs (instead of "handicapped child")



## For Further Study and Support: Eighteen Resources

1.

Read *And Hannah Wept* by Rabbi Michael Gold (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1988), a compassionate and thorough examination of Jewish law as it applies to reproduction, infertility and adoption.

2.

Contact RESOLVE, Inc., a group that offers counseling and referral services for those dealing with infertility. They can direct you to the nearest local chapter.

RESOLVE

1310 Broadway

Somerville, Massachusetts 02144-1731

phone: (617) 623-0744

3.

Consult *The Adoption Resource Book* by Lois Gilman, (HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1992), one of the most detailed and complete compilations available to those interested in every facet of adoption.

4.

In Michigan, contact Jewish Family Service:

Esther Krystal, MSW

24123 Greenfield

Southfield, MI 48075

phone: (313) 559-1500



## 5.

Read *The Bamboo Cradle* by Avraham Schwartzbaum (Feldheim Publishers, Spring Valley, New York, 1988), the moving true account of a Jewish couple who adopt a Chinese baby abandoned in a train station, and how she changes their lives.

## 6.

Contact Stars of David, a resource group that assists those seeking to adopt, as well as those who have adopted, by offering discussion groups, educational programs and social activities. For information regarding a chapter near you, contact:

Stars of David  
Phyllis Nissen  
24 Lisa Lane  
Reading, Massachusetts 01867

In Michigan: Stars of David  
Elissa Rosenfeld  
4458 Apple Valley Lane  
West Bloomfield, MI 48323  
phone: (313) 737-3874



## 7.

Contact the Jewish Children's Adoption Network in Denver, which seeks appropriate homes, including foster homes, for Jewish children:

Jewish Children's Adoption Network  
PO Box 16544  
Denver, Colorado 80216-0544  
phone: (303) 573-8113

## 8.

Listen to the audio tape "Adoption and the Jewish Family" from FACE (Families Adopting Children Everywhere). The tape costs \$11.00 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling:

"Adoption and the Jewish Family" Audio Tape  
% Myra Hettleman  
FACE  
PO Box 28058  
Baltimore, MD 21239

## 9.

Read "A Guide for the Jewish Adoptive Parent" by Rabbi Daniel Shevitz, *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, Spring 1985, pages 107-126. Excerpts of this article, which is difficult to find, are in Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper's book *Living a Jewish Life* (Harper Perennial, New York, 1991), pages 282-3.

## 10.

Contact the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption (Spaulding for Children). The National Resource Center offers advice, resource materials and training regarding children with special needs.

National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoptions  
16250 Northland Drive  
Suite 120  
Southfield, MI 48075  
phone: (313) 443-7080



## 11.

Contact one of the major American centers for adoption information. Among them are:

NACAC  
1821 University Avenue West N-498  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104-2803  
phone: (612) 644-3036

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) is an adoption advocacy organization that promotes the adoption of special needs children. They can direct you to a state chapter.

Adoptive Families of America (AFA)  
3333 Highway 100 North  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55422  
phone: (612) 535-4829

AFA offers packages of information and has affiliates around the country.



National Adoption Information Clearing-House  
 11426 Rockville Pike  
 Rockville, MD 20852  
 phone: (301) 231-6512

The Clearing-House offers information on the adoption process, agencies, laws, publications, and pre- and post-adoption resources. They can also inform you of speakers and consultants in your locale.

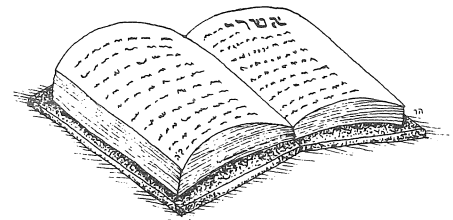
## 12.

On the issues of Jewishness, Jewish observance, and the conversion of children, consult an appropriate text. Among the possibilities:

*Becoming a Jew* by Maurice Lamm (Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 1991). Chapter 13 examines and explains the conversion of minor children.

*To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life* by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin (Basic Books, New York, 1972).

## 13.



Good books about parenting for Jewish families include:

*To Raise a Jewish Child: A Guide for Parents*, by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin (Basic Books, New York, 1977).

*The Hadassah Magazine Jewish Parenting Book*, edited by Roselyn Bell (Avon Books, New York, 1989). This informative anthology, appropriate for both birth and adoptive parents, addresses a wide range of topics, including adoption, the single parent, Jewish day care, Jewish special education, the selecting of schools, and problems of adolescence.

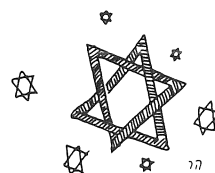
*The Jewish Catalog, Vol. 1* by Richard Siegel, Sharon Strassfeld and Michael Strassfeld, *Vol. 2 and 3* by Sharon Strassfeld and Michael Strassfeld, (Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1973, 1976 and 1980). These three encyclopedic volumes touch on every imaginable topic in Jewish life.

*Raising Jewish Children in a Contemporary World*, Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben, Prima Publishing, Rocklin, California, 1992.

*Living a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper (Harper Perennial, New York, 1991). Diamant and Cooper's clear, concise explanations of traditions will be especially useful for those who are rediscovering their Jewish heritage.

*The Jewish Family Book* by Susan Strassfeld and Kathy Green (Bantam Books, New York, 1981) touches on every life cycle event in the Jewish family, as well as such important topics as the Holocaust.

14.



Read *Adopting the Older Child*, by Claudia L. Jewett (Harvard Common Press, Boston, 1978). As the title suggests, this book touches on the issues particular to the adoption of older children.

15.

Read *How It Feels to Be Adopted* by Jill Krementz (Knopf, New York, 1982). Based on the personal stories of 19 children, *How It Feels to Be Adopted* is touching and thought-provoking, and could be shared by parents and their older children.

16.

In Michigan: For post-adoption services, contact your county Community Mental Health office about your local post-adoption network and other programs available under the MPASS (Michigan Post Adoption Services System) Project.

Or: Contact your county probate court or the adoption agencies in your community.

Or: Contact MARE (Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange) for a monthly book containing photos and write-ups about waiting children; information on any aspect of adoption, including access to adoption records and search support groups; newsletters, and speakers on adoption issues.

MARE  
PO Box 6128  
Jackson, MI 49204-6128  
phone: 1-800-589-6273



## 17.

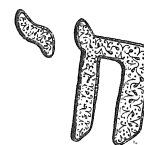
In the event you encounter prejudice in the adoption process, contact:

In Michigan: The Anti-Defamation League

4000 Town Center Suite 420

Southfield, MI 48075-1402

(313) 355-3730

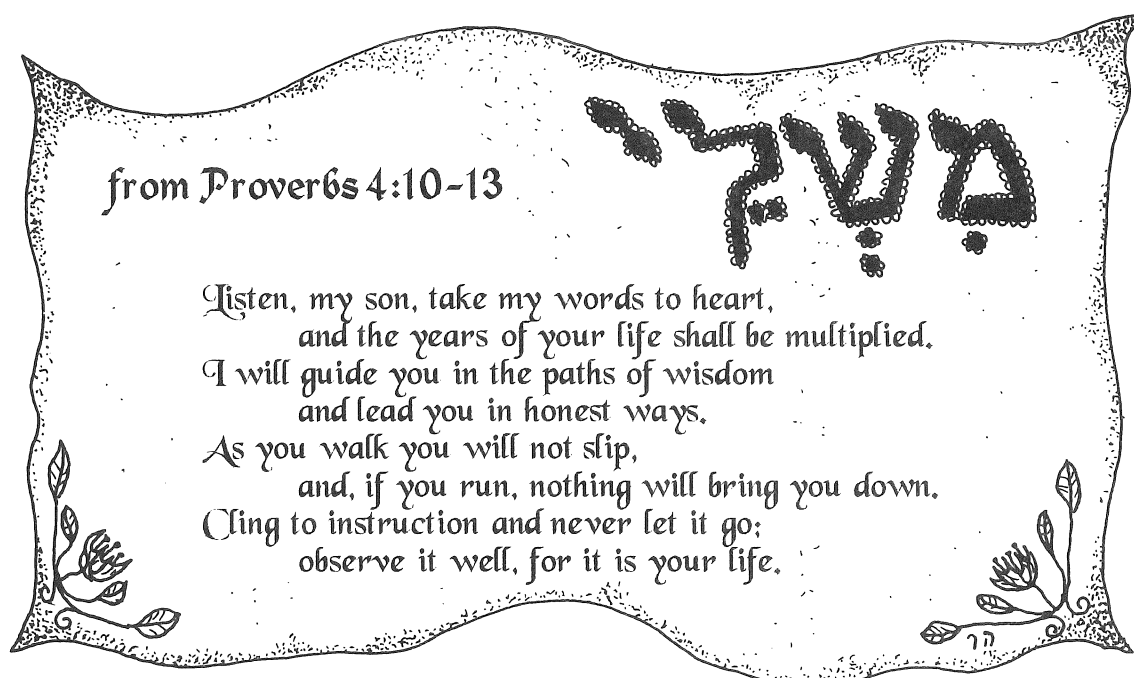


## 18.

There are many excellent books about the adoption experience. Consider reading:

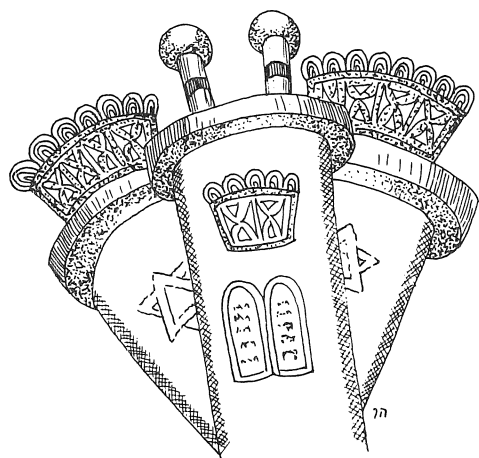
*Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self*, by David Brodzinsky, Marshall D. Schechter, and Robin Marantz Henig, (Doubleday, New York, 1992), a scholarly analysis of how adoption affects everyone it touches.

*Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience*, by Betty Jean Lifton, (Harper and Row, New York, 1988).



## NOTES

1. Carolyn Flanders McPherson, 1992.
2. Rabbi Michael Gold, *And Hannah Wept*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1988, page 35.
3. Rabbi Daniel Shevitz, "A Guide for the Jewish Adoptive Parent," *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, Spring 1985, page 120, as quoted by Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper, *Living a Jewish Life*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1991, page 281.
4. Babylonian Talmud: tractate *Sanhedrin*, page 19b, as quoted by Francine Klagsbrun, *Voices of Wisdom*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, page 173.
5. Maimonides, *Code*, "Laws Concerning Moral Dispositions and Ethical Conduct," chapter 6, section 10, as quoted by Francine Klagsbrun, *Voices of Wisdom*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, page 175.
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8. Shevitz, page 120.
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10. *Shabbat*, 119b, as quoted by Louis Newman and Samuel Spitz in *The Talmudic Anthology*, Behrman House, Inc., West Orange, New Jersey, 1980, page 72.




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The world itself rests upon the breath  
of the children in the schoolhouse.

-- *Shabbat*, 119b 10

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Jan Adler, adult adoptee, adoptive parent, Americans for International Aid and Adoption, Huntington Woods, Michigan

Ron Apol, Supervisor, Adoption Department, Kent County Juvenile Court, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Rabbi Chaim Bergstein, Congregation Bais Chabad F. H. and Congregation B'nai Rashbachabad W. B., Farmington Hills, Michigan

Mary Dengerink, M. S. W., Kent County Community Mental Health, Children's Services Planner, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Jack Finn, Kent County Juvenile Court, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Esther Krystal, M. S. W., Coordinator of Adoption and Foster Care, Jewish Family Service, Southfield, Michigan

Dr. Albert M. Lewis, Rabbi, Temple Emanuel, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Rabbi David A. Nelson, D. D., Spiritual Leader of the Congregation Beth Shalom, Oak Park, Michigan

Rabbi Michael Rascoe, Congregation Ahavas Israel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, adoptive parent

Elissa Rosenfeld, M. S. W., A. C. S. W., adoptive parent, West Bloomfield, Michigan

Hillel (James E. ) Rosenfeld, Ph.D., Clinic Administrator, North Oakland Child and Adolescent Clinic, adoptive parent, Oak Park, Michigan

Susan Raphael Rosenfeld, adoptive parent, Oak Park, Michigan

Flory Silverstein, adoptive parent, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Linda Silverstein, adult adoptee, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Linda Yellin, M. S. W., A. C. S. W., therapist and consultant in private practice, adult adoptee, Farmington Hills, Michigan

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*Members of the  
Michigan Post Adoption Services System Management Team*

Susan Arneaud, Michigan Department of Mental Health

Mary Dengerink, Kent County Community Mental Health Board

Rich Hoekstra, Department of Social Services

Jametia Lilly, Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Board

Rosemary Jackson, Spaulding for Children

Carolyn McPherson, Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Michigan

Hillel (James E.) Rosenfeld, Oakland County Community Mental Health Board

## Notes

