

Adoption

This teshuvah was passed on October 17, 2018, with a vote of twenty-one in favor, none in opposition, and none abstained. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Pamela Barmash, David Booth, Elliot Dorff, Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Reuven Hammer, Joshua Heller, David Hoffman, Jeremy Kalmanofsky, Jane Kanarek, Steven Kane, Jan Kaufman, Gail Labovitz, Amy Levin, Daniel Nevins, Micah Peltz, Avram Reisner, Robert Scheinberg, Deborah Silver, Iscah Waldman, and Ellen Wolintz-Fields.

Question - שאלה

Can a statutorily adopted child be considered equal in familial obligations and halakhic status to that of a biological child? Through what mechanism can parents who statutorily adopt a child record and affirm their halakhic parent-child relationship?

Answer - תשובה

Given the significant rate of adoption within the Jewish community,¹ we recognize the striking absence of a formal process for the adoption of children. The Talmudic expression, “whoever raises a child is like their parent,” is a profound statement, but gives no guidance about how this is determined, and at what point the status of adoptive parent or child is binding.² In this responsum I review Jewish teachings about adoption, and then propose a Teudat Immutz, a document and accompanying Jewish ritual, for the adoption of a child to be a model for Conservative/Masorti Jews in their home country.³

The Teudat Immutz is a document that records the Jewish parental obligations the adoptive parent/s undertake/s toward his/her/their adopted child, in respect of, and consequent to, his/her

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

¹ <https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-34/136/National-Jewish-Population-Study.pdf>

² In addition to b. San. 19b, this statement is found in b. Meg. 13a. This translation is abbreviated.

³ The classical sources cited in this paper employ gender assumptions and heteronormativity. Each text is a reflection of its author’s times and social realities. We understand that families are more diverse, and we seek to provide each unique family structure with language that best fits its reality in the Teudat Immutz. Nevertheless there is still a need to develop language, especially in the Hebrew, that can best address the diversity of gender identities.

statutory adoption.⁴ The act of statutory adoption is the means by which adoptive children move to the status of formally adopted. The teudah records this change in status and makes sacred the process through which adoptive families experience growth. There are various ways of establishing a relationship within a community, and there is no implication that this is the exclusive mechanism.

Currently, adoptive parents undertake their respective state's and country's legal adoption processes without an accompanying Jewish adoption ritual.⁵ Children born to a non-Jewish birth mother require halakhic conversion in order to be considered Jewish according to our traditional criteria, which up until this point served as the primary and more often than not exclusive ceremonies for adoption. Because adoptive families can only ritually recognize and celebrate their adopted child's novel Jewish identity, but not his/her novel familial identity, we understand our current procedures to be inadequate. Below is a sample case of adoption that best illustrates the current Jewish adoption process.

Husband and wife, David and Rachel, begin the adoption process with the assistance of an adoption agency, through which the couple are paired with a birth mother who will provide a direct consent for the termination of her parental rights to her newborn son and thereby places him in the care of the agency, to ultimately be adopted by David and Rachel. The adoption agency places the newborn in the temporary care of David and Rachel, who after temporary court orders are entered, can make decisions for the infant that are consistent with the best interest of the child, including religious decisions. Therefore, with the agency's explicit permission, or court order, the adoptive parents can proceed with welcoming their child into the covenant through *brit milah* and *mikvah*.⁶ After the state's statutory waiting period, a final adoption will be set, where David and Rachel will be awarded the entree of the final decree of adoption, which formally concludes the statutory adoption process.

⁴ In the United States, statutory adoption is the formal name of civil adoption. Each state determines its adoption laws and processes. There are overarching federal guidelines that mainly deal with international adoption agreements between governments, and ethnic, racial, and cultural stipulations. For more information, visit: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/>

⁵ As the author of this paper is a resident of Arizona, the author consulted with adoption attorneys/agents who specialize in Arizona adoption law, and will use said laws as the foundation to all arguments based within secular American adoption law. Arizona's adoption laws are similar to most states'; however, this paper does not serve as a comprehensive guide to adoption within any state, and/or country. To learn each state's/country's comprehensive laws of adoption, one should consult with a legal expert in his/her respective state/country of residence. Certain adoption laws are state federal, and others international, but each state determines the intricacies of the adoption process. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dede Sandler, Esq., for her legal expertise in American adoption law.

⁶ The child is often technically in the legal care of the agency; therefore, the adoptive parent cannot automatically consent to such procedures without agency consent or court order.

This example highlights that there are indeed rituals intended to celebrate this child's life and to welcome him into the covenant. However, there is no ritual intended to celebrate this child's new identity as the son of his adoptive parents. In other words, we celebrate and mark his novel Jewish identity, but not his novel familial identity.

The lack of Jewish adoption procedures can be attributed to the fact that adoption, in its current form, is new to Judaism.⁷ Additionally, our current status of Jewish adoption developed by historic happenstance. However, there is halakhic and textual precedent to argue that Jewish statutorily adopted children are to be considered equal in status and familial obligations to biological children.⁸ We know that a significant number of Jewish families experience growth through the holy act of adoption, but until now there has not been a formal teshuvah that argues the ways in which Jewish adoption is in accordance with the tradition, and/or a method by which we are to record and ritualize the adoption of a child.

To address the halakhic consequences of Jewish statutory adoption, we must assess the history of Jewish adoption, the proposed mechanism that records Jewish adoption, the parental and filial duties to which adoptive parents and adopted children are equally obligated, and the pastoral guidelines and concerns that accompany the proposed adoption ritual. We are addressing Jewish adoption in terms of halakhah. Concurrently, we are addressing Jewish adoption in terms of love, relationships, and the holy act of building and strengthening familial relationships.

This paper in no way calls into question or compromises the halakhic status of previously statutorily adopted children.

Biblical Adoption

There are several passages that may allude to adoption in the Hebrew Bible; however, there is no reliable evidence that adoption, in its present form, was practiced in the pre-exilic period in Israel.⁹ Whether because the Israelite family institutions did not favor creating artificial family ties, or because the practice of polygamy negated the need for acquiring an heir outside of natural relations, we understand that adoption played an insignificant role in the biblical family. There is no legal source in the Bible that specifies a procedure for adoption or the legal rights

⁷ Ophir Yarden. "Adoption in Judaism." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51.4 (2012): Web., 278.

⁸ "Indeed, adoption as a formal legal institution does not exist in Jewish law. Nevertheless, as a social reality, adoption always existed in Jewish societies and was acclaimed." Daniel Pollack, Moshe Bleich, Charles J. Reid & Mohammad H. Fadel, "Classical Religious Perspectives of Adoption Law," *Notre Dame L. Rev.* 696 (2004), 79.

⁹ The 14 biblical texts are: (a) Genesis 15:2–3; (b) Genesis 16:2 and 30:3; (c) Genesis 30:4–3:14; (d) Genesis 48:5–6; (e) Genesis 50:23; (f) Exodus 2:10; (g) Leviticus 18:9; (h) Judges 11:1 ff; (i) Ruth 4:16–17; (j) Esther 2:7, 15; (k) Ezra 2:61 (= Nehemiah 7:63); (l) Ezra 10:44; (m) i Chronicles 2:35–41; (n) Genesis 38:8–9; Deuteronomy 25:6; Ruth 4.

and duties that accompany it.¹⁰ Nevertheless biblical adoption, in some loose form, was a reality.
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Given the importance that the Bible placed on caring for the orphan, the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud desired to formalize and encourage guardians to provide a home for those most in need. In other words, the rabbis of the Talmud sought to evolve and qualify the non-biological form of familial growth we call adoption.¹² Despite the equivocal evidence of biblical adoption, there is significant evidence that rabbinic sources held the institution of adoption in high regard.

Apotropos - Guardianship

Jewish law does provide for consequences essentially similar to those caused by adoption to be created by legal means. The legal means of achieving this result is appointing the adopters as *apotroposim* (*guardians*) - those entrusted with exclusive authority to care for the child's personal welfare, and the administration of the child's property. Thereby assuming all such financial and parental obligations as halakhah imposes on natural parents.¹³ The child is for all practical purposes placed in the same position toward his guardians as he/she would otherwise be toward his/her biological parents.

In classic times, the appointment of an apotropos would have been a court action by the beit din and would have been accompanied, if only in the records of the beit din, by a *teudat minui*. In our day adoption is a feature of the *arkhaot* (*the gentile courts*), so there is no Jewish record of adoption, which is why such a process and accompanying Hebrew document has been absent. The Teudat Immutz is filling that void, standing in place of the original *minui apotropos*.¹⁴

The following sources illustrate the role of the guardian, the nature of the guardian-child relationship, and the textual tradition's perspective on the importance of caring for those in need of guardians.

"The one who brings up," is the terminology frequently found in the texts presented throughout this paper, which is understood to represent a permanent parent. "The one who brings up," or

¹⁰ Rabbi Dr. Elliot N. Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death: A Jewish Approach to Modern Medical Ethics*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998. Print), 107-111.

¹¹ "Some scholars have not been concerned with the lack of clear reference to adoption even in biblical law, since there are other crucial legal institutions barely mentioned in the Hebrew Bible." Barmash, Pamela. "Adoption." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, (Oxford University Press, 2015. Print), 7.

¹² Rabbi Dr. Elliot N. Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death: A Jewish Approach to Modern Medical Ethics*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998. Print), 107-111.

¹³ See b. Ket. 101b, Mishneh Torah (Hilkhos Ishut) 23:17-18; and Sh.A., EH 114, and Tur ad loc, Sh.A., HM 290:1 and 24.

¹⁴ I thank Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner for this suggestion and language.

terminology similar to such, is a separate category from an “adult who temporarily cares for a child” who must provide *Asher Yehsar Lo*, ‘for that which he/she is lacking.’¹⁵

A child in the care of an adult who is not considered their legally adoptive parent will have different obligations toward that adult than the child who is in the permanent care of an adoptive parent. So too, the adoptive parent will maintain different obligations toward his/her adopted child than he/she would to a child in his/her temporary care. The mutual obligations of adoptive parents and adopted children will be explained in great detail, further on in this paper.

Adoption in Halakhic Sources

The rabbis understood the role of raising non-biological children as providing a “home for orphans.” We find the central Talmudic passage that qualifies the familial relationship of those who bring up orphans in their homes, in b. Sanhedrin:

שכל המגדל יתום בתוך ביתו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו ילדו

Whoever brings up an orphan in his home, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had begotten him.¹⁶

Based on this text, the institution of raising non-biological children emerged in the rabbinic period as a valued reality. We interpret the rabbis’ positive attitudes toward raising non-biological children as intended to motivate parents to open their homes to children in need. To further encourage this laudable act, rabbinic law elevated this practice to a means by which parents could fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah. Perhaps the clearest statement lauding the one who raises a non-biological child is in b. Ketubot 50a, describing R. Shmuel bar Naḥmani’s interpretation of the verse in Psalm 106:3:

(תהלים קו, ג) אשרי שומרי משפט עושה צדקה בכל עת וכי אפשר לעשות צדקה בכל עת ... רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר זה המגדל יתום ויתומה בתוך ביתו ומשיאן

‘Happy are they who keep justice, who perform charity at all times (Psalm 106:3).’ Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani said: This is referring to one who raises an orphan boy or an orphan girl in his house, and takes care of them, through to his/her marriage.¹⁷

¹⁵ See b. Ket. 67b; Sh.A., YD 250:1.

¹⁶ b. San. 19b.

¹⁷ b. Ket. 50a.

The rabbinic leaders' positive attitude toward those who raise non-biological children is additionally evidenced by a midrashic text from *Shemot Rabbah*:¹⁸

וכן דוד אמר (תהלים לא, כ): מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך ... ויאמר אני אעביר כל טובי על פניך (שמות לג, יט) ... הראה לו הקב"ה את כל האוצרות של מתן שכר, שהן מתוקננין לצדיקים. והוא אומר ... האוצר הזה של מי הוא? והוא אומר: של מגדלי יתומים

'How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear You (Psalm 31:20),' and *'I will make all My goodness pass before you (Exodus 33:19),'* Rabbi Assi said: 'When the Holy One of Being showed [Moses] all the treasures that were in store as rewards for the righteous He asked [rhetorically], And for whom is this treasure? For those who raise orphans.'¹⁹

Further on in *Shemot Rabbah*, we learn of a parable that formalizes the role of the non-biological parent and equates these guardians to biological parents:

משל ליתומה שהיתה מתגדלת אצל אפוטרופוס, והיה אדם טוב ונאמן, גדלה ושמרה כראוי, בקש להשיאה, עלה הלב לכתב הכתבה, אמר לה מה שמך, אמרה פלונית. אמר לה ומה שם אביך, התחילה שותקת. אמר לה אפוטרופוס שלה למה את שותקת, אמרה לו מפני שאיני יודעת לי אב אלא אותך, שהמגדל נקרא אב ולא המוליד

A parable: An orphan girl was raised by a guardian. He was a good and trustworthy man who raised her and protected her, as appropriate. He sought to give her in marriage. The scribe came to write her ketubah. He asked her: What is your name? She said: Thus-and-so. He asked her: And what is your father's name? She was silent. Her guardian asked: Why do you not speak? She said: because I know no father but you. The one who raised a person is called her father, not the one who bore her.²⁰

This text inspired R. Moshe Isserles' commentary to *Orah Hayyim* 42.15. Isserles quotes R. Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg (c. 1215–1293), and presents the argument that the non-biological child is treated like a biological child in matters of law. Isserles's addition comes at the conclusion of a *siman*, which rules that when common language or geographically local

¹⁸Article by Rabbi Mordecai Hacohen in *Torah She B'al Peh* 46 entitled "Immutz Yeladim Lepi Halakhah" "Adoption of Children According to Halakhic Principles", which has since been digitized, provides the fullest marshaling of sources. Rabbi Mordecai Hacohen, *Torah She B'al Peh* 46, Vol. III (1960/61), 65-84. Digital: <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/sinay/emutz-4.htm>.

¹⁹ *Shemot Rabbah*, 45:6 in *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. S.M. Lehrman, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simond (1939, reprint London: Soncino Press, 1961), 524. Quoting Psalm 31:20 and Exodus 33:19a (NJPS).

²⁰ *Shemot Rabbah* 46:5.

nomenclature is used in financial contracts, one does not call the contract's validity into question. Isserles provides the example of how parties in a financial contract refer to one another in what may be understood as informal language:

מי שמגדל יתום בתוך ביתו וכתב עליו בשטר בני או היתום כתב על המגדלו אבי או אמי לא מקרי
מזויף וכשר הואיל וגדלוהו ראוי לכתוב כך

An individual who raises an orphan in his house and refers to him as 'my son' in a contract, or if the orphan refers to the one who raised him as 'my father' or 'my mother,' the contract is not counterfeit and is considered valid; since he raised him, it is appropriate to write it in this fashion.²¹

Our texts primarily refer to the non-biological child as the *yatom*, *the orphan*.²² However, we come to learn from R. Jacob Emden, the Ya'avetz (c. 1697-1776), that raising non-biological children is not exclusive to children without biological guardians. Rather, children with biological parents can also be raised:

ולא ביתום בלבד, אלא אפילו יש לו אב ואם, ומתגדל אצל אחר לשם מצווה. אם הלה אין לו בנים
ומגדלו לזה להיות לו בן ליורשו, וזה קורא לו אב והוא קורא לו בני... שזה נחשב כאילו ילדו ממש

This is not only the case for an orphan, but even when the child's mother and father are alive, yet is raised in the household of another as a mitzvah. If the latter does not have children and raises the child as his son and heir, the child may call him 'father,' and he may call him 'my son'... for it is considered as if that person were the natural parent.²³

Rabbi David Almog presents Rabbi Shlomo Kluger's (c. 1785-1869) famous question as to whether the one who raises a non-biological child fulfills his/her obligation to "be fruitful and multiply" i.e., to procreate, through the act of what he identifies as adoption:²⁴

Kluger asks whether the dictum of 'whosoever raises' should be taken literally, thus allowing the positive commandment of procreation to be fulfilled through adoption. He suggests that the answer would be based on how one ruled in the

²¹ Sh.A., HM 42:15, see Biur ha-Grah ad loc.

²² Orphan refers to a child as fatherless, not necessarily motherless.

²³ Yaakov Emden, Ya'avetz, (1697-1776 ce) was a German rabbi, Talmudist and polemicist. She'ilat Ya'avetz, 8:1, 165.

²⁴ Rabbi David Almog. "Flexibility and Facilitation: The Case of Adoption in Jewish Law." Keren Journal 1 (2014): 30-66; Hokhmat Shlomo, EH 1.

dispute over whether the word *ke'ilu* ('as if') creates an exact equation or not. If the equation is exact then one can certainly fulfill one's obligation.

The preceding texts posit that a permanent guardian is responsible for raising his adopted child. Therefore, we are compelled to analyze the permanent guardian's religious role in the child's upbringing. According to the Mishneh Torah:

האפוטרופין עושין לקטנים לולב סוכה וציצית ושופר ספר תורה תפילין ומזוזות ומגלה. כללו של דבר כל מצות עשה שיש להם קצבה בין שהוא מדברי תורה בין שהוא מדברי סופרים. עושין להם אף על פי שאינן חייבין במצוה מכל אלו המצות אלא כדי לחנכן...

Guardians make arrangements for minors to perform the mitzvot of lulav, dwelling in the sukkah, tzitzit, shofar, Torah, tefillin, mezuzot and reading of the megillah. This is the general principle: guardians are obligated to arrange for minors to perform all positive mitzvot for which the [financial] scope is clearly defined, whether the precept originated from the Torah or from the rabbis. Guardians do so even though the minors are not obligated themselves to fulfill these mitzvot, but rather, for sake of educating them.²⁵

Rabbi Dorff asserts that the adoptive parent is obligated to care for the child's upbringing, education, and physical accommodations...equal to the obligations of the biological parent.²⁶ All of which elevate the act of caring for orphans to go beyond simply housing or feeding children, instead providing children with affection, a home, and a family:

In later Jewish law, adoption is not a defined institution as such, but rabbinic law provided for its approximate equivalent. The rabbinic court, 'the parent of all orphans,' appoints guardians for orphans and children in need, and the guardians have the same responsibilities as biological parents do. They must care for the child's upbringing, education, and physical accommodations, and they must administer the child's property.

This author proposes what was implicit in these sources, namely non-biological parents who serve in the permanent parental role to non-biological children, i.e., adoptive parents, can be considered halakhically equal in status and familial obligations to biological parents. We must next explore the halakhic consequences of Jewish adoption.

²⁵ M.T., *Hilkhot Nahlot*, Laws of Inheritance, 11:10.

²⁶ Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 197.

Naming in Adoption

As Rabbi Reisner concluded, and Rabbi Barry Leff affirmed, “children who are converted [or born Jewish] and adopted into a Jewish family may certainly use the patronymic and matronymic of his adopted parents,²⁷ and need not use *בן/בת אברהם*...²⁸

Understanding Familial Obligations

Adoption is a mechanism that affirms the permanent parental role. Therefore, we must define the Jewish textual understanding of parenthood, whether natural or of the adoptive nature. Because we are asking the adoptive family members to publicly declare their recognition and acceptance of their mutual familial obligations in the *Teudat Immutz*, it is essential that we explore those obligations’ textual origins and later interpretations.

Parental Obligations²⁹

In antiquity adoption was solely for the benefit of the child, whereas in our day it is also for the benefit of the child, but largely structured to be of benefit to the parent who wishes to grow his/her family. That being the case, it is all the more reason to assure our procedures highlight the obligations of the adoptive parents to their adoptive children.³⁰

²⁷ “The social parents’ names may be invoked when the child is being identified by his or her Hebrew name, as for example, when being called to the Torah, when being identified in a marriage contract (*Kettubah*), or when having a prayer recited in the synagogue for his or her recovery from illness.” Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 109

²⁸ See Rabbi Barry Leff’s teshuvah, citing Reisner, approved by the CJLS, “May a convert use a name other than ‘Ploni ben/bat Avraham Avinu?’”

<<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/ConvertsNameLeff.pdf>>, 6. See also the first essay in David Golinkin’s newest volume of responsa:

<https://www.schechter.edu/what-is-the-proper-way-to-refer-to-the-parents-of-a-convert/>

²⁹ b. Kid. 29a, states that the six parental obligations, fully listed later on this paper, are a father’s obligations to his son: “**A father** is obligated to circumcise, redeem, teach Torah to, find a wife for, and teach a trade to his son. There are those that say “[there is] even [an obligation to show his son] how to swim.”

However, we no longer understand the text in b. Kiddushin, or its later interpretations, to be exclusively applicable to fathers and sons. Rather, we understand the parental obligations to be incumbent upon both mothers *and* fathers toward both daughters *and* sons. We reach this understanding of equal obligation through Rabbi Dr. Pamela Barmash’s teshuvah “Women and Mitzvot,” in which she writes: “Women and men are equally obligated to observe the mitzvot...” Furthermore she writes: “The equality of obligations for fathers and mothers is expressed as early as the Mishnah [m. Kiddushin 1:7]: ‘(With regard to) all the obligations of the father to the son, both men and women are obligated.’” Therefore, mothers and fathers are equally obligated to all of the parental duties as understood by the halakhic tradition.

Given that “Women and men are equally obligated to observe the mitzvot...,” parents are equally bound to fulfill their parental obligations toward sons *and* daughters. After all, how could a child be expected to fulfill their Jewish obligations without the education and care of their parent? For example, how could a daughter fulfill her obligation to study Torah without her parent’s instruction or financial support?

See the teshuvah approved by the CJLS written by Rabbi Pamela Barmash, titled “Women and Mitzvot.”

<<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/womenandhiyyuvfinal.pdf>>

³⁰ I thank Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner for this suggestion and language.

One of the earliest understandings in rabbinic tradition of the obligations incumbent upon parental guardians is found in b. Kiddushin. They are as follows:

למולו - (בראשית כא) וימל אברהם את יצחק בנו...ולפדותו - (שמות יג) כל בכור בניך תפדה...
וללמדו תורה - (דברים יא) ולמדתם אותם את בניכם...ולהשיאו אשה - (ירמיהו כט) קחו נשים...
והולידו בנים ובנות וקחו לבניכם נשים ואת בנותיכם תנו לאנשים...וללמדו אומנות - אמר חזקיה,
דאמר קרא: (קהלת ט) ראה חיים עם אשה אשר אהבת, אם אשה ממש היא כשם שחייב להשיאו
אשה, כך חייב ללמדו אומנות, אם תורה היא כשם שחייב ללמדו תורה, כך חייב ללמדו אומנות...
להשיטו בנהר - מאי טעמא – היותיה הוא³¹

To circumcise him. As commanded in the book of Genesis, *'And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him (Genesis 21:4).'* To redeem him. As commanded in the book of Exodus, *'And you must redeem every firstborn male among your children (Exodus 13:13).'* To teach him Torah. As commanded in the book of Deuteronomy, *'And teach them to your children - reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up (Deuteronomy 11:19).'* To take a wife for him. As commanded in the book of Jeremiah, *'Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters (Jeremiah 29:6).'* To teach him a trade. As commanded in the book of Ecclesiastes, *'Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun - all your fleeting days (Ecclesiastes 9:9).'* The sages understood the text of Ecclesiastes, as such, 'If 'wife' is literal, this teaches, just as the father is bound to take a wife for him, so is he bound to teach him a craft for a livelihood; if it is a metaphor for Torah then, just as he is bound to teach him Torah, so is he bound to teach him a craft (Kiddushin 30b).' To teach him to swim, for his life may depend on it.

Halakhic literature, from the time of the Talmud to modernity, interpreted and expanded on these six parental obligations. Each generation seeks to understand these duties in the context of how they are applied to their contemporary circumstances. In fact, "...certain parental duties can pose problems for contemporary parents and their children - namely, teaching Torah, teaching a trade, and marrying children off."³² Rabbi Dorff offers us contemporary understandings of three of the aforementioned parental obligations:

³¹ b. Kid. 29a-30b.

³² Dorff, *Love Your Neighbor and Yourself*, 143.

- **To teach them a trade:** ‘...Jews now fully expect their children to learn general subjects at least as well as Jewish materials...it can be justified in very Jewish terms as an expression of the parents’ duty to teach children a trade...that increasingly means providing a college and even a professional education, for more and more jobs depend on extensive education.’
- **To Teach them Torah,** this is to be understood as providing a child with a Jewish education,³³ whether acting directly as teacher, but more likely as appointing another Jewish educational institution as their agent in fulfilling this obligation.³⁴
- **Marrying them off to a spouse,** There are ‘several approaches for parents in a kind of modern interpolation of their talmudic duty to marry off their children,’ which bear ‘...deep, personal significance for couples, for their parents, and for the Jewish people as a whole.’³⁵

When we read the parental obligations as listed in b. Kiddushin through the lens of the 21st century, we recognize that the text leaves out certain core tasks of parenthood. The six parental obligations, as b. Kiddushin sets forth, represent the halakhic tradition’s foundational understanding of parent-child relationships, namely, mutual halakhic responsibilities accompany familial relationships. However, this list of parental obligations is far from comprehensive. In fact, there are many parental responsibilities that we might consider equally important, such as providing affection, care, a stable household, a relatively normal childhood, clothing, and food.

Filial Duties

The two basic filial duties are to “Honor” and “Respect.”³⁶ The Talmud, as is its common practice, translates those attitudes into specific actions.

מורא לא עומד במקומו, ולא יושב במקומו, ולא סותר את דבריו, ולא מכריעו

Respect means that the son must neither stand in his father's place nor sit in his place, nor contradict his words, nor tip the scales against him.³⁷

³³ Dorff, *Love Your Neighbor and Yourself*, 145-149: Dorff addresses a number of approaches to Jewish education, especially taking monetary concerns into consideration.

³⁴ “As early as the first century C.E. Jews had established schools that parents could use as their agent in fulfilling this obligation.” Dorff, *Love Your Neighbor and Yourself*, 145.

³⁵ See Dorff, *Love Your Neighbor and Yourself*, 153; for a list of Dorff’s interpretations of the talmudic duty to marry off their children.

³⁶ “To respect his/her mother and father.” As commanded in the book of Leviticus, “You shall each respect his mother and father, and keep My sabbaths: I the Lord and your God.” Leviticus 19:15.

“To honor his mother and father.” As commanded in the book of Exodus, “Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.” Exodus 20:12.

³⁷ B. Kid. 21b.

Honor means that the son must give his father food and drink, clothe and cover him, lead him in and out.³⁸

The halakhic tradition elucidated upon the filial duties originated in b. Kiddushin, thereby producing multitudes of interpretations of how children are to perform the acts of *honoring* and *respecting* their parents. This text serves as the foundational understanding of filial obligations, and illustrates that the parental and filial obligations are equally rooted within the halakhic tradition.

We encourage, with the assistance of the family's rabbi, the adoptive parent/s and his/her/their adopted child to learn later halakhic interpretations of *honor* and *respect*, and/or to provide personal interpretations, in their journey to a committed eternal familial relationship.³⁹

Mourning Adoptive Parents

It is important to note that the parent-child relationship does not end after a parent dies. Jewish familial relationships do not cease because the parent is deceased. Rather, the relationship changes in nature; the altered relationship centers around mourning practices. Therefore, we must define the nature of the adoptive relationship, regarding mourning practices.⁴⁰

Firstly, the adopted child should observe the prescribed mourning observances toward his/her adoptive parents, just as a natural child should mourn his/her natural parents.⁴¹ Secondly, if the child was adopted into a family with siblings who are the biological children of the adoptive parents, all children should equally observe the traditional Jewish bereavement practices, namely *shivah* and *shloshim*.⁴²

³⁸ Ad loc.

³⁹ In fact, we encourage all families to learn later halakhic interpretations of "honor" and "respect," and/or to provide personal interpretations, in their journey to a committed eternal familial relationship.

⁴⁰ For the laws of Jewish mourning, See Rabbi Isaac Klein's *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), 285-300.

⁴¹ "In response to a question regarding whether or not a grandchild may recite the mourner's Qaddish [Kaddish] for his grandfather when the grandfather raised the child himself, [R. Moses] Isserles chose to defend the practice by defending the position, against the assertion of R. Yosef Colon (c. 1420–1480) to the contrary, that a grandson is in fact obligated in the mitzvah of honoring his grandfather even more than his own father. Yet, in his conclusion he dismisses any need to make such an argument..." Almog, "Flexibility and Facilitation," 48. However, the Siftei Kohen states that there is not an obligation to mourn for a non-immediate family member, but one can do so if he/she chooses. Comment to Sh.A., YD 374:5.

⁴² Because all children are of equal Jewish familial status, except in matters of cohenic or levitical status; as will be addressed in great detail further on in this paper.

Mourning Adoptive Children

הס ושלום a parent should have to bury a child. That said, we must address this circumstance, and we will do so briefly. Just as a child should mourn an adoptive parent to the same extent of the prescribed Jewish bereavement practices as a biological parent, so too, an adoptive parent should mourn his or her adopted child to same extent of the prescribed Jewish bereavement practices as a biological child, namely *shivah* and *shloshim*.

Siblings

The textual tradition placed significantly less importance on the sibling relationship than the parent-child relationship. However, there are certain guidelines and mutual obligations, which we can explore.

Laws of familial relationships are mostly concerned with the mutual obligations of parents and children and less focused on the interfamilial relationships and obligations between siblings. Whether because it was assumed that siblings would pursue *sh'lom bayit* for the sake of their parents, or because siblings are significantly less dependent on one another than they are on their parents, the laws of siblings are equivocal. Where the commentators elucidate the ideal practices of siblings are: Firstly, the obligation to distribute tzedakah to family members, including siblings, before distributing outside of the family.⁴³ Secondly, to be present at the burial of one's siblings and to formally mourn their passing.⁴⁴ Finally, the laws of *yibbum* and *halitzah*.⁴⁵

We can assuredly promote that siblings, and therefore adopted siblings, are to mourn one another and to pursue *sh'lom bayit*. Just as one is counseled to abrogate the relationship with a parent who is abusive... so too one should abrogate the relationship with a sibling who exemplifies those behaviors, adopted or otherwise.⁴⁶

There is debate as to whether or not adopted siblings may marry one another. According to the Talmud, children raised in the same home may marry each other.⁴⁷ However, as Dorff argued and was unanimously approved by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, sexual intercourse

⁴³ Sh.A., YD 251:3.

⁴⁴ Mishneh Torah (Eivel) 2:2.

⁴⁵ "In 1950 to promote unity among Jewish communities and to prevent abuse, the chief rabbinate of the State of Israel outlawed yibbum, mandating the sole practice of halitzah where necessary..." Rabbi David M. Greenstein, "Between Siblings," *The Observant Life*, (Rabbinical Assembly, 2011), 703.

⁴⁶ "Just as one is counseled to keep a distance from a parent if maintaining contact will be destructive to one's well being, so should one avoid relationships with a sibling if remaining close would be too painful or hurtful." Greenstein, "Between Siblings," 703.

⁴⁷ B. Sot. 43b.

between adopted siblings⁴⁸ and consequently marriage should be considered forbidden as a rabbinic enactment.⁴⁹

The challenge to this ruling emerges from the family dynamic in which two children from separate biological parents, join the adopted family as young adults. They did not build the emotional and educational relationships with one another throughout their childhood, as children who were adopted at infancy; instead they met as young adults. There is ongoing debate at the CJLS as to whether they, under these circumstances, may be permitted to marry one another at the legally appropriate age.

Open Adoptions Vs. Closed Adoption

The consistent concern for modern decisors, namely Rabbi Moses Feinstein,⁵⁰ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and Rabbi Gedalya Felder⁵¹ is, where possible, the adoption should be an open adoption. In other words, adoptive parents and adopted children should know the birth parents' identities. For Feinstein and Felder the central concern is that without knowing the identities of his/her biological family members, the adopted child could come to unknowingly enter into an intimate relationship with a blood relative, sibling or otherwise.⁵² Adoptions within the United States are predominantly closed adoptions, but Soloveitchik encouraged adoptive parents who did have information on the birth parents to share that information with the adopted child.⁵³

Felder's, Soloveitchik's, and Feinstein's approach to open adoptions does take every precaution to ensure that there will not be cases of unknowingly engaging in incest, which, of course, is an important yet unlikely concern of future relationships. However, their approach does not take into account the psychological implications of adoption, especially the adopted child's feelings toward his/her biological parents.⁵⁴ When adopted children seek out their biological parent, it often can produce less than desirable results.⁵⁵ Because most adoptions in the United States are

⁴⁸ "...even if their biological parents are four separate people, all different from the social parents." Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 79.

⁴⁹ "The emotional and educational relationships among the members of the family are sufficiently strong to apply the category of secondary relations (*sheniyot*)...to adopted children...sexual relations between them should be seen as incest of the second degree, and consequently their marriage to each other would be forbidden as a rabbinic enactment." Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 78-79.

⁵⁰ Iggrot Moshe, 1; Sh.A., YD 162.

⁵¹ See Rabbi Gedaliah Felder, *Nahalat Zvi*, vol. I, 35-49.

⁵² When adoptions were all closed adoptions in the United Kingdom, there was a communal central registry that people would check before getting married to ensure they were not marrying siblings/family members.

⁵³ "There is no need to withhold from the adopted child information concerning his or her natural parents." Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, ed. David Shatz and Joel Wolowelsky (New York: Meorot Harav Foundation, 2003), 61.

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive discussion on the psychological implications of adoption, see Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 110-111.

⁵⁵ "The child may be deeply disappointed in the reality, as against the dream, of the kind of human beings the biological parents are; the biological parents may find being discovered by the child after all of these years as most

closed adoptions, it is at the adoptive parent's discretion if he/she/they wish to take the steps necessary to discover the identity of the birth parent/s. Adoptive parents should take into consideration the concern for potential future intimate relationships, but equally the concern for their and their adopted child's psychological well being, when considering pursuing the birth parents' identities and information.

Relationship with Biological Parents

Beyond the laws of inheritance, the biological child retains the obligation to honor and respect their Jewish biological parent. According to Rabbi Dr. Joel Rembaum, adopted and converted children have different halakhic obligations toward their non-Jewish biological parents:⁵⁶

It can be demonstrated that, while a גר (*Ger*) is not obligated to fulfill the commandment to honor parents, the overwhelming majority of halakhic authorities who deal with this issue expect גרים (*Gerim*) to show respect for their non-Jewish parents and desist from demeaning them. Such acts of respect would include visiting them when they are ill. According to certain authorities the reason for this is הכרת טובה (*Hakarat Tovah*), 'recognition of goodness' the parents generated for their children. Others simply recognize that common sense dictates that respect be shown by גרים (*Gerim*) to their non-Jewish parents.⁵⁷

Importantly, Rembaum points out: "...the גרים (*Gerim*) -parent relationship is viewed as continuing to be viable."⁵⁸ In either circumstance, i.e., whether the biological parent is Jewish or not Jewish,⁵⁹ the adopted child is expected to show respect for his/her biological parents.

Under certain circumstances, a child may sever ties with his or her biological parent. According to Rabbi Dorff:⁶⁰ "Within the dictates of Jewish law Jews may withhold love from their parents, either for cause or just as a function of the personalities involved, and if the cause is severe

unwelcome, making the child feel rejected yet again; and the social parents in turn may feel inadequate as parents, that they never succeeded in overcoming the lack of a biological relationship between them and the child despite years of love and effort." Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death*, 111.

⁵⁶ See Rabbi Dr. Joel Rembaum's teshuvah approved by the CJLS, "Converts Mourning the Deaths of Close Relatives," *Respona 1991-2000: The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement*, 431-438.

⁵⁷ Rembaum cites Rabbi Etan Shikli's unpublished paper in response to the question: "From the perspective of halakhah may a devout Jewish woman ask her husband-to-be who is a convert to Judaism to sever all ties with his gentile family, or is he still obliged to honor his parents and is this obligation contrary to halakhah?" 10-16 (Hebrew), submitted to Rabbi David Golinkin in Jerusalem, 1 Adar, 5751.

⁵⁸ Rembaum, "Converts Mourning the Deaths of Close Relatives," 433.

⁵⁹ Or status is completely unknown.

⁶⁰ Rabbi Dr. Elliot Dorff, *Love Your Neighbor and Yourself: A Jewish Approach to Modern Personal Ethics*. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2006. Print), 173.

enough, they may even be released from the command to honor and respect them.”⁶¹ However in many cases, neither the rights and obligations of the child toward his or her biological parents, nor their obligations towards him/her are affected by adoption.⁶²

If the biological parent of the adopted child is Jewish, that presents us with two unique concerns and possibilities, namely kohenic and levitical status, and decisions regarding child’s matronymic/s/patronymic/s. Regarding kohenic and levitical status, the child will maintain the status of his/her biological father. The adopted child’s kohenic or levitical status is dependent upon the status of the biological father and not the adoptive parent. Therefore, if the child’s biological father is an Israelite and his/her adoptive father/s is/are (a) Kohen/Kohanim, the child will remain an Israelite; the converse is also true.

Renunciation of the Adoption

Throughout this responsum, much of the halakhic literature cited deals with ensuring the care and growth of an adopted child. The legal tradition has long understood the familial relationship’s tremendous impact on a child’s health and development. Therefore, a child should not face halakhic obstacles in joining an adoptive family. Given the value the tradition placed on caring for orphans, it is apparent that the tradition views integrating a child into a loving family unit, as a great gift.

However, family dynamics are complicated and there may be children who wish to abrogate the parent-child relationship with their adoptive parent/s. In such cases the family will need to take steps either as a family and/or in conjunction with a counselor/family therapist to improve the relationship. To improve the health of the relationship, hopefully, to a point at which adoptive parents and their adopted children want to affirm with confidence and love.

There is not a mechanism along the lines of a “*parental get*,” “*parental divorce document*” for adoptive parents and adopted children. However, if the child is endangered by the adoptive parent/s, children and family members are highly encouraged to reach out to their local authorities and/or Department of Child Safety. If a family court finds the adoptive parent/s no longer “fit” to raise his/her/their adoptive child, the relationship may be abrogated. As stated earlier, under certain circumstances a child may abrogate his/her relationship with his/her parents.⁶³

⁶¹ See Rembaum, “Converts Mourning the Death of Close Individuals.” Rembaum posits that the command to honor parents is not incumbent upon *geirim*, only the command to respect parents.

⁶² See Sh.A., EH 82, Pithei Teshuvah 7.

⁶³ Pg 15.

Once the court awards the final decree of adoption, adoption cannot be undone, which includes the Jewish adoption.⁶⁴ After all, we could not have a statutorily adopted child considered by the American courts to be permanently the child of the adoptive parents who ceases to be the Jewish child of those same adoptive parents. This is true, unless DCS or the court finds the parents to be “unfit,” and remove the child from the adoptive parent’s custody. In those cases the Jewish adoption can and must be rescinded. There are no formal documents or formulations to abrogate the relationship. If the parent illustrates abusive, neglectful, destructive, or illegal behaviors, the court may abrogate the relationship on behalf of the child.⁶⁵

For cases in which a child seeks to abrogate the relationship without parental abuse, neglect, destructive, or illegal behavior, we highly encourage rabbis to direct these families to professional family counselors.

Rabbinic Concerns About the Family Status of Adopted Children

Below, we will review the primary rabbinic concerns about considering adopted children equal in halakhic status and obligations to that of biological children. The two notable issues with which the poskim wrestle are: 1) inheritance; 2) the irreplaceable biological relationship between parents and children.

Inheritance:

The subject with which Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Eisenstadt (c. 1812-1868), author of Pithei Teshuvah, takes issue is that of assigning inheritance to non biological children. He writes:

...כשיש לו בנים של עצמו, אזי חושש טובא שלא יבוא מזה טעות והפסד להפקיע בניו מנחלתו,
וחזקה לא שביק אינש בריה ויהיב לאחריני, ולכן שטר שנכתב כן פסול...

...If a person has natural children, they should take good care to avoid any error and loss that could arise from diminishing their inheritance [to their children].

There is a legal presumption that a person does not put aside their children and give to another. Hence, any document purporting to do so will be invalid...⁶⁶

Eisenstadt posits that an adoptive parent cannot bequeath his/her estate to non-biological children. However, there is textual evidence to the contrary. The adoptive parent/s may bequeath their estate to the adopted child, either through adopting the child in civil court or writing of a

⁶⁴ Unless there is significant reason for authorities to remove the child from their adoptive home and rescind the adoptive parents’ parental rights and authority, for the safety and wellbeing of the child.

⁶⁵ This includes physical and/or emotional abuse.

⁶⁶ Pithei Teshuvah, HM 42:13.

will.⁶⁷ Furthermore, this does not negate the adopted child's right to his/her inheritance from his/her biological parents. As stated by Alfred Cohen in *Halacha and Contemporary Society*:

All this [referring to adoptive parents bequeathing their estate to their adopted child], moreover, does not in any way affect the rights of the adopted child with respect to his inheritance from his natural parents. Rambam writes [M.T., Hilkhot Naḥlot, Laws of Inheritance, 6:1] that the language of the Torah 'and the law of inheritance shall be unto the Children of Israel a statute of judgment'⁶⁸ implies that this has a religious connotation and is not merely a civil matter.⁶⁹

The Teudat Immutz is not a mechanism by which we can establish the adopted child's inheritance from his/her adoptive parents in civil law. This must be done either through a will or as a product of statutory adoption.⁷⁰ We consider issues of inheritance to fall under the category of *Dina d'Malkhuta Dina, the law of the land is the law*.⁷¹

Biological:

Poskim like Soloveitchik, maintain biological relationships between biological parents and children can never be replaced or replicated through adoption because medically/biologically there can only be one set of parents, through whatever means of modern impregnation and/or relationships. Soloveitchik writes:

Judaism did not recognize the Roman institution of adoption since the Roman concept is directed toward substituting a legal fiction for a biological fact and thus creating the illusion of a natural relationship between the foster parents and the adopted son.⁷²

⁶⁷ "Melech Schachter cites the authority of Chaim Hezekiah Medini (nineteenth-twentieth century, Israel, Crimea) to posit that "adopting a child through a civil court may be considered equivalent to the writing of a will." Cohen, *Halacha and Contemporary Society*, 33.

⁶⁸ "If his father had no brothers, you shall assign his property to his nearest relative in his own clan and he shall inherit it. This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites, in accordance with the Lord's command of Moses." Numbers 27:11.

⁶⁹ Cohen, *Halacha and Contemporary Society*, 33.

⁷⁰ See "Various Aspects Of Adoption," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, 4 (Fall 1982): 93–110; reprinted in Alfred S. Cohen, ed., *Halacha and Contemporary Society* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1984). "As for the question of inheritance, in the absence of a will, no one has a right to inherit the estate of an adoptive parent in preference to blood relations. However, everyone has a right to bequeath his possessions to anyone he desires. Adopting a child through a civil court may be considered equivalent to the writing of a will, bequeathing to the adopted child his entire estate or a proportionate percentage thereof."

⁷¹ The concept of דינא דמלכותא דינא, *the law of the land is the law*, is developed in b. Nedarim 28a, Gittin 10b, Baba Kama 113a, Baba Batra 54b and 55a.

⁷² Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, 60-61.

This is best evidenced by the fact that social constructions, like kohenic and levitical statuses, are passed on exclusively from the biological father, which a social father cannot subvert. Even in cases that the adoptive father is a kohen or levi, this is not transmitted to the adopted child. Cases in which the relationship between a biological Jewish father who is a Kohen and his son/daughter is abrogated, the child will retain his/her kohenic identity, whether he/she chooses to include this title in their Hebrew name or not.

Yes, one cannot biologically replace the natural parents through adoption, but the consequences of the social relationship are equal to those of the biological relationship. Biologically, a child will remain the son/daughter of his/her biological parents, but we know that adoptive parents are the “real” parents of adopted children in some of the most significant ways, toward which the textual tradition points us.

Thus far we have addressed the biblical and halakhic history of Jewish adoption, the halakhic concerns and issues that accompany adoption, and the nature of the halakhic adoptive familial relationship. The following is the Teudat Immutz, the explanation of the Teudat Immutz, and the ritual and pastoral components that accompany the Teudat Immutz.

Choice of Name, “Teudat Immutz,” שטר אימוץ

The term אימוץ, *immutz*, is the term the Israeli courts designated to the practice of Israeli statutory adoption.⁷³ Therefore, this author selected the words תעודת אימוץ, *Teudat Immutz*, to represent the nature of the document as a formal record of adoption. Additionally the root אמץ (*ammatz*) has the connotation of strength - certainly a parental quality that accompanies adoption.⁷⁴

The Teudat Immutz is comprised of the following elements:

- Personal statement accepting parental obligations.
- Signature of parent/s.
- For children who have reached the age of majority: Personal statement accepting filial obligations.
- For children who have reached the age of majority: Signature of child.
- Paragraph that describes: the date and place of record, intention of the document, identification of the parties entering into the agreement, and petitionary prayer.

⁷³ The “Adoption of Children Act of 1981,” Israel’s first laws established for the act of statutory adoption within Israel, designates אימוץ as the legal Hebrew word for adoption, *Hok Immutz Yeladim* - 1981. See, <www.psakdin.co.il/Law/1981-א-התשמ>. For more information on adoption within Israel, see: <http://www.family-laws.co.il/other-topics-adoption-minors>. Israeli statutory adoption is similar to the American adoption process, namely neither of which include a religious component. Rather, both processes focus solely on the familial and statutory consequences of the adoption.

⁷⁴ Yarden, "Adoption in Judaism," 278.

- Signature of two kosher witnesses.⁷⁵

Teudat Immutz Accompanying Ritual

The ritual is comprised of two essential steps and an optional third step:

1. The completion of the Teudat Immutz.
2. The witnessed reading and signing of the Teudat Immutz.
3. Public welcoming of the adopted child to the community (optional).

The Teudat Immutz serves as the formal conclusion to the statutory adoption process, following the award of the final decree of adoption.

This proposed timing is appropriate because, in certain cases, before a final decree of adoption is submitted, a child can be removed from the potential adoptive parent's/s' custody and placed back in the custody of the biological parent/s.⁷⁶ This happens rarely, but it is still a possibility, and we do not desire adoptive parents to be halakhically bound to a child of whom they are no longer considered parents.

Most adopted children must undergo conversion, which can occur prior to the final decree of adoption, on the condition that the adoptive family receives the explicit permission of the court to do so. The conversion procedures must be completed before, or concurrently with, the Teudat Immutz rituals. Adoptive parents can choose to begin conversion procedures, namely *brit milah/hatafat dam brit* and/or *mikvah*, soon after they receive temporary custody of the adopted child, but we prefer adoptive parents to delay mikvah for both males and female until after they have received the final decree of adoption.⁷⁷

If the court gives the adoptive family permission to ritually circumcise the adopted male in time for the circumcision to take place on the eighth day of life, prior to awarding the final decree of adoption, the adoptive parent/s should proceed with the circumcision on the eighth day of life, or as soon thereafter as possible.

⁷⁵ For guide to kosher witnesses, see Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, 394. Additionally, see the teshuvah approved by the CJLS ruling: "An otherwise qualified woman is eligible to serve as a witness in all matters equally with a man, for kiddushin, gittin, giyur or in any capacity governed by halakhah, evidentiary or affective." https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/geller_womenedut.pdf

⁷⁶ Some states allow the biological parent/s to rescind his/her/their decision to terminate parental rights for a variety of reasons within a specified time. In other states, once the biological parent forgoes their parental rights, it can never be reestablished.

⁷⁷ For comprehensive conversion procedures for adopted and patrilineal children, i.e., circumcision, immersion, naming, see Rabbi Dr. Avram Israel Reisner's teshuvah approved by the CJLS, titled "On the Conversion of Adopted and Patrilineal Children." *Responsa 1986-1990: The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement*, 157-183.

Part One of the Adoption Ritual: Completing the Teudat Immutz.

The rabbi must accurately complete the information in the Teudat Immutz. It is to be noted that in the opening paragraph of the Hebrew teudah, the rabbi will insert the Hebrew transliteration of the child's English name. Example: for a child named Nancy Smith.

הרינו מקבלים עלינו לקיים את כל חובות ומצוות האבות והאמהות המוטלות על הורים יהודים לגבי ננסי סמית.

Following this paragraph is the line in which the rabbi will insert the child's novel Hebrew name, to reflect the matronymic/s/patronymic/s of the adoptive parents. Example: for the child mentioned above who received the Hebrew name *Leah*, adopted by two parents with the Hebrew names *Tzvi* and *Rachel*.

ויקרא שמה בישראל לאה בת צבי ורחל.

The remainder of the teudah is to be completed according to its internal instructions.

To enhance the beauty of this ritual, it is possible to employ a calligrapher to decoratively write the Teudat Immutz. A proposed addition to the document would be to insert a preamble that describes the family's journey to becoming an adoptive family. The preamble might include: a description of their relationship, their shared history, and what they hope to accomplish as a family.

Regarding Matronymic/s/Patronymic/s

We insert the Hebrew names of the parents and child into the Teudat Immutz. If the child is adopted under the age of majority, that child's Hebrew name most often contains the adoptive parents' patronymic/s/matronymic/s. However, if the adoptive parent/s choose/s not to include his/her/their patronymic/s/matronymic/s in the child's Hebrew name, either out of respect for the biological parents or for some other personal reason, we do not require them to do so. In either situation, the chosen name should be used throughout the Teudat Immutz.

If the child is born to a Jewish mother (and Jewish father if applicable) and the status of the natural parent/s is/are known, an adoptive family may consider including the phrase: "*she nolad l,*" "*who was born to,*" in the adopted child's matronymic/s/patronymic/s after the adoptive parent/s' matronyms/patronyms to honor the birth parent/s.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ This would be most common in cases in which the natural parent/s died.

If a child is adopted over the age of majority and the family chooses together to include the child's adoptive parents' patronymic/s/matronymic/s, the adopted child should use the adoptive parents' patronymic/s/matronymic/s throughout the Teudat Immutz.⁷⁹

As noted earlier, the child will not inherit the appellation of priestly or levitic descent, Kohen or Levi.⁸⁰ However, if the parent is a Kohen or Levi, this appellation should be included in the parent's' Hebrew name. If the adopted child's biological father is a Kohen or Levi, the child will maintain that status and the appropriate appellation should be included in the child's Hebrew name.

If conversion takes place prior to final decree of adoption:

If the parent/s choose/s to begin conversion procedure prior to receiving the final decree of adoption, the rabbi will complete the conversion documents using the patronymic/matronymic "*Ben/Bat Avraham v'Sarah.*" Once the family receives the final decree of adoption, the rabbi will complete the Teudat Immutz using the preferred patronymic/s/matronymic/s of the adoptive parent/s. Then, the family will begin the Teudat Immutz rituals, as outlined below.

If conversion takes place after receiving the final decree of adoption:

If the adoptive parent/s choose/s to delay conversion procedures until after he/she/they receive/s the final decree of adoption, the rabbi will complete the conversion documents and Teudat Immutz reflecting the adoptive family's chosen patronymic/s/matronymic/s for the child. Then, the family will begin the Teudat Immutz rituals, as outlined below.

Parts Two and Three of the Adoption Ritual: The Witnessed Reading and Signing of the Teudat Immutz, and the Public Recognition of the Adoption

It is for parts two and three of the Teudat Immutz rituals that we must take into consideration the age of the child and if the child must undergo conversion procedures. The age of the adopted child plays a role in how the rabbi should proceed ritually with the Teudat Immutz. After assessing the status of the family, the rabbi should proceed as such:

Infant/child in need of conversion

If the child is a male, and the court has given its permission for the family to proceed with ritual circumcision, adoptive parents should ensure the child is circumcised as close to the eighth day of life as possible.

⁷⁹ Regarding the adoptive parents' patronymic/s/matronymic/s, if the child is adopted over the age of majority, the family and the adopted child should decide on how to proceed with the child's Hebrew name, together.

⁸⁰ Pg 18.

In cases of adopted males and females, we prefer that the family wait to proceed with mikvah until they receive the final decree of adoption. Once they receive the final decree of adoption, the family will visit the mikvah and proceed as such:

The rabbi will oversee traditional conversion procedures. Following immersion, the adopted infant/child and his/her adoptive parent/s who held the infant/child during immersion are to be dressed and join those present outside of the mikvah proper. The rabbi will complete the Teudat Immutz, following which the adoptive parent/s will read the “Parent” portion aloud and sign on the designated line/s. Then the two witnesses will read the “Witnesses” portion aloud and each sign on the designated lines.

The rabbi will then recite the “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”⁸¹ Finally, the adoptive parent/s will place his/her/their hands on the adopted child’s head, and offer the child the traditional parental blessings given to children on Shabbat evenings, the *Priestly Blessings*.⁸² This concludes the Teudat Immutz ritual.⁸³

Infant/child born Jewish or underwent conversion prior to the adoption

It is in cases of infants/children born Jewish or those who completed the conversion procedures prior to adoption that the Teudat Immutz provides a Jewish ritual to accompany the statutory adoption, which might have otherwise been absent of Jewish ritual.

If the adopted infant/child was born Jewish or underwent conversion prior to the adoption, the signing and ritual of the Teudat Immutz can take place privately in the home or publicly at the synagogue at any point, after receiving the final decree of adoption, except on *Shabbatot* and *Chagim*.

If the family chooses to celebrate the growth of their family with a *simhat bat*, in cases of adopted females, or a formal announcement of the child’s Hebrew name, in cases of adopted males, the Teudat Immutz can accompany those rituals.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2013. Print), 440. Also, on page 34, of this paper.

⁸² Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2013. Print), 75. Also, on page 33, of this paper.

⁸³ Please note, a beit din will be gathered to witness the immersion, but the Teudat Immutz does not require the presence or authority of a beit din. Rather only two witnesses who are Jewish, not related to the adoptive parents or the adopted child, and who witnessed the signing of the Teudat Immutz must be present. Two members of the beit din can serve as the witnesses to the Teudat Immutz.

⁸⁴ Rank, Perry Raphael., and Gordon M. Freeman. :The Rabbinical Assembly Rabbi’s Manual. (New York, NY: Assembly, 1998. Print), A-9-A10.

Following the formal naming procedures, the rabbi will complete the Teudat Immutz, following which the adoptive parent/s will read the “Parent” portion aloud and sign on the designated line/s. Then the two witnesses will read the “Witnesses” portion aloud and each sign on the designated lines. The rabbi will then recite the “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*” Finally, the adoptive parent/s will join the child, place his/her/their hands on the child’s head, and offer the child the traditional parental blessings given to children on Shabbat evenings, the *Priestly Blessings*.

Middle-School or High-School Age Children Over the Age of Majority

There are children whom families statutorily adopt at the middle-school or high-school age. Adoption at this age typically follows a long term familial relationship originating from some form of foster care or step-parenthood. Additionally, because infants are the most sought after children for adoption, there are organizations that seek to encourage, assist, and enable families to adopt children who are beyond infant age. If the adopted child is of middle-school or high-school age (at or over the age of majority), the rabbi should encourage the parent/s to proceed with the the Teudat Immutz rituals as close to the conclusion of the statutory adoption and conversion procedures (if needed) as possible. Thereby, ensuring that for any forthcoming Jewish ritual honors, the child will be recognized by the Hebrew name that reflects the matronymic/s/patronymic/s of his/her adoptive parents.

The witnessed signing can be done at any point following the final decree of adoption, but may not be signed on *Shabbatot* and *Chagim*. Because the adopted child is over the age of majority, he/she will also have the opportunity to sign the Teudat Immutz. It is for these cases that there is a separate Teudat Immutz from the standard version that includes a statement and space for the child’s signature.⁸⁵

The rabbi will complete the Teudat Immutz, following which the adoptive parent/s will read the “Parent” portion aloud and sign on the designated line/s. Then the adopted child will read the “Child” portion aloud and sign on the designated line. Finally, the two witnesses will read the “Witnesses” portion aloud and each sign on the designated lines. The rabbi will then recite the “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*” Finally, the adoptive parent/s will join the child, place his/her/their hands on the child’s head, and offer the child the traditional parental blessings given to children on Shabbat evenings, the *Priestly Blessings*. This concludes the signing of the Teudat Immutz and its accompanying rituals. The following proposed rituals are optional.

⁸⁵ See pages 31 and 32 of this paper.

In all of the aforementioned cases, if (an) adoptive parent/s would like to sign the teudah prior to receiving the final decree of adoption, he/she/they may do so, but this is not ideal.⁸⁶

Public welcoming of the adopted infant/child/child at or over the age of majority (optional)

As the conversion and adoption rituals will most likely be conducted in the privacy of the mikvah or home, we encourage the parents to come to the synagogue with the child to receive an honor, and thus introduce the adopted child to the greater community. At the community's Shabbat service subsequent to the signing of the Teudat Immutz, the rabbi can call the parents to stand in the presence of an open *aron kodesh* for a "Welcoming Ceremony For a Minor."⁸⁷ Following which, the adoptive parent/s will place his/her/their hands on their adopted child's head, and offer the child the traditional parental blessings, the *Priestly Blessings*. Importantly, the family should be consulted prior to any public recognition if they would like the rabbi to publicly acknowledge the adoption.

פסק - Ruling

1. A statutorily adopted child can be considered equal in familial obligations and halakhic status to that of a biological child. However, because the biological ties to the natural father cannot be subverted, the adopted child cannot receive the kohenic or levitical status of the adoptive father.

2a. Halakhah accepts the ruling of a court with sovereignty in the local jurisdiction in establishing the financial ties within a family between an adoptive parent and adopted child.

2b. The Teudat Immutz extends this financial connection to matters of religious obligation, binding the parent to provide the child with religious education and other ritual matters, and the child to honor and respect the parent according to Jewish law.

3. We strongly recommend that adoptive families proceed with the Teudat Immutz and accompanying rituals. However, there are various ways of establishing a relationship within a community, and there is no implication that this is the exclusive mechanism. Additionally, this

⁸⁶ Using the example of the groom who binds himself to the financial obligations of the ketubah prior to the marriage, we understand that one may sign a document that records a change in status prior to the change itself: "A groom may quite properly bind himself to the financial obligations of the ketubah even prior to his marriage, The obligation is, quite understandable, conditioned upon the solemnization of the marriage as indicated by the text of the ketubah itself, but subsequent to the marriage all financial obligations become binding retroactively." Rabbi J. David Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems (Vol. IV)*. (New Jersey: KTAV Pub., 1995.), 376-377. See also, Tosafot, Baba Metzia, 17a.

⁸⁷ Rabbi's Manual, J-35. Also, on page 35, of this paper.

paper in no way calls into question or compromises the halakhic status of previously statutorily adopted children.⁸⁸

The Teudat Immutz procedures are as follows:

For adopted males under age of majority not born Jewish:

1. Family is awarded temporary custody of adopted male infant/child.
2. Family receives permission from the court to proceed with conversion process, including *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*. If family does not receive permission to proceed with *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*, they must wait until they receive the final decree of adoption.
3. If the family receives permission from the court, they should proceed with *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*. Otherwise, *brit milah/hatafat dam brit* will take place after receiving the final decree of adoption.
4. Family receives final decree of adoption.
5. Mikvah (and *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*, if not yet done).
6. Conversion ritual and documents.
7. Rabbi completes the Teudat Immutz using the necessary information and appropriate matronymic/s/patronymic/s.
8. Parent/s read/s “Parent” portion aloud and sign/s on designated line/s.
9. Two kosher witnesses read “Witnesses” section aloud and sign on designated lines.
10. Rabbi recites “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”
11. Parent/s place/s hands on child’s head and recite/s Priestly Blessings.
12. Public welcoming of the adopted child (optional).

For adopted females under age of majority not born Jewish:

1. Family is awarded temporary custody of adopted female infant/child.
2. Family receives final decree of adoption.
3. Mikvah for conversion.
4. Conversion ritual and documents.
5. Rabbi completes the Teudat Immutz using the necessary information and appropriate matronymic/s/patronymic/s.

⁸⁸ I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Rabbi Susan Grossman, Rabbi Dr. Pamela Barmash, Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner, Rabbi Robert Scheinberg, and Rabbi Dr. Reuven Hammer for their suggestions, guidance, and comments, Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Cohen, Rabbi Jonathan Lubliner, Rabbi Deborah Silver, and Rabbi Dr. Gail Labovitz for their assistance with translations and edits to the teudah, and especially to Rabbi Daniel Nevins for his crafting of the Teudat Immutz’s structure and language, in addition to his inspiring recommendations found throughout this paper. I would like to also extend my sincerest gratitude to Rabbi Dr. Elliot Dorff for his encouragement to compose this teshuvah and its accompanying ritual and to submit this work to the CJLS. Thank you to Rabbi Gary Ezra Oren and Rabbi Cheryl Peretz for their expertise on an earlier version of the Teudat Immutz.

6. Parent/s read/s “Parent” portion aloud and sign/s on designated line/s.
7. Two kosher witnesses read “Witnesses” section aloud and sign on designated lines.
8. Rabbi recites “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”
9. Parent/s place/s hands on child’s head and recite/s Priestly Blessings.
10. Public welcoming of the adopted child (optional).

For adopted males and females under the age of majority born Jewish or underwent conversion:

1. Family is awarded temporary custody of adopted female boy/child.
2. Family receives final decree of adoption.
3. Rabbi completes the Teudat Immutz using the necessary information and appropriate matronymic/s/patronymic/s.
4. Parent/s read/s “Parent” portion aloud and sign/s on designated line/s.
5. Two kosher witnesses read “Witnesses” section aloud and sign on designated lines.
6. Rabbi recites “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”
7. Parent/s place/s hands on child’s head and recite/s Priestly Blessings.
8. Public welcoming of the adopted child (optional).

For adopted males at or over the age of majority not born Jewish:

1. Family is awarded temporary custody of adopted male.
2. Family receives permission from the court to proceed with conversion process, including *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*. If family does not receive permission to proceed with *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*, they must wait until they receive the final decree of adoption.
3. If the family receives permission from the court, they should proceed with *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*. Otherwise, *brit milah/hatafat dam brit* will take place after receiving the final decree of adoption.
4. Family receives final decree of adoption.
5. Mikvah (and *brit milah/hatafat dam brit*, if not yet done).
6. Conversion ritual and documents.
7. Rabbi completes the Teudat Immutz using the necessary information and appropriate matronymic/s/patronymic/s.
8. Parent/s read/s “Parent” portion aloud and sign/s on designated line/s.
9. Child reads “Child” portion aloud and signs on designated line.
10. Two kosher witnesses read “Witnesses” section aloud and sign on designated lines.
11. Rabbi recites “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”
12. Parent/s place/s hands on child’s head and recite/s Priestly Blessings.
13. Public welcoming of the adopted child (optional).

For adopted females at or over the age of majority not born Jewish:

1. Family is awarded temporary custody of adopted female.
2. Family receives final decree of adoption.
3. Mikvah.
4. Conversion ritual and documents.
5. Rabbi completes the Teudat Immutz using the necessary information and appropriate matronymic/s/patronymic/s.
9. Parent/s read/s “Parent” portion aloud and sign/s on designated line/s.
10. Child reads “Child” portion aloud and signs on designated line.
11. Two kosher witnesses read “Witnesses” section aloud and sign on designated lines.
12. Rabbi recites “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”
13. Parent/s place/s hands on child’s head and recite/s Priestly Blessings.
14. Public welcoming of the adopted child (optional).

For adopted males and females at or over the age of majority born Jewish:

1. Family is awarded temporary custody of adopted male/female.
2. Family receives final decree of adoption.
3. Rabbi completes the Teudat Immutz using the necessary information and appropriate matronymic/s/patronymic/s.
4. Parent/s read/s “Parent” portion aloud and sign/s on designated line/s.
5. Child reads “Child” portion aloud and signs on designated line.
6. Two kosher witnesses read “Witnesses” section aloud and sign on designated line.
7. Rabbi recites “Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption, *Mi Shebeirach l’Ben me’Umatz o’ l’Bat me’Umetzet.*”
8. Parent/s place/s hands on child’s head and recite/s Priestly Blessings.
9. Public welcoming of the adopted child (optional).

תעודת אימוץ לקטן/קטנה

האב/אם/אבות/אמהות

הריני/ו מקבל/ת/ים/ות עלי/נו לקיים את כל חובות ומצוות האבות והאמהות המוטלות על הורים יהודים לגבי _____
הרי הוא/היא בני/בתי/בננו/בתנו לכל דבר מן היום הזה והלאה.

ויקרא שמו/שמה בישראל _____ בן/בת _____ (ו) _____.

חתימת האב/אם/אבות/אמהות _____ (ו) _____

מעידים אנו, חתומי מטה, שביום _____ בשבת _____ לחודש _____ שנת חמשת אלפים

ושבע מאות _____ לבריאת עולם כאן ב _____

ש _____ בן/בת _____

(ו) _____ בן/בת _____ (אמץ/ה/ו לו/לה/להם/להן לבן/בת את

הקטן/קטנה _____ בן/בת _____) (ו) _____, וקבל/ה/ו על

עצמו/ה/ם/ן את כל החובות המוטלות על אבות ואמהות לגבי בניהם ובנותיהם בין מדיני ישראל ובין ממנהגי זמנינו. יהי

רצון מלפני ה' שיזכה/תזכה/יזכו/תזכו האב/אם/אבות/אמהות לגדלו/ה באהבה

את _____ בן/בת _____ (ו) _____ לתורה, לחופה,

ולמעשים טובים.

חתימת העדים

נאום _____ עד _____

נאום _____ עד _____

Record of Adoption for a Minor Child

The Parent/s

Behold I/we accept upon myself/ourselves the obligations incumbent upon parents regarding (name of child)_____. He/she is my child in all matters, from this day forward.

(First Parent's Signature) _____

(Second Parent's Signature if applicable) _____

We the undersigned testify that on this ___ day of the week, the ___ day of the month of _____, in the year 57___, corresponding to the ___ day of the month of _____, 20___, in _____ (city, state) that (name of parent/s)_____ (and _____) formally adopted this child (name of child) _____. He/she/they accepted the obligations incumbent upon parents in accordance with the laws of the people Israel and the customs of our times. May it be God's will that the father/mother/parents be privileged to lovingly raise his/her/their child to a life of Torah, to *huppah*, and to *ma'asim tovim*, good deeds.

Signature of the Witnesses

(Witnessed by)_____

(Witnessed by)_____

תעודת אימוץ למבוגר/מבוגרת

האב/אם/אבות/אמהות

הריני/ו מקבל/ת/ים/ות עלי/נו לקיים את כל חובות ומצוות האבות והאמהות המוטלות על הורים יהודים לגבי _____
הרי הוא/היא בני/בתי/בננו/בתנו לכל דבר מן היום הזה והלאה.

ויקרא שמו/שמה בישראל _____ בן/בת _____ (ו) _____.

חתימת האב/אם/אבות/אמהות _____ (ו) _____

הבן/בת

הריני מקבל/ת עלי לקיים את כל חובות ומצוות הבנים והבנות המוטלות על בנים לגבי _____
בן/בת _____ (ו) _____ בן/בת _____ . הרי הוא/היא/הם/הן
אבי/אמי/אבותי/אמהות שלי לכל דבר מן היום הזה והלאה.

חתימת הבן/בת _____

מעידים אנו, חתומי מטה, שביום _____ בשבת _____ לחודש _____ שנת חמשת אלפים
ושבע מאות _____ לבריאת עולם כאן ב _____

ש _____ בן/בת _____

(ו) _____ בן/בת _____ (אמץ/ה/ו לו/לה/להם/להן לבן/בת את

המבוגר/מבוגרת _____ בן/בת _____ (ו) _____), וקבל/ה/ו

על עצמו/ה/ם/ן את כל החובות המוטלות על אבות ואמהות לגבי בניהם ובנותיהם בין מדיני ישראל ובין ממנהגי זמנינו.

יהי רצון מלפני ה' שיזכה/תזכה/יזכו/תזכו האב/אם/אבות/אמהות לגדלו/ה באהבה

את _____ בן/בת _____ (ו) _____ לתורה, לחופה,

ולמעשים טובים.

חתימת העדים

נאום _____ עד _____

נאום _____ עד _____

Record of Adoption for a Child Who Has Reached the Age of Majority

The Parent/s

Behold I/we accept upon myself/ourselves the obligations incumbent upon parents regarding (name of child)_____. He/she is my child in all matters, from this day forward.

(First Parent’s Signature) _____

(Second Parent’s Signature if applicable) _____

The Child

Behold I accept upon myself the obligations incumbent upon children regarding (name of parent/s) _____ (and _____). He/she/they is/are my parent/s in all matters, from this day forward.

(Child’s Signature) _____

We the undersigned testify that on this ___ day of the week, the ___ day of the month of _____, in the year 57___, corresponding to the ___ day of the month of _____, 20___, in _____ (city, state) that (name of parent/s)_____ (and _____) formally adopted this child (name of child) _____. He/she/they accepted the obligations incumbent upon parents in accordance with the laws of the people Israel and the customs of our times. May it be God’s will that the father/mother/parents be privileged to lovingly raise his/her/their child to a life of Torah, to *huppah*, and to *ma’asim tovim*, good deeds.

Signature of the Witnesses

(Witnessed by)_____

(Witnessed by)_____

Mi Sheberakh Celebrating an Adoption

For a boy:

May the one who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bless _____ (name/s of parent/s) and this child _____ (name of child), whom they | he | she have received in their | his | her lives with open heart(s) and with great joy. May his parent(s) merit the ability to raise him in the covenant of the people Israel, to a life of Torah, to *huppah*, and to good deeds; with wisdom and knowledge of God; the love of kindness and reverence for heaven. Please God, give him insight to recognize the good, and a courageous heart to withstand life's tests, as well as the courage to seek justice and pursue peace. Protect him from injury and illness. Bless _____ (name of child), that we may merit to find joy in the light of his face. May this little child grow to full adulthood. And let us say: Amen.

For a girl:

May the one who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bless _____ (name/s of parent/s) and this child _____ (name of child), whom they | he | she have received in their | his | her lives with open heart(s) and with great joy. May her parent(s) merit the ability to raise her in the covenant of the people Israel, to a life of Torah, to *huppah*, and to good deeds; with wisdom and knowledge of God, the love of kindness and reverence for heaven. Please God, give her insight to recognize the good, and a courageous heart to withstand life's tests, as well as the courage to seek justice and pursue peace. Protect her from all injury and illness. Bless _____ (name of child), that we may merit to find joy in the light of her face. May this little child grow to full adulthood. And let us say: Amen.

מי שברך לבן מאמץ או לבת מאמצת

For a boy:

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם, יצחק ויעקב, וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת _____ (names of parent/s) וְאֶת הַיָּלֵד _____ (name of child) שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן | שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן | שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן

בְּחַפְזוֹ לֵב וּבִשְׂמֵחָה רַבָּה. יְזַכֵּנוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ | תּוֹמְנֵינוּ אֲמוֹתֵינוּ לְגִדּוֹל בְּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחוּנְהָ, לְחוּפָהּ, וּלְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים, לְחַיִּים מְלָאִים חֶסֶד וְדַעַת יְהוָה, לְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְלִירֵאת שְׁמַיִם. אֵינָּה יְהוָה, מִן לֹחֲבוֹתָ לְחַפְזֵי הַטּוֹב וְאֲמִיצֵית לֵב לְעִמּוּד בְּנִסְיוֹנוֹת הַחַיִּים, לְהִיות דּוֹרֵשׁ אֶדְק וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם. אֵינָּה יְהוָה, הַיְצִילֵהוּ מִכָּל־יָגַע וּמִחֶלֶה. בְּרַךְ אֶת _____ (name of child) וְנִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִנּוּ בּוֹ, וְנוֹפֵה בְּלִנּוּ לְשִׂמְחַת פְּאוּר פְּנִיָּו. זֶה הַקּוֹשֵׁן גְּדוֹל יְהוָה, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

For a girl:

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם, יצחק ויעקב, וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת _____ (names of parent/s) וְאֶת הַיָּלִידָה _____ (name of child) שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן | שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן | שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לְהִיטֵן

בְּחַפְזָּהּ לֵב וּבִשְׂמֵחָה רַבָּה. יְזַכֵּנוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ | תּוֹמְנֵינוּ אֲמוֹתֵינוּ לְגִדּוֹלָה בְּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחוּנְהָ, לְחוּפָהּ, וּלְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים, לְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְלִירֵאת שְׁמַיִם. אֵינָּה יְהוָה, מִן לֹחֲבוֹתָ לְחַפְזֵי הַטּוֹב וְאֲמִיצֵית לֵב לְעִמּוּד בְּנִסְיוֹנוֹת הַחַיִּים, לְהִיות דּוֹרֵשֶׁת אֶדְק וְרוֹדֵפֶת שְׁלוֹם. אֵינָּה יְהוָה, הַיְצִילֶהּ מִכָּל־יָגַע וּמִחֶלֶה. בְּרַךְ אֶת _____ (name of child) וְנִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִנּוּ בָּהּ, וְנוֹפֵה בְּלִנּוּ לְשִׂמְחַת פְּאוּר פְּנֵיהָ. זֶה הַקּוֹשֵׁתָה גְּדוֹלָה חַיִּיהָ, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

⁹⁰ Excerpted from Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals, p.440, with permission from the Rabbinical Assembly.

A WELCOMING CEREMONY FOR A MINOR

[The rabbi begins with an introductory prayer,
before an open ארון קודש:]

Our God and God of our ancestors, we thank You for Your many blessings. We thank You for the blessing of new life and for the birth of _____, whose parents have chosen to bring closer to You and Your people. We thank You for the gift of Your Torah, that has always been a light on our path, enhancing our life with meaning and helping us reflect the divine image in which we are created. We recall with reverence and gratitude Abraham and Sarah, who faithfully served You and who chose to bring their child, Isaac, to You, so that his descendants might embrace a life of Torah and *mitzvot*.

We ask You to grant Your blessings to _____ and _____, and their child _____, all of whom now stand before the ark of Your Torah. They stand before Your ark, as the people Israel stood at Sinai, choosing to teach their children about Your sovereignty and to bring them into a life of Torah and *mitzvot*. Strengthen these parents in their resolve. Help them to teach their child Your Torah. May the parents be privileged to raise their child to adulthood and may _____ enjoy the blessings of Torah, *huppah*, and a life of *ma'asim tovim*, good deeds.

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⁹¹ Excerpted from Rabbi's Manual, p. J-35, with permission from the Rabbinical Assembly.