



ADOPTION AND JEWISH LIFE

-RESOURCE GUIDE FOR CLERGY-

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JSSA's ADOPTION SERVICES



JSSA supports individuals and families seeking to grow their family through adoption. For more than 120 years, JSSA has provided a full range of adoption and family-building services to meet the needs of individuals and families throughout the life cycle.

JSSA provides...

- Pre-home study counseling & information about adoption alternatives
- Parental placement counseling
- Counseling for birth parents
- Surrogacy assessments
- Home studies and post-placement supervision for all married couples, same sex couples and singles
- Home studies for embryo adoption/placement
- Court reports
- Counseling for adoptees of all ages and their families
- Adult adoptee and birthparent search services
- Clergy consultations

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ADOPTION AND JEWISH LIFE – CLERGY RESOURCE GUIDE

JEWISH RESOURCES

Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA) – www.jssa.org

JSSA offers a full range of adoption and family-building services to meet the needs of individuals and families throughout the life cycle (see p. 2 for a full list of resources and contact information).

Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) – www.jccany.org

Includes Ametz Adoption Program, a comprehensive child care agency, as well as a large collection of relevant articles, FAQs, statistics, listings of domestic and international agencies and personal stories on topics like, how to finance an adoption, how Judaism plays into adoption.

Jewish Children's Adoption Network (JCAN) – www.jcan.qwestoffice.net

Recruitment and referral organization that places adopted children into Jewish homes. They specialize in placing special needs children who are developmentally or physically disabled, as well as victims of abuse and neglect.

Just Adopt (Rabbi Susan Silverman) – www.justadopt.net

JustAdopt.net seeks to raise awareness about the devastating circumstances of the world's 150-200 million unparented children, and to promote adoption — both domestic and international — as an important solution. Site offers numerous links, statistics and resources for CLERGY and families considering adoption.

B'chol Lashon - www.bechollashon.org

A significant resource and education center focused on ethnically and racially diverse Jews. This organization hosts Camp Be'chol Lashon, a multicultural Jewish overnight camp located in the San Francisco Bay area. The camp welcomes ethnically and racially diverse Jews... empowering them to see themselves as an integral part of world Jewry.

Jewish Multi-Racial Network – www.jewishmultiracialnetwork.org

Working toward the full inclusion of Jews-of-Color and multi-racial Jewish families into the larger Jewish community. Provides trainings, resources and information (including a list of synagogues considered 'welcoming' to Jews of color).

Ritualwell.org

Collection of alternative/creative Jewish ritual practices, including naming ceremonies for adopted children.

GENERAL RESOURCES

Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA) – www.jssa.org

JSSA offers a full range of adoption and family-building services to meet the needs of individuals and families throughout the life cycle (see p. 2 for a full list of resources and contact information)

Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) - adoptionssupport.org

Strengthens the well-being of foster and adoptive families, promotes adoption awareness and sensitivity; Assists professionals and families to better empower adopted children to thrive.

Dave Thomas Foundation - www.davethomasfoundation.org

Wonderful website with every possible resource for US domestic adoption.

Rainbow Kids - www.rainbowkids.com

Provides info on International and Special Needs Adoptions; includes 'Waiting Child' photo section.

Adoption Advocates International - www.adoptionadvocates.org

Rich, informative and accessible site with information on how to adopt + resources and support for adoptive families, and political updates and actions you can take on behalf of international adoption.

Adopt US kids - adoptuskids.org

Raises public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system; and assists U.S. States, Territories, and Tribes to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families and connect them with children.

Kidsave - www.kidsave.org

Creates opportunities for older orphanage and foster kids to grow up in families.

RESOLVE – www.resolve.org

Resources for families and individuals faced with infertility.

A Child Waits - www.achildwaits.org

Offers grants and low-interest loans for international adoption.

American Academy of Adoption Attorneys - www.adoptionattorneys.org

The Jewish Imperative for Adopting a Child

Article by Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz

Millions of children go to bed hungry every night, with no one to hold them as they cry themselves to sleep. There is perhaps no greater suffering than to feel unloved, unwanted, and uncared for by anyone. This is the story of the orphan.

The global population just surpassed seven billion, and concerns for the poor in a world with more limited resources than ever before must be a top priority. Perhaps the most vulnerable among us are the more than 160 million orphans who lack love, attachment, and emotional support, let alone homes. Millions of children need families, and we can all pause to consider adoption.

My wife Shoshana and I feel that as Jews and global citizens facing the realities of the 21st century, we must regard adoption as a moral imperative. It is not an easy thing to do, and there are always risks, but we are blessed with a safe home and lots of love to give. One need not be challenged with infertility to turn to adoption, nor must one be rich to consider it as an option for building a family.

The Torah strongly condones adoption. The orphan (*yatom*) is given priority in the sacred text along with the widow (*almama*) and stranger (*ger*) to ensure their protection (*Deuteronomy* 16:11 and 14, 24:19-21, 26:12-13). God is described as a “father of the fatherless” (*Psalms* 68:6), so to become a parent to a parentless child is to emulate the Divine.

Jewish law encourages adoption to the extent that it considers adoptive parents who care for, raise, and teach their child as the official parents. “Whoever brings up an orphan in their home, it is as though they gave birth to him.” (*Sanhedrin* 19b) That this approach is embraced is reflected in the practice of including foster parents’ names in a child’s halachic name, because “he who brings up a child is to be called its father, not he who gave birth.” (*Exodus Rabbah* 46:5)

The rabbis taught that one who rescues and raises an orphan child in one’s home fulfills a tremendous mitzva, since there is a community responsibility to support impoverished orphans. (*Ketubot* 50a) The Talmud holds the community responsible for the support of orphans, for finding spouses for them, and for providing them with the means to live economically independent lives. Communal funds must be allocated to support orphans. (*Ketubot* 67b)

We are collectively responsible to find solutions for parentless children.

We all should seek our own ways to contribute. At the least, we must find some way to love and support this population. Rambam says we must show the highest sensitivity toward orphans: “Whoever irritates them, provokes them to anger, pains them, tyrannizes over them, or causes them loss of money is guilty of a transgression.” (*Mishneh Torah, De’ot* 6:10) We must go beyond avoiding committing any wrong against parentless children and be sure to actively show them love and caring. The great prophet Isaiah teaches us to “defend the cause of orphans.” (*Isaiah* 1:17) How will each of us heed this prophetic call?

Adopting a child is not only a great kindness; there is great precedent for adoption as a model to cultivate greatness in an individual who can understand multiple worlds and identities. For example, the greatest prophet of all, Moses, was adopted when his parents couldn’t safely raise him. (*Exodus* 2) His multiple identities as a Hebrew and Egyptian contributed to his leadership capabilities as he possessed deep empathy toward human vulnerability. Similarly, Mordechai raised his orphaned cousin Esther, who went on to become an essential Jewish leader. The great talmudic sage Abaye often quoted wise sayings in the name of his foster mother.

Of course, adoption is not for everyone. There are serious challenges, risks, and commitments that come with such a decision, but given the realities of our over-populated world and the over-abundance of orphans, it is a decision we must all at least consider. There is perhaps nothing that causes greater damage to the soul than growing up in the world without parents, without a warm embrace at night. Every stable family should consider the opportunity to welcome the most vulnerable humans on the planet by giving homeless children a home and family.

Jewishness, Judaism & Adoption

By Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb

Let's begin with a key distinction: between STATUS -- the legal, often controversial question of who is a Jew -- and IDENTITY, the question of how important Jewishness is to *our own* sense of who we are, how connected we feel to Judaism and/or to the Jewish people. Status is how *others* perceive you, and what you 'officially' are (whatever that means!); identity is how *you* feel, and thus what *you* think you are.

IDENTITY, in today's open society, is voluntary. It's often said that now, we're *all* "Jews by Choice." Whether born Jewish, converted into it, and/or adopted into it (which falls somewhere between 'born' and 'converted'), we all actively choose to identify as Jewish (or freely choose not to).

Is our Jewish heritage, history, membership in the Jewish people, etc., important enough to make a meaningful part of our identity, and our lives? That's personal. As a rabbi, no surprise, I *hope* it's important! -- for ourselves -- and (so many of us being adoptive parents), for us to empower our *children* to hopefully choose it for *themselves*. But it's not a foregone conclusion.

And, I must add from my own Reconstructionist standpoint: Judaism is not "better" in some objective sense; it's just good, it's meaningful, and it's *ours*. We're people, before we're Jews. I do believe that active Jewish connection enriches those who choose it, and that something primal is lost when that connection is attenuated -- but our children (and we) can be happy moral spiritual well-adjusted people, regardless. And we cannot forget that with adoption, our children also each lay some real claim to *other* cultures and civilizations, which are also good and meaningful (but not ours, and partially theirs). Everything else I say assumes that "Jewish identity" is good -- but always with that asterisk, "it's very good, for *us*, but not 'better than'..."

To instill *Jewish* identity in our children, we should ourselves be immersed in the culture, and immerse our kids in it -- this includes intensive learning about history and traditions, surrounding ourselves and our kids with people of that background, and making it a family affair -- yet without force-feeding it, lest it feel more oppressive than enriching; and without cutting off exploration of our children's birth-culture/s.

Some proven approaches to fostering *Jewish* identity in kids -- any Jewish kids -- are:

- Meaningful and routine home experience, from ritual (like lighting candles) to ethical (volunteering and giving tzedakah) to educational (talking Torah in the house) to aesthetic (Jewish art on the walls);
- Formal Jewish education that manages to convey both enough content (so our kids feel at home across the Jewish world) *and* enough fun (emphasizing affect and positive experience);
- Immersive peer experiences -- these are key above all, say the data -- like camp, youth group, Israel trips, etc.

Yes, it's the same for adopted Jewish children -- but more so. These proven ways to instill Jewish identity are *more* urgent, even, for children who will be prompted by "the road not taken" or "if my birth family hadn't made their adoption plan" questions (plus general rebellion), to ask at some point "why be Jewish." That's one key difference: we're all Jews by Choice, but those adopted into Judaism will more often be *reminded* that it's a choice.¹

Another angle: Jewish identity is, of course, one vector among many. We all have multiple identities. Reconstructionist founder Mordechai Kaplan coined the glaringly obvious phrase, "living in two civilizations", to celebrate the hyphen in 'Jewish-American' or 'American-Jewish'. Where he erred: we live not just in two, but in seven or eighteen or forty, civilizations!

¹ Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg, *Adoption and the Jewish Family: Contemporary Perspectives*, 1998, p 41: "...Shira was about eight years old when she asked whether she was born Jewish. I told her that she was born with a Jewish soul, Miriam [her adoptive mother] recalls. "I told her the midrash that there were other souls at Sinai who wanted to accept the Torah. God told them that it wasn't the right time for them, but that there would be a time for them in the future. That satisfied her."

Neither 'American' nor 'Jewish' is monolithic, for starters; there's huge geographic and cultural diversity in both. Then come sub-civilizations by ideology, background, profession, educational attainment, personal status, leisure time pursuits and interests, and more. Plus, the classic big ones besides religion and nationality: like class; gender and sexual orientation; race and ethnicity.

Jewish identity is one set of considerations in that complicated mix -- often it's in the top three or four; for some, it's the single largest -- but rarely the majority, and never the only one. Jewish identity continually interacts with, affects and is affected by, the others. Adoption enters the mix as another critical reality adding both power and complication to the question of Jewish identity.

So: even dropping every other hyphen from their identity-descriptions (including what we adoptive parents further create for them like "raised by single mother, has two fathers, kid with three or more 'parents'", etc) -- our children are "Jewish-American-adopted". And: Jewish-African-American-adopted; Korean-or-Chinese-American-Jewish-adopted; adopted-Russian-Ukrainian-Khazak-American-Jewish; Latino-Jewish-adopted-American; and so on. [e.g. Maya: "I am from China, and from the land of Shabbat dinners" ...].

I say, celebrate all of these many hyphens, theirs, and ours! Of course, we can be all these things, and more, simultaneously.² It's not "Jewish OR..."? We are, and can be, "Jewish-AND".

The more we emphasize and lift up each vector of our kids' identity from the get-go -- the more we use the "A-word" (adoption, that is; they'll get 'American' no matter what) and the "J-word" on a daily basis -- the more we surround our children with adults who proudly bear such multiple identities -- the more it becomes real, plausible, *natural* for them to do the same -- to thrive on every side of every hyphen. (And in so doing, to lift up their families and their communities, through exposure to the *other* side of the hyphen).

For Jewish identity to be natural, I recommend giving our children a *thick* Jewish identity -- make it obvious, from the get-go, that this rich tradition and extended community is THEIRS -- their 'birthright,' as it were, irrespective of birth-parent religion. Yes, they'll have the *choice* to opt out, like all Jews -- and yes, they'll have one extra way in which the question may get raised -- but by making Jewish ritual, culture, knowledge, and community second-nature for them -- we increase the odds that they'll continue to find meaning in it.

This is key for kids who sadly are likely to be mistaken as non-Jewish, to have their identities questioned, because they don't "look Jewish." For our children, who *will* be asked about it, by unthinking defenders of Ashkenazic hegemony (clueless as they are of indigenous Chinese Jews, Indian Jews, Nigerian and Ethiopian Jews, Peruvian and Guatemalan Jews, Nordic Jews...).

So: there's racism without; there's narrowness, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia within; plus, there's an inevitable "what if I'd been placed in a different family with a different religion, or stayed with my birth family" line of questioning. For all that, my RX remains: thick meaningful Jewish identity, even alongside open genuine exploration of their birth-culture.³

We mustn't deny their reality -- their *birth*-family's culture and civilization are also our children's 'birthright'. Our kids should learn about it, explore it. If we've given our children a strong foundation of love, of openness, and of rich Jewish identity, then *let* them search for birth-families, and learn their birth-parents' cultures -- our kids will still be our kids, and they'll neither reject us as their parents, nor Judaism as their religious civilization. The greater danger is the opposite, letting silence reign and secrecy fester.⁴ Stay open.

² Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg, 1998, p 120: "Jessica, who was adopted from Korea at age two, has three small flags on a stand in her bedroom, one Korean, one American, and one Israeli. By age six, she would look at them and announce: 'This is me'. She has learned to straddle her multiple identities and knows exactly who she is." [even so, she "once wished aloud that she wasn't Korean and didn't have a Korean face" (op cit p 127).]

³ Every Jew has reason to wonder, and doubt. There's external anti-semitism -- as a kid in northwest Ohio, my head was felt for horns -- which for centuries has led to assimilation and out-migration, to distance from the community and even active out-conversion. There's also internal meaningless-semitism -- stultifying Coen-Brothers-style religious education; parents who drop their kids off at Hebrew School and do no extra Jewish family activities, but wonder when their child feels disconnected and when their grandchildren aren't even raised Jewish...

⁴ If we stonewall their attempts to explore, they'll think that 'we doth protest too much', there must really be something compelling we're hiding from them (!). *Tafasta meruba lo tafasta*, our tradition teaches; trying too hard can actually prove counter-productive.

That's IDENTITY. Now, a few words on STATUS: it's a piece of cake, for those of us born and raised by the same Jewish mom. (Just a Jewish dad, or a Jewish non-bio-parent second mom, works for Reform & Reconstructionist, but not Conservative or Orthodox).

For those born to a Jewish mother, adopted, and raised in a different Jewish family: Jewish status is 100%, but with footnotes: (a) check on mamzerut, illegitimacy, which is a big problem in a few cases;⁵ (b) to avoid accidentally ending up marrying your birth-sibling, closed adoption is ill-advised; (c) the adopted Jewish kid can't marry a kohen.

Now for *most* of our children, born to the 98% of Americans (or 99.8% of humans) who *aren't* Jewish, then raised by us: conversion is required by most, and strongly recommended by most of the rest. I'll break that down here. Note, for infant-or-young-child conversion, questions are only asked of the parents; it's deemed a privilege, a *z'chut*, for their benefit—better to be raised Jewish in a Jewish family, than non-Jewish in a Jewish family. (The traditional view is just “better to be Jewish”, but we reconstruct that ;-). With an older child, the variables mount; ask afterward, if it's relevant.

In short, says the Talmud: Whoever raises an orphan in their home, Scripture regards as though the child had been born to him/her.⁶ But that's not enough.

In the Reform movement, some (by now most) rabbis strongly encourage conversion of adopted children, while some say it's enough to be raised in a Jewish home by at least one Jewish parent. Reconstructionists do strongly encourage conversion, but won't require it when a child is raised in a Jewish home. For Conservative, and Orthodox: conversion is required, with mikvah and the works,⁷ by rabbis who attest that the child will be raised, Jewish-observance-wise, per their movement's standards. Thus some liberal conversions are suspect in some Conservative eyes; and all non-Orthodox conversions are suspect (or plain insufficient) for most Orthodox authorities.⁸ Two Jews, three opinions.

⁵ Should the birthmom be at least technically still wed to one man, while conceiving the child by another, then the poor child is traditionally consigned to a small outcast group of fellow *mamzerim* and *mamzerot*, allowed to marry only within that group, for all time. Not pretty.

⁶ Sanhedrin 19b. Also: Abaye's father had died when his mother conceived him, and his mother died in childbirth. Yet the Talmud records that Abaye would say, “my mother told me.” He was referring to his adoptive mother, we are told (Kiddushin 31b, summarized in Rosenberg, p. 192).

⁷ All traditional conversions (including most Reconstructionist and many Reform) will insist on circumcision for boys – including a ritual drop of blood (*hatafat dam brit*) if a non-religious surgical circumcision has already taken place – and a proper immersion in a mikveh for everyone. The *tevilah*/immersion in a mikvah is easy enough for infants – the trick is to blow air onto their face, which makes it scrunch up, then dunk 'em super quick; they'll be startled, but won't take on water. Note: Most local non-Orthodox conversions take place at Adas Israel, in Cleveland Park, which runs a community mikvah; it can also be done outdoors in any natural body of water, and some Orthodox Mikvaot often open up for pluralistic conversions as well.

⁸ The fuller version of this:

Orthodox Judaism, defending what it calls “Torah-True”, largely insists that the conversion be done under Orthodox supervision – for some groups, it's only under *their* group's supervision -- pursuant to their own ritual strictures and their stated expectations for the child and family. Conversions performed by others simply don't count. It's a position that has internal integrity, though it may disturb those outside of an Orthodox framework; it becomes an issue only if our kids (a) choose eventually to affiliate Orthodox (in which case they can easily do another stricter conversion as an adult), or if they (b) make aliyah to Israel, which is currently automatic under the ‘right of return’ with any conversion certificate, and also (c) want to be registered as Jews and legally marry in Israel -- since the state-sponsored Chief Rabbinate is in charge of personal status, and it leans hard-right Haredi Orthodox.

Conservative Judaism is bound by halacha (Jewish law) just like Orthodoxy, but willing to set a much faster pace for its evolution and modernization; it likewise insists on conversion. The expectations on the parents for raising the child Jewishly will be serious, though not as intense as those applied by most Orthodox authorities. It does matter here; Ramah camps and Schechter schools often insist on proof of Jewishness, in which case no (or a non-traditional) conversion will not suffice.

Reform Judaism used to say that you needn't bother with a conversion, since the *adoptive* parent is the *parent*. Then it said that you really should have a ritual, but consecration or bar/bat mitzvah or confirmation was confirmation enough. Its most recent (non-binding) responsum suggests that you really, *really* ought to do a proper conversion – which usually means mikvah and the rest – but notes that flexibility remains around what qualifies as ‘proper’.

And Reconstructionist Judaism, as always, says consider all of the above, give tradition a vote but not a veto, and decide through an elaborate communal process (!). Actually, there is no movement-wide stance, per se; among the clergy, there is a strong shared preference for a ‘proper’ conversion ceremony; the Reconstructionist Rabbinic Association is now reworking its *ishut* or ‘personal status’ guidelines.

So: you can look over your right shoulder, and go for the most traditional ceremony.⁹ Or, you can do what's comfortable and meaningful for you, and know that if your adult child makes aliyah or becomes much more *frum*, they can convert again, yet more traditionally.¹⁰

A twist: born Jews, we're stuck with it. Adult converts take the plunge of their own free will. Adoption is somewhere in-between: converting as a child is real, yet iffy, unless and until one grows up and confirms it on their own. Tradition has fun here – could any early adolescent rebel just reach the age of majority, and say 'fugghetaboudit', I'm not Jewish?! In theory, yes. So halacha makes it nearly impossible, with an implausibly small window of time in which to publicly renounce the conversion imposed from childhood. Just being and doing Jewish for a day, even an hour – much less publicly affirming your status as a bat or bar mitzvah – and, bam! – you're stuck too. Jewish forever. Mazel tov.

That's IDENTITY, and STATUS. One last (short) heading, which to my surprise was not found in the literature (otherwise, most of this is covered quite well in Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg's *Adoption and the Jewish Family*). This one is important to me, as a rabbi: Judaism as a RESOURCE, how our rich tradition can shed new meaning and perspective on adoption. Three quick examples:

(1) *Barukh sh'amar v'haya ha'olam*, God spoke and the world became: words matter. Words can kill and words can heal. Jews have unique insight into "was adopted" vs "is adopted" – "created an adoption plan" vs "gave away the baby" – "real parent" vs "birthparent". We're all still learning, and preferred nomenclature continues to evolve, but words count.

(2) *Tzelem Elohim*, all are created in God's image. Mishnah Sanhedrin says: we all share common ancestors, so none can say "my lineage is better than yours". And, when an earthly ruler coins himself (as on a coin), all are the same; but when God coins Godself (i.e. makes us), all come out different. To celebrate difference, *and* our underlying equality, are core Jewish values.

(3) *Bakesh shalom v'rodfeihu*, seek peace and pursue it. 'Shalom' is such a key value that we should seek it in our own midst, and pursue it even beyond our orbit. Shalom is from *shalem*, whole. *Shleimut*, wholeness, is the meta-principle. Let this help us as we guide the identity-development of our children – that they be whole, *shleimim*.

Three closing thoughts, in that vein: One, from fellow adoptive rabbi-parent (and dear friend) R. Linda Potemken: adoptive moms miss the womb-experience, but adoption leaves stretch-marks on the heart. It's real.

Two: modern Hebrew, a century ago, sought a new word for "adopted": *me'umetzet*, *me'umatz*, from *ometz*, strength/courage. May we have the strength and courage to be the (Jewish) parents our children deserve; and may we raise (hopefully Jewish, but) strong courageous awesome children.

And last: What do we most want for our kids? "Happy, healthy, and good" should do it.¹¹ Well-adjusted, we hope and pray. Jewish, please God. Smart & successful, sure. But happy, healthy, and good: Dayenu. [Thank you.]

⁹ That is, the most traditional ceremony possible based on your own level of observance -- I know of non-Orthodox adoptive parents who have gotten all-Orthodox rabbis to sign their young children's conversion certificates, but this is not always the case

¹⁰ (Again, an active and fairly traditional conversion under liberal auspices is still recommended, partly in deference to tradition and 'Jewish unity', and partly so that there are no questions about our children's Jewish status at least across the liberal Jewish world – though Reform & Recon do leave room for "the heck with that, my kid's Jewish because I'm the parent, and we're Jewish but not religious anyway").

¹¹ Rosenberg, 1990, p. 140: "Don't put pressure on a child with a disability for genius, education, or success," adds Rabbi Eliezer Goldstock. "An adoptive parent should have three standards in mind: good character and ethics, a pleasing personality, and the tenacity to complete what is begun." If the child accomplishes these things, the parents can be pleased. [note: "Jewish identity" is not among the three key standards!]

Moses – A Case Study on Adoption & Identity

Rabbi James Q. Kahn – jkahn@jssa.org; 301.610.8356

TEXT I: EXODUS CHAPTER 2:5 – 2:22; 3:1 – 3:4

1And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. **2**And the woman conceived, and bore a son; and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. **3**And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch; and she put the child therein, and laid it in the flags by the river's brink. **4**And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. **5****And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maidens walked along by the river-side; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it. 6**And she opened it, and saw it, even the child; and behold a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' **7**Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter: 'Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?' **8**And Pharaoh's daughter said to her: 'Go.' And the maiden went and called the child's mother. **9**And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her: 'Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.' **And the woman took the child, and nursed it. 10**And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, **and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said: 'Because I drew him out of the water.'**

11And it came to pass in those days, **when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren.** **12**And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, **he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.****13**And he went out the second day, and, behold, two men of the Hebrews were striving together; and he said to him that did the wrong: 'Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?' **14****And he said: 'Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? thinkest thou to kill me, as thou didst kill the Egyptian?' And Moses feared, and said: 'Surely the thing is known.'** **15**Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. **But Moses fled** from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. **16**Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. **17**And the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. **18**And when they came to Reuel their father, he said: 'How is it that ye are come so soon to-day?' **19**And they said: 'An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and moreover he drew water for us, and watered the flock.' **20**And he said unto his daughters: 'And where is he? Why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread.' **21****And Moses was content to dwell with the man; and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. 22****And she bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said: 'I have been a stranger there.'**

EXODUS CHAPTER 3:1 – 3:4

1Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the farthest end of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb. **2**And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. **3**And Moses said: 'I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.' **4****And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said: 'Moses, Moses.' And he said: 'Here am I.'**

Moses – A Case Study on Adoption & Identity

TEXT II: RASHI on “*amatah*” - *Shmot* 2:5

ה וַתֵּרֶד בֵּת-פַּרְעֹה לְרַחֵץ עַל-הַיָּאֵר,
וַנַּעֲרֹתֶיהָ הֵלְכֹת עַל-יַד הַיָּאֵר; וַתֵּרָא אֶת-
הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף, וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת-אֲמָתָהּ
וַתִּקְחָהּ.

5 And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maidens walked along by the river-side; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it.

RASHI: “She sent her maid (“אֲמָתָה”) to fetch it (*Shmot* 2:5).” Another interpretation of this verse renders the Hebrew word *ammatah* as “her arm” rather than “her maid.” *Ammatah* also means “arm lengths.” This is to teach us that “her arm was extended for many arm-lengths” (some say 400 amot).

TEXT III: Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Przysucha on “*amatah*” - *Shmot* 2:5

If a person truly focuses his whole heart and soul on his actions, nothing in the world can stand in his way. So, too, here, Pharaoh’s daughter did what she could by stretching out her arms, even just a few feet, and a miracle happened and they kept extending.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Enduring Understanding:

The Torah’s description of Moses’ birth, subsequent ‘adoption’, later identity crisis and resolution have much to teach clergy about adoption and the role clergy can have in empowering adopted individuals and their families across the lifespan.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How did RASHI and Rabbi Bunim’s teachings on ‘*amatah*’ impact your understanding of Princess Biyah’s ‘adoption’ experience? How might her experience relate to that of contemporary couples seeking to adopt?
2. The text (2:10) states that Moses “was a son to her” (Princess Biyah) and that she named him Moses. What can we learn about the Torah’s understanding of parenthood from this text?
3. How might the stories relayed in 2:11 – 2:15 have impacted Moses’ sense of self?
4. In 2:22, Moses names his son, Gershom, meaning, ‘I have been a stranger there’. Where did Moses most feel like a stranger?
5. How might Moses’ story relate to that of adopted children coming of age in our contemporary American Jewish community?

Privilege Checklist – Jewish Multiracial Network

The Privilege Checklist was developed by Corinne Lightweaver, Sasha King, and members of the Jewish Multiracial Network online discussion group, 2006–2009, to teach about the widening range of privilege experienced in the Jewish community. Please distribute the Privilege Checklist, use it in workshops, and add to it.

The following statements are examples of ways in which privilege is experienced. The privileges listed below are ones that many people take for granted today, but which are not available to most Jews of color in the United States.

Please check all the statements that apply to you. At the end, try to list at least two more ways you have privilege in the Jewish community.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can walk into my temple and feel that others do not see me as outsider.
- ☐ I can walk into my temple and feel that others do not see me as exotic.
- ☐ I can walk into my temple and feel that my children are seen as Jews.
- ☐ I can walk into temple with my family and not worry that they will be treated unkindly because of the color of their skin.
- ☐ I can enjoy music at my temple that reflects the tunes, prayers, and cultural roots of my specific Jewish heritage.
- ☐ No one at my synagogue will attempt to assign me to a ethnicity to which I do not belong (e.g., assuming all Jews of African descent are Igbo or Ethiopian).
- ☐ I can easily find greeting cards and books with images of Jews who look like me.
- ☐ I can easily find Jewish books and toys for my children with images of Jews that look like them.
- ☐ I am not singled out to speak about and as a representative of an “exotic” Jewish subgroup.
- ☐ When I go to Jewish bookstores or restaurants, I am not seen as an outsider.
- ☐ I find my experiences and images like mine in Jewish newspapers and magazines.
- ☐ I do not worry about access to housing or apartments in predominately Jewish neighborhoods.
- ☐ My rabbi never questions that I am Jewish.
- ☐ When I tell other members of my synagogue that I feel marginalized, they are immediately and appropriately responsive.
- ☐ There are other children at the religious school who look like my child.
- ☐ My child’s authenticity as a Jew is never questioned by adults or children based on his/her skin color.
- ☐ People never say to me, “But you don’t look Jewish,” either seriously or as though it was funny.

- ___ I do not worry about being seen or treated as a member of the janitorial staff at a synagogue or when attending a Jewish event.
- ___ I am never asked “how” I am Jewish at dating events or on Jewish dating websites.
- ___ I can arrange to be in the company of Jews of my heritage most of the time.
- ___ When attempting to join a synagogue or Jewish organization, I am confident that my ethnic background will not be held against me.
- ___ I can ask synagogues and Jewish organizations to include images and cultural traditions from my background without being seen as a nuisance.
- ___ I can enroll in a Jewish day school, yeshiva, and historically Jewish college and find Jewish students and professors with my racial or ethnic background.
- ___ People of color do not question why I am Jewish.
- ___ I know my racial or ethnic background will not be held against me if I attempt to join a minyan in prayer.
- ___ I know my ethnic background will not be held against me in being called to read the Torah.
- ___ I am not discriminated against in the aliyah process as a Jew of my particular ethnicity.
- ___ I have never had the police called on me or have been escorted out of a service by a policeman for doing nothing other than praying while being a person of color.
- ___ I have not been asked to leave a shul or a class or have been barred from entering a shul or a class due to my skin color.

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Preferred Adoption Terminology*

Negative Terms	Preferred Terms
Real Parent/natural parent	Birthparent
Real mom/real dad	Birthmother/birthfather
Adoptive parent/adoptive mom/adoptive dad	Parents/mom/dad
Adopted child/own child	My child
Giving away/relinquishing/putting up for adoption/put up	Making an adoption plan
Keeping the baby	Deciding to parent
Foster child	Child in foster care
Adoptable/eligible/available	Waiting or child in need of a family
Child of their own (very offensive)	Birth child
Foreign adoption	International adoption
Is adopted	WAS adopted
Adopted OUT	Made an adoption plan
Real (blood) relative	Birth relative
Adopted OUT OF the foster care system	Adopted through or from the foster care system
Normal child	Typically developing child

*Adapted from National Council for Adoption

For a more thorough explanation, see...

Patricia Johnston's 'Speaking Positively: Using Respectful Adoption Language

www.abrazo.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Speaking-Positively.pdf

Books for Adults on Judaism, Race and Adoption

**Resources compiled from jewishmultiracialnetwork.org and bechollashon.org*

ADOPTION AND THE JEWISH FAMILY: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

by Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg

Looks at the adoption process through a Jewish lens; includes adoption rituals and readings... a great resource for clergy!

AND HANNAH WEPT: INFERTILITY, ADOPTION AND THE JEWISH COUPLE

by Rabbi Michael Gold

A personal exploration of infertility and adoption, as viewed through a Jewish lens.

TWENTY THINGS ADOPTED KIDS WITH THEIR ADOPTIVE PARENTS KNEW

by Sherrie Eldridge

Invaluable guide to the complex emotions that can take up residence within the heart of an adopted child.

IN EVERY TONGUE: THE RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

by Diane Tobin, Gary Tobin, and Scott Rubin

Groundbreaking look at the changing faces of the Jewish people and implications for the world Jewish community.

DIM SUM, BAGELS, AND GRITS: A SOURCEBOOK FOR MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES

by Myra Alperson

A resource guide for interracial families of all kinds, written by a single Jewish mother whose adopted daughter was born in China.

IS THAT YOUR CHILD? MOTHERS TALK ABOUT REARING BIRACIAL CHILDREN

by Marion Kilson and Florence Ladd

'Is That Your Child?' is a question that countless mothers of biracial children encounter. Social scientists Kilson and Ladd probe mothers' responses to this query and other challenges that mothers of biracial children encounter.

NO BIKING IN THE HOUSE WITHOUT A HELMET

by Melissa Fay Greene

A "sprawling, imperfect, courageous and joyful account of the adoption process, warts and all..."

Books for Youth on Judaism, Race and Adoption

**These resources and more can be found at jewishmultiracialnetwork.org*

BLUISH (PRE-TEEN)

by Virginia Hamilton

“Blewish,” for Black and Jewish... story of three pre-teens who carefully forge a bond of friendship, stumbling often as they confront issues of illness, ethnicity, culture, need, and hope.

DAUGHTERS OF THE ARK (AGES 10 AND UP)

by Anna Morgan

Tells the story of Debitu, a 14-year-old Ethiopian Jewish girl who, together with her two younger brothers, makes her way across miles of hostile and dangerous country before finally arriving in Israel in 1984, during Operation Moses.

I LOVE JEWISH FACES (Ages 5 and under)

by Debra Darvick

Jews come in every shape, size and color.. The book affirms identity, embraces diversity, and celebrates Jewish life.

LET’S TALK ABOUT RACE (Grades 1-5)

by Julius Lester

Introduces race as just one of many chapters in a person’s story.

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE A JEW (Ages: 3-6)

by Lauren Seidman

A vibrant and fun way for children to develop a broader knowledge of Judaism and the Jewish People, this book gently guides children down their own path of Jewish spiritual discovery and reminds us all that being Jewish is about our deeds, thoughts, and heart. (Quite a few of the photographs in the book are of JMN children!)

NAPPY HAIR (Elementary School)

by Carolivia Herron, Illustrated by Joe Cepeda

This story affirms the life of an African American girl in all her splendor, including her hair. Written by a Jewish African-American author, the girl has an Uncle Mordechai, and mention is made of slavery in Egypt and in North America. Her hair is considered an act of God. The illustrations are humorous and delightful.