



לזכות
הרה"ת ר' חיים וזוגתו מרת ביילא
בניהם ובנותיהם
מנחם מענדל, חי' מושקא, לוי יצחק,
חנה דינה, משה אליהו שיחיו
גרייזמאן



How to Adopt

The foundation for
a healthy relationship



This letter is addressed to Professor Ze'ev Falk, a prominent professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who was very involved in Jewish family law from a halachic perspective. The Rebbe addresses the question of whether adopted children should be told that they're adopted, demonstrating that from both a halachic and humanitarian standpoint, deceiving children in this way is extremely detrimental.

It is interesting to note that the Rebbe's opinion, which at the time was contrary to accepted practice (as the Rebbe details in the letter), has since become much more accepted in the scientific community. Studies have demonstrated that late discovery of adoption is highly detrimental to a child, and adoptive parents are routinely advised to tell their children that they are adopted at a young age—as soon as they're old enough to understand.

It should be noted that this letter concerns the Rebbe's opinion on whether children who have been adopted should be told that they're adopted. When it comes to questions regarding adopting in general, a Chassidische rav should be consulted. There are many other letters where the Rebbe addresses that topic.

22 Sivan 5725*

Mr. Ze'ev Falk,

Greetings and blessings!

In reply to your letter: It is needless for me to emphasize that the Shulchan Aruch has the final say in everything related to a Yid. The same applies to counsel and guidance; as long as one relies on Shulchan Aruch, one can give counsel and guidance for a Yid's life. If someone gives guidance that is not in keeping with Shulchan Aruch, it is not simply bad guidance—the person has disqualified himself from being a guide.

In other words, when someone asks me for guidance and I want to give honest advice, I must see what Shulchan Aruch says and follow that. For if I knew that Shulchan Aruch said something and yet I were to deviate from it, this would be the greatest form of deceit—for the person asking me advice is asking in the assumption that I am a Yid whose path is illuminated by Torah.

Therefore, when it comes to the question of contemporary adoption, in which the children are not told

that they are adopted—so that even if they wish to follow the Shulchan Aruch [with regards to the prohibitions of *yichud* and physical contact that apply to anyone who isn't a blood relative] they cannot do so under these circumstances—clearly, such adoption is forbidden by Torah. Since—as our *chachamim* tell us—“the Torah was given to benefit humankind,” it is clear that this approach is not good for the children or for the adoptive parents, not just in *Olam Haba*, but in this world as well.

The question of whether or not we logically understand how it is negative is secondary, for one cannot bring a logical argument when there is a clear directive from Shulchan Aruch. Since you're a doctor, I don't need to cite to you tens of proofs from the field of medicine, where treatments and medications are used based upon experience [that they work] rather than understanding [why they work]. The understanding follows afterwards, and there are things whose effectiveness we still don't understand, and yet they are nevertheless used—based upon trial and experience—with much success. This is on the positive side. The same applies to the negative: There are tens of examples from treatments for sick people, and even from the lifestyle choices of healthy people, that



when experience shows a certain action or a certain thing to be harmful, the doctors immediately announce that these lifestyle choices are detrimental, without waiting to understand at all; and certainly without waiting to fully understand what is the harmful component and how it is harmful.

Additionally, it is true about many aspects of Torah and mitzvos, that, as time goes on, the benefits of acting in accordance with the Torah are made clear from a worldly perspective, and the detriments of not following the prohibitions of the Torah are observed as well. This was after they had been considered for a long time to be non-understandable decrees.

In many cases of adoption that have come to my attention in which the adoptive parents withheld the knowledge from their children that they weren't their real parents, later on when they finally did reveal that they had deceived their children, my experience has shown that this led to tragedy and hostile relationships, sometimes even hatred on the part of the adopted children. The pain that the adoptive parents went through is undeniable.

If you think about it a bit, it's not surprising that adoption in this manner leads to such results, since it is impossible that a life built upon falsehood—falsehood that affects the very soul of a boy or girl—will not lead to the shattering of the relationships the child has with those close to them. If people say about any falsehood that the truth will come out eventually, it is all the more so when it comes to a lie like this one, which goes on for years and effects day-to-day life. It is impossible for the secret not to come out, whether through neighbors or friends, intentionally or unintentionally.

It should be noted that adoption in this way is relatively new—only several decades old—and even so, the instances

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of complications and tragedies are many. And all the more so today, when such adoptions are increasingly common, because doctors and social workers put pressure and make the adoption conditional on the relationship between the adoptive parents and the adopted children being built on a lie. The natural results of this are easy to understand.

Another point: In typical cases, the adoptive parents are advised to tell the children the truth once they grow up. Even in such cases [when the children did not find out by accident, but from their parents], the children come with a heartfelt complaint: “Why did you deceive me?”

What’s more—and this, too, is essential—in many cases, the adoptive parents don’t find the fortitude to tell their adopted children that they were deceiving them each day for many years, and in the end, the adopted children find out the truth from strangers.

In summary: The overall ultimate good for a Yid depends upon the instructions of our Torah; in following the core principle from the time of receiving the Torah—*na’aseh venishma*, doing before understanding. This ultimate good is not only in the next world but in this world as well.

Even if we’re not talking about Yidden, the approach of deceiving the adopted children will end in tragedy; after a short time or a long while—the truth will come out.

Although this is not my profession, based upon the cases that I am aware of (and it follows that those involved in the field are aware of many more such cases), I have no doubt that this approach must be changed entirely, and the relationship between the adoptive parents and the adopted children must be established upon truth from the very beginning. This is the natural relationship they should have. It is hard to believe that in most cases the adoptive parents can hope for a natural relationship between them and their adoptive children just like that of biological parents and

their children [even if they were not to tell them the truth. And even if it would work in rare instances,] there is no reason to establish a normative way of acting based upon instances that are the exception to the rule.

I will not conceal the fact that the length in which I wrote the second part of this letter isn’t just in the hope that you will agree with me that according to Shulchan Aruch, the practice of adopting children and not telling them the truth must be discontinued. [It is also in hope] that you will use your influence to persuade the psychologists that they should discontinue this practice from a psychological standpoint at least, for it is near-certain that the results will be the opposite of what is optimal—a broken heart on the part of the adopted child, and disappointment on the part of the adoptive parents. Instead of [authorities] pressuring [adoptive parents] and making it a condition that they must lie to the adopted child, they should establish the relationship on the truth from the very beginning, with a true and natural relationship. This will turn out to be for the benefit of the adoptive parents and the adopted children, as discussed above.

With esteem and blessing.

Obviously, it will interest me to know your response to all I’ve written above, and [I hope] it is unnecessary for me to emphasize that it should be an open, frank response.²

1 See, for example, this 2019 study: journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X19829503

2 This letter was printed in the weekly *Toras Menachem* booklet by Vaad Hanachos B’Lahak, for Shabbos Parshas Va’eschanan 5779.