MAKING UNIQUE JEWISH FAMILIES FEEL WELCOME AT TEMPLE RODEF SHALOM: CROSS-RACIAL AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AROUND B'NEI MITZVAH AGE

RABBI MARCUS LANCE BURSTEIN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

Requirements for Doctor of Ministry Degree

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Graduate Studies Program

New York, New York

April 1, 2004

Advisors: Rabbi Nancy Wiener, D. Min., Ms. Lynne Jones, CSW

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

One morning as I sat on the bima at Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Virginia, during Shabbat services, I observed something unusual in the congregation. Although it was not the first time, I noticed that the bar mitzvah was a Korean boy who was leading us in prayer. I was struck, however, by the fact that there were fewer than five other non-Caucasian people in a congregation of over 300. I wondered what it must be like for this young man. Did he feel strange being one of a handful of non-Caucasian people in the sanctuary? Did he identify as a Jew to the same degree as his peers? Did he feel welcomed in an atmosphere that was not racially diverse? All of these thoughts crossed my mind. He did an outstanding job, yet I sensed that although I felt he was clearly Jewish, others might question his "Jewishness." This overt and sometimes covert questioning may have been present for the boy, too. We never discussed this topic, because I treated him just as I would treat any other bar mitzvah. I did wonder, however, if there were a way that the temple could help open a dialogue to talk about this issue with similar children and their families and to see if there were any way we might be able to help.

At Temple Rodef Shalom, there has been a growing number of non-Caucasian or biracial students in our religious school. Some are children of parents of different races and some are non-Caucasian children who have been adopted by two Caucasian parents. Ten years ago, there were three non-Caucasian students out of 600 (.5%). Five years ago, that number grew to 7 students out of a total of 725 (.9%) total students. In the present school year, there are 34 non-Caucasian students out of a total enrollment of 850 (4%). Our

nursery school has continued to see increases in non-Caucasian students, as well. Ten years ago, all of the 161 students were Caucasian. Four years ago there were 7 non-Caucasian students out of 164 (4%). This year, there are 10 non-Caucasian students out of 164 (6%). Although we do not give these children any special or different treatment at the temple, I wondered if we were missing out on an opportunity to make them feel more welcomed and at home in the synagogue. I also noticed that a higher percentage of our non-Caucasian students drop out of our post-b'nei mitzvah program than our Caucasian students. Over the past three years in which post-b'nei mitzvah students would be expected to attend confirmation class, more than 50% of non-Caucasian students dropped out of the program. This is in contrast to a normal drop out rate of 20-25%. I am not sure of the reason, but it may have to do with the feeling of not "fitting in."

Fitting in is a challenge for all teenagers, and growing up Jewish in the United States of America can be an extra challenge. Although we have the freedom and resources to express our religious beliefs and practices, we are surrounded by a Christian society. Being a member of a small minority has its difficulties, but also has some benefits. Most Jewish-American families share a common ancestry from Russia and/or Eastern Europe (Ashkenazi Jews), a common cultural heritage, a set of physical characteristics, and even a shared history of when our ancestors emigrated to the USA. (Randall Belinfante, the librarian/archivist at the American Sephardi Federation in New York City, using statistics from Rabbi Marc Angel estimates that less than 300,000 Jews in the USA are Sephardi, which means that about 96% of Jews in the USA are from Ashkenazi backgrounds.) This history can lead to a sense of a shared identity. Yet within this small religious minority, there is another population of adopted

children who do not share the same cultural heritage, genetic make-up, ancestry, or, sometimes, even the same skin color. I wondered if these children and their families needed any extra support and/or attention in their Jewish and spiritual lives. As I began to read, my suspicion was confirmed:

> Jewish adoptees are a minority within a minority. Should a Jewish adoptee also ... be of a different race or culture ... he or she becomes a member of an even smaller subset. Each additional identity raises questions that overlap the others, layer upon layer, creating heretofore unrecognized, but not unfelt, stress on adoptive Jewish families. Families often do not know where to turn with this stress. They may hesitate to acknowledge a concern or hesitate to consult an adoption specialist, because they are embarrassed to be less than the perfect family with whom their child presumably was placed. Jewish professionals do not often think about adoption as an issue necessitating their concern. They do not understand the complexities of adoption or the added uncertainties that Judaism, with its conflicting messages, creates (Rosenberg, 1998, p. xix).

In a chapter devoted to transcultural and transracial adoption, she continues:

> Jewish children of color face some unique and formidable tasks. Not only do they not look like anyone in their adoptive family -- an issue for many other adoptees -- but they probably do not look like anyone in their extended American Jewish community. They know that when people look at them, they see color first and Jew second, and in some cases, they do not see a Jew at all. They also know, as do teachers, friends, and casual acquaintances, that there are relatively few American Jews of color. They cope with questions, sometimes simply curious but sometimes hostile, regarding their appearance, their birth culture, their adopted culture, their future. Sometimes, they themselves question whether they belong to the American Jewish community,

> which is still predominantly white. They wonder: Am I entitled to be a 'real' Jew? How does my Jewish community see me? How does the secular community see me? How do I see myself? (Rosenberg, 1998, p. 126).

Addressing these issues within the temple community could provide needed support and encouragement to the growing number of these children and their families in the congregation.

Most of the Spring 2004 issue of Reform Judaism Magazine was dedicated to Jewish Diversity. The following introduction appeared before various articles written by multiracial Jews about their own Jewish stories and journeys:

> Jews of color are not a novelty. We have come in all shades from the very beginning of our existence as a people. Yet the stereotype of the Jew as White [sic] persists in our society, often giving the message, whether consciously or not, that people who do not fit this profile are not welcome in Jewish life. Fortunately, this stereotype is beginning to break down, as diversity within our congregations is growing and Jews of color are rising in the leadership ranks of our Movement (Reform Judaism Magazine, 2004, p. 45).

This statement is corroborated by Dr. Gary Tobin and Diane Kaufman Tobin, who co-direct the Institute for Jewish and Community Research. Based on the 2001-02 national survey of American Jews, they report the following statistics:

> The American Jewish community is now more diverse than ever. Of America's 6.0-6.5 million Jews, an estimated 300,000-400,000 are Jews of color, including Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and mixed-race Americans (not counting Sephardim). ... According to our study, diverse Jews are: 1) multicultural Jews by heritage; 2) children of interracial Jewish couples; 3) spouses and partners of Jews who have converted or are interested in Judaism; 4) religious seekers

> who choose Judaism; and 5) children of color who have been adopted by Jewish families (Tobin and Tobin, 2004, p. 66).

Clearly, this topic is one of the most challenging and exciting issues of American Reform Judaism today.

In the United States, there is a growing phenomenon of foreign and cross-racial adoptions. At the present time, less than three percent of American women relinquish their babies for adoption (Pertman, 2000, p. 5). "There are an estimated 40 couples for each white infant available domestically" (Eisenstadt and Cohen, 2000, from the internet). Although costs vary significantly according to circumstances, location of adoption, and other factors relating to each child, domestic private adoptions can cost more than $30,000, and international adoptions usually cost $7-25,000 (Source: www.adopting.org).

Adam Pertman in his book *Adoption Nation* writes that adoption:

> ... has been considered off-limits for so long, both by individuals and by society as a whole, that until very recently studies have not been devised, census questions have not been asked, surveys have not been conducted. There is no national organization or branch of government that keeps track of adoptions, so determination of how many triad members [birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents] there are ... would require sorting through the individual 'finalization' records in every courthouse in every city and town in every state (Pertman, 2000, p. 7).

This lack of central information makes it very difficult to determine the number of adoptions that take place -- in the USA in general and in the Jewish community in particular. The number of foreign-adopted children has been growing since World War II. "In 1964, the first year that the Immigration and

Naturalization Service began to provide data, just under 1,700 children came into the USA for adoption" (Pertman, 2000, p. 23.). "By 1998, there were 15,724 foreign adoptions, more than 10,000 from Asia, Central and South America, Africa and the Caribbean" (Pertman, 2000, pp. 56). "Of the 31,000-plus public adoptions monitored by the Department of Health and Human Services in 1998, nearly one third crossed racial or cultural lines; that's five times the ratio of just a few years earlier, and there's no letup in sight. ... Superimpose the hundreds of thousands of intercountry adoptions, about sixty percent of which involve children whose skin isn't white, and a clear trend comes into focus" (Pertman, 2000, p. 159). By 2000, there were 18,477 international adoptions, up 20% from just two years prior (Scroggs, p. 3). One can easily see that the Jewish community, as part of the larger community, would clearly be affected by these growing numbers.

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-1 reports that American Jews, both men and women, tend to marry later than Americans generally. Only 48% of Jewish men are married between 25-34, while 59% of the male US population are married. For women of the same age category, 64% of Jewish women are married in contrast to 70% of US women. Because of infertility problems associated with late marriage, and the significant importance of the family as the center of Jewish life, many Jewish adults adopt children when they cannot have children of their own. Kathy Brodsky, Director of Ametz Adoption Program of the Jewish Child Care Association in New York City, says that 3% of all Jewish children are adopted. Because of the high cost and low availability of Caucasian children, more and more Jewish families choose to adopt children from Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe or adopt African-American babies

born in the USA. The number of cross-racial families in the Jewish community continues to grow at a steady pace, and the racial make-up of the Jewish community broadens each year.

Mark Eckman, an attorney who specializes in adoption law, serves as the Director of the Datz Foundation, an adoption agency in Northern Virginia. He is also the regional representative of a national organization dedicated to adoptive families called Stars of David. In a recent telephone conversation, he stated that, "it may be impossible to figure out the number of Jewish families who adopt each year. There is no way to know how many domestic adoptions there are each year." Although his agency works with all types of families and adoptees, he notes that the agency seems to have a larger number of Jewish clients than the Jewish population in the USA. About 15% of his clients are couples in which both members are Jewish and another 10% are families with at least one parent who is Jewish. These percentages are much higher than the national Jewish population of the USA, which is about 2%. An article in the Washington Jewish Week of February 3, 2000, stated that nationwide, "an estimated 25 percent of Jewish couples adopting are bringing home children from overseas. ... Locally, the number of international adoptions is estimated to be even higher. Half of the adoptions facilitated by the Jewish Social Service Agency [of Northern Virginia] are of children born overseas" (Eisenstadt and Cohen, 2000, from the internet).

Within Temple Rodef Shalom, one can clearly see the impact of this national phenomenon. In reviewing rosters of nursery school attendees from 10-15 years ago, there were only Caucasian, Jewish students enrolled in the school. In school year 1996-97, four non-Caucasian students were enrolled; all were the children of biracial couples. In the last five years, however, the number of non-

Caucasian students has grown to about 10 each year, with half of the students adopted and half from biracial families. There have been a total of between 143-161 nursery school students in the past 15 or so years. In addition to these Jewish students, there are also a handful of non-Jewish, non-Caucasian students each year who attend classes, so almost 10% of the nursery school is non-Caucasian.

In terms of a continuing presence within the temple community, the bar and bat mitzvah ceremony seems to be the last time we see the vast majority of non-Caucasian students. Only about 20% of the non-Caucasian students have continued in their Jewish education past b'nei mitzvah age, whereas 60-80% of the other students have continued their formal Jewish education.

Although the number of cross-racially adopted children continues to increase quickly, these adoptions sometimes carry extra challenges for parents and their children. Some of these multiracial families know what it is like to have "children who would come home crying when classmates or teachers hurt them with racial taunts, children whose curiosity about their backgrounds was aroused each time they passed a mirror and couldn't detect a hint of their parents' features in their reflections. Or children who avoided looking at themselves altogether" (Pertman, 2000, p. 52). Despite efforts to treat their non-Caucasian children the same as the majority culture, there can be difficult moments for these children. One adopted Korean girl described herself as "110 percent American. ... So she was unprepared, even shocked, when some older boys pummelled her with profanities and racial slurs on the school bus during her sixth-grade year" (Pertman, 2000, p. 52). One parent writes about her biological children and their challenge of being different in the Jewish community.

> It is not easy to be a Latino Jew. Although we have been members of our congregation for seven years, other congregants sometimes say hurtful things, making us feel like outsiders. Because the way we prepare our food and other cultural traditions are different, we sometimes are asked, in our own synagogue, 'Are you Jewish?' My children have been told by their Jewish classmates that there's no such thing as a Latino Jew. I tell them that the only way to respond is to be a better Jew and to educate these children about their prejudices (Elias, 2004, p. 51).

Dr. Patricia Lin, an Asian convert to Judaism who is presently studying some of the issues specifically facing Asian Jews in America, describes her work in an article of Reform Judaism Magazine.

> Today I am focused on conducting research for an in-depth study of the rapidly growing Asian American Jewish population in America. I've been curious to know how Asian American Jews, most of whom are the products of mixed-race marriages, adoption, and, to a much lesser extent, conversion, balance their Asian and Jewish identities. From my initial interviews, I've learned that while many have experienced difficulties reconciling their dual-minority identities in their early years, as adults most have come to appreciate their uniqueness as Jews of Asian descent. At the same time, many tell me of their isolation, even in cosmopolitan Jewish areas. They do not like having to prove they are Jewish and wonder if Ashkenazi Jews may reject them as potential romantic partners because they are Asian. They rarely see their faces reflected in Jewish periodicals, haggadot, children's books, or advertisements. Above all, they are eager to meet and learn about other Asian American Jews so that they do not feel so alone (Lin, 2004, p. 62).

I am sure that some of her personal experiences resonate with Asian Jews of Temple Rodef Shalom.

Another Asian Jew, Rabbi/Cantor Angela Warnick Buchdahl eloquently wrote about her sometimes painful struggles while growing up.

> As a child, I believed that my sister and I were the "only ones" in the Jewish community -- the only ones with Asian faces, the only ones whose family trees didn't have roots in Eastern Europe, the only ones with kimchee on the seder plate. I came to believe that I could never be "fully Jewish" because I could never be 'purely' Jewish. I was reminded of this daily, when fielding comments like "Funny, you don't look Jewish." But as I grew older, I began to see myself reflected in the Jewish community. ...
>
> While I was the only multiracial Jewish camper at my Jewish summer camp in 1985, a decade later, when I served as songleader, there were a dozen. I have since met hundreds of people from multiracial Jewish families in the Northeast through the Multiracial Jewish Network.
>
> Still, throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, I struggled to integrate my Jewish, Korean, and secular American identities. My identity crisis intensified one painful summer in Israel after my junior year in college. Feeling marginalized and invisible, I called my mother and declared that I no longer wanted to be a Jew. I did not look Jewish and did not want this heavy burden of having to explain and prove myself every time I entered a new Jewish community. She responded by saying simply: "Is that possible?" At that moment I realized I could no more stop being a Jew than I could stop being Korean, or female, or me (Buchdahl, 2004, p. 64).

These issues of being racially different can be further exacerbated when one is Jewish and not part of the majority culture. We have to deal with ubiquitous Christmastime challenges, looks of puzzlement from peers and strangers about certain practices and beliefs, time missed from school or work for Jewish holidays, and other difficulties ranging from perplexed reactions to acute anti-

Semitism. These additional challenges can warrant extra support from family, schools, and religious institutions, although this support is not always easily found.

Regardless of family of origin issues, for any child between the ages of 11-15, issues of identity are paramount. Children of these ages are consumed with figuring out who they are -- in relation to their parents, friends, religious community, and the greater world. Discussing these issues in a safe space with peers (and facilitators) in similar circumstances could provide an outlet for these thoughts and feelings, as well as also support and reassurance in achieving a better self-understanding, acceptance, and comfort as part of a community.

Adoptive children often must deal with additional issues. "By virtue of being adopted ... [each] child faces additional challenges and issues that are different from those other children face" (Rosenberg, 1998, p. xvi). She goes on to state that, "Adoptees have long harbored questions and feelings about themselves... However, adoptees often feel unable to ask their questions or express their feelings for many reasons; chief among them is usually the desire not to hurt the adoptive family they love" (Rosenberg, 1998, p. xvii). Moreover, "adoptive parents, anxious to believe what they have been told, often have not recognized that their children harbored unspoken questions" (Rosenberg, 1998, p. xvii).

Mark Eckman mentioned that a family recently contacted him about concerns that their Jewish, Korean teenager had and the differences he was feeling in his Jewish day school after becoming a bar mitzvah. Mark could not refer the family to any local resources; the local metropolitan Washington, DC, Stars of David chapter has been defunct for almost 7 years and there are no other

groups specifically for Jewish cross-racially and internationally adoptive families. He went on to say that many adoptive families participate in adoption-related programs for younger children, but that the older the child grows, the less likely the family is to be involved with adoption-related programs. There are few such programs, even of a secular nature, within the metropolitan Washington, DC, community. In the Jewish community, no Reform metropolitan Washington, DC, congregations have any type of support groups for adoptive families. Rabbi Scott Sperling, Regional Director of the Mid-Atlantic Council, is unaware of any congregation in the entire region that has resources of this type available, although he did say that they were looking into this growing phenomenon. The Union for Reform Judaism had a publication concerning adoption at one time, but in speaking with Rabbi Lisa Izes, Assistant Director of the Department of Family Concerns, there is no current literature available, mostly due to understaffing.

Because of the lack of resources available to adoptive Jewish teens and their parents, I felt the need to develop a series of discussion groups, co-led by a rabbi and a social worker or psychologist. The group would be for cross-racially and internationally adopted children around bar/bat mitzvah age, with a parallel group for their parents, designed to make them feel more welcome at Temple Rodef Shalom and more comfortable being Jewish. I hoped that through actively addressing some of the issues of concern for children around bar/bat mitzvah age and their parents, the groups might enable these families to feel more comfortable with who they are -- as people and as Jews. It was my hope that the members of our discussion groups would feel better as a result of having an "official" forum to discuss their concerns, and that they would feel more

connected to me as their rabbi, to Temple Rodef Shalom as their community, and to Judaism as their religion. An additional benefit of the discussion groups would be to have the younger children and their parents learn from those who have completed the bar/bat mitzvah process. The older children and their parents could in a way mentor the younger children. I also hoped that ultimately this model could be used by other rabbis in other congregations around the country as they seek to welcome and embrace an entire generation of Jews which includes individuals from different cultural and racial backgrounds.

Chapter 2

Religious Principles

In the torah portion Mishpatim, Exodus 21:1-24:18, we read a commandment that concerns care for the *ger*, the stranger, twice. Exodus 22:20 states, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Exodus 23:9 states, "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." Rabbi Harvey Fields writes, "This emphasis upon the treatment of aliens or foreigners -- those who are new to a community or society -- is not unusual within the Torah. Early Jewish tradition emphasizes the pain of the outsider and seeks solutions for it. Commandments calling for sensitivity and justice for the *ger* are found in thirty-six different places within the Torah, more than the mention of any other mitzvah" (Fields, 1991, p. 56). This special treatment takes the form of both positive commandments such as "you shall love the stranger" and negative commandments, as above.

As Rabbi Fields notes, "Many commentators note this unique emphasis of the Torah upon justice for the stranger and ask: 'Why all these warnings? Why all this attention to the *ger*?'" (Fields, 1991, p. 56). One interpretation is that *ger* can mean convert in addition to stranger. In the context of adopting children, it is very likely that the adoptee is not Jewish. When cross-racial and international adoptions are included, it is almost impossible that the birth parents are Jewish. All these adopted children must go through a series of Jewish rituals in order to officially become a member of the Jewish religion. Their physical features, however, may make them continue to feel like a stranger long after their official

conversion to Judaism. It is with this principle in mind that I thought special attention might be necessary for these children and their families.

The commandment "Love the stranger (*ger* in Hebrew) as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" is mentioned more times in the Torah than any other commandment. Welcoming the "other" -- however perceived -- is the essence of this commandment. Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut writes, "*Ger* was the term applied to the resident non-Israelite who could no longer count on the protection of his erstwhile tribe or society" (Plaut, 1981, p. 582). This person was seen as the "other," and may have needed special protection, treatment or attention, even in daily, commonplace activities. (An example of this appears in Exodus 22:20-23: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.") Although I am hesitant to view Jews who appear different from most Eastern European Jews as "strangers," I think that many -- Jews and non-Jews alike -- look at non-Caucasian Jewish children as "other." Perhaps these children could benefit from some special attention, just as the biblical *ger* required different treatment. These children "may, unfortunately, also need to learn how to deal with prejudice, both anti-Semitism from outside the community and resistance from inside the community, from people who do not yet understand or accept the American Jewish community's new reality" of becoming a "Jewish Rainbow" (Rosenberg, 1998, p. 108). Rabbi Michael Gold, author of *and Hannah wept: Infertility, Adoption, and the Jewish Couple*, explains that many within the Jewish community are not eager to accept non-Caucasian Jews

into the community. "Many Jews are not prepared to fully embrace as Jewish, youngsters from another race. This problem becomes particularly acute during the adolescent years when dating and youth activities become important and youngsters search for their identity" (Eisenstadt and Cohen, 2000). Even within the non-religious community, color and ethnicity "add layers of complexity to a process [adoption] that's complicated to begin with" (Pertman, 2000, p. 92).

Adoption has a long history in the Jewish religion, although it was not until very recently that adoption has been officially and legally recognized. "Jewish law does not recognize adoption per se. It is true that the Talmud does say, 'Whoever raises an orphan in his home, scripture considers him as if he gave birth to the child.' (Sanhedrin 19b) Yet the child's biological identity can never be replaced. If a non-Jewish child is adopted into a Jewish family, the child does not automatically become Jewish. He or she must be formally converted" (Gold, 1988, p. 152). Perhaps the most famous example of adoption in the Bible is the story of Pharaoh's daughter adopting Moses in Exodus 2:1-10, although there are many other instances. The Book of Genesis has examples of what could be seen by today's standards as adoption (Gen. 15:2-3, Eliezer as heir to Abraham, although not biological child; Gen. 16:2 and 30:3, Sarah obtaining a child through her maid Hagar and Rachel obtaining a child through her maid Bilhah; Gen. 29-31, Jacob is adopted by Laban; Gen. 48:5-6, Jacob adopts his grandsons Ephraim and Menasheh; and Gen. 50:23, Joseph adopts his great grandchildren, the children of Machir, son of Menasheh). Later books of the Bible offer additional examples.

Rabbi Michael Gold writes that from the Talmud passage in Sanhedrin 19b, we learn that the Jewish attitude toward adoption is that the "child's

spiritual parents, not the biological parents, give the child his or her name and identity. An orphan is called by the name of the parent that raises him or her, not the parent that gives birth. The real parents are the ones who physically sustain the child by providing for his or her needs and who spiritually sustain the child by teaching the Torah" (Gold, 1988, p. 156). He continues to explain the lack of an official adoption process in Jewish tradition:

> There is a reason for the absence of adoption as a legal procedure in Jewish law. Halakhah places great importance on a child's biological identity and status. Such identity is permanent and cannot be changed by a legal procedure such as adoption. It is birth that gives a child identity as a Jew or gentile and as a Kohen, Levi, or Yisrael. This identity does not change because of a judicial decree (Gold, 1988, p. 157).

And so, Jewish law did not provide formal legal means for adults to adopt children until the modern State of Israel was established. "Throughout the Bible we find cases of a child being born to one set of parents and raised by another, a de facto adoption. Yet adoption de jure, adoption as a legal institution, is unknown to Jewish law. Only in modern Israel have rabbinic authorities been forced to establish procedures for the adoption of children" (Gold, 1988, p. 154). It was not until 1960 in Israel that adoption became legal when rabbinic authorities had to establish procedures for the adoption of children. In fact, it was not until this point that a new Hebrew word for adoption was coined -- ametz (Gold, 1988, p. 154). Ametz means "strengthen," and comes from Psalm 80:15-16 (Rosenberg, 1998, p. xv) and was used to show how those who join our community through adoption strengthen us as a people.

These laws, however, are not viewed the same within all branches of Judaism. Because the Reform Movement does not view halakhah as binding or recognize the distinctions between certain classes of Jews (priestly and lay classes), Reform Jews view these traditional laws differently from Orthodox or Conservative Jews. For example, the genetic link that is required for a man to be a member of the priestly class does not even factor into the Reform mindset, because Reform Jews do not make any distinctions between Jews. The acceptance of adopted children into the Jewish community also varies. Within the Orthodox community, some are against adoption while others are more accepting. The liberal branches of Judaism are more open to adoption in general.

The rituals for bringing a non-Jewish child into the community include the same rituals for any other convert to Judaism. The specific requirements vary among the various movements of Judaism, but usually incorporate some or all of the following rituals: immersion witnessed by a Rabbinic court (beit din), usually in a ritual bath or mikvah; a naming ceremony; and, for boys, a ritual circumcision (brit milah) or a symbolic circumcision (hatafat dam brit). There can be some technical differences for certain types of adoption within the Jewish community, and the laws may vary whether or not the birth mother is Jewish. Because this project does not address the specifics of Jewish law, these specifics will not be discussed in this section.

While being an official member of the Jewish community can be achieved through birth or ritual, integration into the Jewish community and truly feeling a part of a community are different matters. Temple Rodef Shalom is a large, suburban congregation with close to 1300 member units. Some members are overwhelmed by the sheer size of the congregation. Many families who live in

the area are far from their extended families and therefore lack a support system that can assist them emotionally, culturally, educationally, Jewishly, and otherwise. One of the goals of Temple Rodef Shalom is to form a community of acceptance, support, and encouragement by assisting members to incorporate as many Jewish traditions and customs into their lives as possible. Because people have unique concerns and preferences to be with others like themselves, an entire array of affinity groups exists in the congregation. These groups are divided by age, family situation (single parents, divorced people, etc.), sexual orientation, to name a few. It is within the context of these groups, as part of a larger congregation, that we can welcome and support any person who might feel like a "stranger." Finding others with similar challenges, goals, interests and needs allows for a deeper level of intimacy and connection within a congregation and community. The creation of a discussion group for the population including cross-racially and internationally adoptive families would ideally enable its members to feel a sense of belonging and support from each other.

In addition to the principle of welcoming the stranger, this project is based on the Jewish principle of showing special consideration for those who are considered on the periphery of society. In addition to the stranger, we are taught to treat the widow, the orphan and the elderly with respect. Since these groups of people historically felt marginalized by those in power, they deserved extra attention. Being a minority within a minority within a minority, this unique group of cross-racially and internationally adoptive families could benefit from some extra attention.

The role that the rabbi plays in the congregation and community will also affect this project. A congregational rabbi is a "preacher, teacher, counselor,

administrator, and officiant at religious services" (Washofsky, 2001, p. 67). The rabbi is "a teacher, an expounder of Jewish tradition, and a judge of issues of Jewish law and practice" (Washofsky, 2001, p. 69). Part of my unique role in the community is to provide support to members of the congregation. Facilitating this group would not only teach the participants more about Judaism and encourage their involvement in the Jewish community, but would also be a model of acceptance and support to other members of Temple Rodef Shalom who know about the project. Also, as rabbi to the entire congregation, after discussing issues of concern, I can serve as a liaison between this heretofore marginalized group and other parts of the temple structure to ensure that the difficulties faced by these families are properly addressed.

Psychological Principles

Adopted children face some challenges that biological children do not face. Joyce Maguire Pavao writes:

> As they approach adolescence, many children turn inward and do not wish to talk, especially to their parents, about how they feel regarding many subjects, certainly including adoption. But this stage -- what is called latency in children -- is the very best time to talk to and to work with children who are struggling with their feelings about adoptions, before the onslaught of even more complex adolescent issues. (Pavao, 1998, p. 54.)

This same issue was discussed at a recent workshop entitled "The Changing Faces of Adoption: How Reform Judaism is Responding to New Ways to be Fruitful" at the biennial conference of the Union for Reform Judaism held in

Minneapolis, MN, in November 2003. Rabbi Michael Berk, a Regional Director of the Union for Reform Judaism, read from an unpublished booklet of the Union for Reform Judaism's Department of Jewish Family Concerns:

> While adoptive parents may be reluctant to raise complicated questions of religious identity with a child, many have found that doing so has opened doors to further discussion with their child about Jewish identity and the importance of family. For those who feel conflicted, supportive counselling for teens and parents can be helpful in resolving identity issues.

Participating in a forum where children could discuss these topics, with peers, adults, their parents, and their rabbi in a safe space could greatly assist those whose normal tendency would be to close up.

Divulging one's personal adoption story to others can be stressful and upsetting. Schoettle and Singer write in the introduction to the Parent Guidebook for the W.I.S.E. Up! Powerbook:

> They can go right to the heart of their self-concept, challenging who they are and where they belong.
>
> At C.A.S.E., we have worked hard to learn about the special challenges faced by adopted children and teens. Hundreds of them have told us that one of their big concerns has been having to answer many questions about adoption. Sometimes they are asked about their own adoption stories, and other times they are asked to be expert commentators on a media event connected to adoption. They have shared with us how difficult and uncomfortable this makes them feel because they don't always know what to say, or they regret afterwards what they did say. They are often left with a mixture of many emotions: confusion, anger, embarrassment, sadness, or frustration (Schoettle and Singer, 2000, p. 1).

Another issue that adopted children may face is divided loyalty. "During adolescence ... adopted children ... have a hard time feeling uncomplicatedly loyal to their adoptive family while they are coming to an understanding of who and what their birth family is and sorting out their feelings about them" (Pavao, 1998, p. 60). Their fantasies of who they imagine their birth parents to be can influence their actions and reactions with their adoptive parents and family. Like children at this age from any family, they may choose to identify with groups that are different from their parents. Some of the principles with which they have been brought up may also come into question.

The feeling of being alone is another psychological challenge sometimes faced by adoptees. "When ... you have no knowledge of siblings or other relatives, it is almost as if you are the only person in the world. You have no genetic connections. ... This sense of disconnection is hard even for same-race, same-ethnicity adoptees, so it is even more pronounced for international and transracial adoptees" (Pavao, 1998, p. 65). It is important to openly discuss these feelings to appropriately address them. "Many adolescents are not dealing with these facts and feelings concretely. They are not thinking about all this in a defined way, and they often will not admit to anyone that they are thinking about these lonely issues at all" (Pavao, 1998, pp. 65-6). Another reality that adoptive children deal with concerns those left behind. In *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness*, Betty Jean Lifton writes:

> The adopted child is always accompanied by the ghost of the child he might have been had he stayed with his birth mother and by the ghost of the fantasy child his adoptive parents might have had. He is also accompanied by the

> ghost of the birth mother, from whom he has never completely disconnected, and the ghost of the birth father, hidden behind her (Lifton, 1994, p. 11).

Lifton continues, "[the] adoptees you will meet in this book are mostly successful people in that they are productive in their work and their private lives. But, as we will see, much of their psychic energy has been taken up with adjusting to the mystery of their origins..." (Lifton, 1994, p. 10). Placing these issues on the table for discussion could aid children in dealing with these challenges.

Because adoptees devote so much energy to thinking about their past and have to process the issue of loss, they sometimes maintain a longer connection to their adoptive parents than other adolescents. One adoptee wrote about his adolescence:

> The natural maturational push to move away is conflicted with the terror of loss. No one named this process for me and my family. We only know that it was strong. Separating, differentiating, and sexual development -- although predictable and natural -- rearouse issues of loss, infertility, and sexuality, all of which resonate within adoptive families in very special ways (Lifton, 1994, p. 70).

Even later on, adoptive girls sometimes long for physical intimacy, as Lifton writes, "Physical intimacy gives them the illusion of love" (Lifton, 1994, p. 72).

The search for who one is takes on a different meaning for adoptees. In many ways, they try to find their home. Lifton writes:

> We can see the search for Home [sic] as a universal quest, but for the adopted person it is also a literal one. It is a quest for the beginning of one's narrative; for the lost mother; for unconditional love; for meaning; for the recovery of lost

> time; for a coherent sense of self; for security; for form and structure; for grounding and centering.
>
> The search for Home [sic] reflects the adoptee's need for biological, historical, and human connectedness. It is close to a religious search because it is an attempt to connect to forces larger than oneself (Lifton, 1994, p. 128).

Giving children a chance to express their longings for this type of "Home" and discussing their desire to search for their birth family can open up important channels of communication between these children and their parents.

Another issue that adoptees face arises when they realize they are adopted. "While it is important to talk about adoption from an early age, it is equally important to remember that, intellectually, adoption is an adult, complex concept, which the child will not understand for some time" (Verrier, 1994, p. 121). This usually occurs between the ages of 6-12. The process lasts for a while; it begins even before adoptees truly understand the meaning of being adopted. Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig write:

> Because a young child's thinking ability is so rudimentary, she generally has trouble understanding the full implications of being adopted. The advice of most adoption experts is to start talking to children about being adopted during toddlerhood, before they have a chance to develop their own ideas about adoption. Most parents dutifully follow this advice. But our research suggests that most children haven't the foggiest idea what Mom and Dad are talking about.
>
> "My father's a dentist, my mother's a teacher, and I'm a dopted," say a boy of five." (Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig, 1992, pp. 49-50).

Adolescence in general is a critical time with its own issues, challenges, and stresses for individuals and their families. Identity formation is the central psychological goal of the adolescent years. Adolescents must figure out the ways best to achieve the goals of character and identity formation while simultaneously navigating through daily living, which can challenge the formation of either one of these goals. Erik Erikson's *Eight Stages of Man* provides a model with eight psychosocial stages, usually corresponding to different ages in their lives. The stage of Adolescence (Ages 11-18) is concerned with Identity vs. Role Confusion.

> In Erikson's schema, adolescence presents a pivotal crisis around the development of a sense of a personal identity. Adolescents are often in a state of suspended morality, as they begin to formulate personal ideologies based upon values that differ from those of their parents. The psychosocial task of this stage is that of identity vs. role confusion. The task of adolescence is to achieve a stable sense of self, which must fit with an image of the individual's past, present, and future and of larger possibilities. The ego identity that may be achieved in adolescence is the accrued confidence that one's identity will remain stable (Berzoff, Flanagan, and Hertz, 1996, p. 115).

Although for all teens adolescence can be challenging, teens who are part of a racial minority may have additional challenges. "Teenagers' capacity for self-reflection and self-consciousness results in them asking the question, 'Who am I?' Experts suggest that for children of minority groups, issues of race or ethnicity are likely to have a greater impact on this process than for members of the majority group" (Scroggs, p. 8). Race plays a major role in self-understanding. The children in the group are not the same race as their parents.

Lourdes Mattei writes, "Skin color difference shapes a major sense of difference. Our awareness and experience of skin color difference in our relational context give form and meaning to our racial identities" (Berzoff, Flanagan, and Hertz, 1996, pp. 229-30). Mattei goes on to state that:

> "the experience of skin color is based on the child's cognitive and emotional capacities in the context of her unique relational world. Skin color difference is not simply a biological fact. The meanings given by the family and the community to a difference significantly color the experience. ... It is not until latency (8-10 years of age) that it is possible for children to acquire an accurate and a relatively stable understanding of race and ethnicity as a permanent characteristic of themselves and others -- what is called ethnic constancy" (Berzoff, Flanagan, and Hertz, 1996, p. 235).

Although Mattei was not dealing with cross-racial adoptive families, the importance of race clearly informs and contributes to one's self-identity. Lifton quotes Warren Watson, a clinical social worker in Minneapolis, "No matter how good their family, or how connected they feel, they are aware that they look different, feel different, and are different" (Lifton, 1994, p. 83). Discussing differences in race would allow the children to express their thoughts and feelings on this topic.

The following passage from *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self* describes some of the issues that non-Caucasian Jewish children may feel and how the can play out:

> Not only are transracial adoptees physically different, they are culturally different, too. And because adolescence is the period when cultural, ethnic, or racial identity comes

> to the fore, the conflict between the child's ethnicity and the family's can be another source of trouble. Issues of identity can get confused for youngsters who look one way and are raised another.
>
> The family that raised Josh, for example, was Jewish, and when Josh was thirteen his parents wanted him to be bar mitzvahed. [sic] But the process was an agony for the boy, who was the only Oriental face in the entire congregation.
>
> "I'm not even really Jewish," he told his parents. "It's like a lie for me to be up there reciting from the Torah" (Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig, 1992, pp. 99-100).

Providing the opportunity for children of this age to gather to talk about these topics can give young people a chance to realize how their own identities fit with their peers and their community. Lifton writes, "According to Erikson, young people who are confused about themselves have 'identity hunger.' I like this term because it suggests the starved part of the adoptee's psyche — the part that hungers for the nourishment that the mystery about their heritage has denied them. (Lifton, 1994, p. 71). Erikson also used a term called "psychosocial moratoria," during which adolescents temporarily suspend their identities to discover and define themselves before making adult commitments (Berzoff, Flanagan and Hertz, 1996, p.105).[1]

---

[1] Interestingly, Erik Erikson would have been eligible to participate in these discussions. He was born in Germany to a German-Jewish mother and a Danish father who abandoned him. Erikson was brought up by a German-Jewish step-father and had not been told about his biological origins until he was 18. "As a child ... Erikson suffered a series of identity crises. He was a blond, blue-eyed son of a Jew, thought to be Jewish by non-Jews and non-Jewish by Jews" (Berzoff, Flanagan, and Hertz, 1996, p. 105). His being a part of two different racial, ethnic and religious groups is probably similar to some of the challenges that the children in this discussion group face.

Being part of a group also plays an important role for adolescents. "Group membership, acceptance, and approval are of the utmost importance in the individual's developmental sequence. ... Nothing seems to be of greater importance for the self-esteem and well-being of the adolescent, for example, than to be included and accepted in some social group...." (Yalom, 1995, p. 50).

Like their adopted children, "[t]he adopted mother and father are accompanied by the ghost of the perfect biological child they might have had, who walks beside the adopted child who is taking its place" (Lifton, 1994, p. 11). Parents of cross-racially and internationally adopted children also have additional and distinct issues and challenges to address. They often face a number of important questions when deciding how they want to handle their child's relationship to the culture or country into which he or she was born (Scroggs, p.9). Another important issue for parents of adolescent, internationally adopted children is:

> American parents feel helpless and angry that no one warned them of the pain their adolescents would feel at being abandoned. No one told these parents when the plane landed with its precious unidentified bundles that their love would not be enough, that they should go to Korea before too many years passed and find the people who knew their child's story, or even a fragment of it (Lifton, 1994, p. 79).

Finally, like their children, parents may feel stress about disclosing information about their adoptive family:

> As parents, many of us have also felt these emotions when we were questioned about our adoptive families. We may have felt very comfortable talking about adoption, or we may have been caught off-guard when an acquaintance or a stranger made a comment or asked a question related to

> adoption. Later, we may have wondered if we handled the situation appropriately. Imagine how many times our kids must feel the same way! Both our positive and negative experiences have helped to make us aware of the importance of helping prepare our children to respond to questions and comments about adoption (Schoettle and Singer, 2000, p. 1).

Adoptive parents also could benefit from addressing these important issues.

Growth and Development Groups

All of the above-mentioned topics could be addressed in a group context to help the members better deal with these challenges. In *The Group Therapy Experience: From Theory to Practice,* Louis Ormont writes that the "majority of those who undertake group treatment are not acutely disturbed. Some are already highly accomplished in their chosen fields. ... the group, itself, when used effectively, is a vehicle for people to identify and deal with their own emotional blocks and limitations" (Ormont, 1992, p. 1). A synagogue-based support group will not be a formal therapy group, but will be similar to group treatment in that it intends to be "very therapeutic and straddle the blurred borders between personal growth, support, education and therapy" (Yalom, 1995, p. xii). Growth and Development Groups are "not specifically designed for the rehabilitation of people suffering from specific psychological or psychiatric symptoms, but instead for relatively normal people who are looking for an experience that will enhance their personal living..." (Shaffer and Galinsky, 1974, p. 11). They share similar goals to therapy groups, "the harvest of psychotherapy is not cure ... but instead change or growth" (Yalom, 1995, p. xii). They do so by focusing on "instruction, advice, support, and mutual identification among members" (Shaffer, 1974, p. 3).

The makeup of the group for success, especially for children's groups, is to limit the age range of the participants as part of the screening process. "Composition of the group must be based on each individual's needs, age, psychosexual level and diagnosis. As a clear guideline, Sugar (1975) specifies that group members should fit within a three-year age span. With a wider age span, member's developmental tasks may be too different to allow them to work well together" (Shapiro, Peltz, and Benadett-Shapiro, 1998, p. 205).

Although not designed specifically as a therapy group, this project has many similarities to family therapy. "Family therapy in a general sense is most directly concerned with family development, the dynamics of authority in the family system, the maintenance of structure and discharge of functions within the system, and appropriately assessing and treating subsystems ... while recognizing the specific characteristics and needs of each subsystem" (Nichols, 1996, p. 58). Additionally, family therapy "is developmental in that it is concerned with a family as it moves through the processes of formation, expansion, contraction, and continuing changes, as weli as being concerned with its individual members as they navigate the passages of their own life span (Nichols, 1996, p. 58). This project is modeled on multiple cojoint family therapy, "a treatment modality in which five to six family groups ... participate simultaneously in open-end group therapy sessions" (Berman, 1972, p. 279). Berman writes that in multiple family therapy:

> Group identification becomes intense. The depth of emotional involvement is profound and is shared by all the group members. The emotional investment spreads rapidly. Soon everyone takes part in "solving" his or her own or his neighbor's problems. Here, then, through identification and

> a great amount of empathy generated by the group, all the individuals cease to function in isolated, small groups. In a sense they all become partners in one large family unit (Berman, 1972, p. 281).

For this project the entire family will not be invited, just parents and children of a specified age range will be invited. Although both parents will be invited to participate, it will be difficult to determine whether or not both parents will attend. Both parents' attendance will not be required.

The six sessions will resemble brief group therapy, which is usually considered "as fewer than twenty to twenty-five visits" (Yalom, 1995, p. 273). Yalom suggests that all brief psychotherapy groups share many common features -- efficiency, a specific set of goals, a tendency to focus on the present, attendance, a relatively homogeneous group and a few other factors (Yalom, 1995, pp. 273-4).

Groups "differ from one another in the amount of 'groupness' present. Those with a greater sense of solidarity ... value the group more highly.... Such groups have a higher rate of attendance, participation, and mutual support... " (Yalom, 1995, p. 48). Regular attendance and participation can foster a strong sense of solidarity and cohesiveness. "Cohesiveness is broadly defined as the resultant of all the forces acting on all the members to remain in the group, or, more simply, the attractiveness of a group for its members. It refers to the condition of members feeling warmth and comfort in the group, feeling they belong, valuing the group and feeling, in turn, that they are valued and unconditionally accepted an supported by other members" (Yalom, 1995, p. 48). In groups in general, "regardless of what the participants said, the more words they spoke, the greater the positive change in their picture of themselves. ... The

greater the verbal participation the greater the sense of involvement, and the more the patient is valued by others and ultimately by himself" (Yalom, 1995, pp. 375-6).

Although originally referring to parents of children of preschool age, Scroggs notes, "Parents depended heavily on support groups with other families who had adopted from the same country or internationally to help the children see themselves, their families, and their stories as 'normal' and positive" (Scroggs, p. 6). Most cross-racial adoptive families, most likely including those at Temple Rodef Shalom, are familiar with some type of group support. This group forum at the Temple could show parents that their experiences are normative. The same is true for their children.

> Adolescents may be able, through participation in group, to gain a sense that their personal experience is not fully unique. They are comforted by knowing that they are heading down a path that has been cleared by previous travelers. Although they commonly take pride in deviating from convention, they are reassured by not being alone in their pursuit of self-sufficiency. In group, members are exposed to common themes, concerns, and actions (Shapiro, Peltz, and Benadett-Shapiro, 1998, p. 202).

Groups are often co-facilitated.

> We believe that every group can be conducted best by more than one therapist. ... Rosenbaum (1971) suggests that the presence of a co-therapist increases the validity and intensity of specific interpretations, helps root out and break through therapeutic impasses, helps neutralize or clarify neurotic problems of the therapist, increases the depth and movement in therapy, allows for simultaneous probing and

> support and aids transference. Corey (1990) includes the advantages of the different perspectives of life experiences and insights of two therapists, the combined strengths of a complementary leadership team, and re-creation of early family experiences with a male and female co-leader (Shapiro, Peltz, and Benadett-Shapiro, 1998, p. 180).

The group will be co-facilitated not because neurotic problems are anticipated, but because by having a rabbi and an adoption specialist, the goal of successful therapy is a "relationship between therapist and patient that is characterized by trust, warmth, empathic understanding and acceptance" (Yalom, 1995, p. 48).

Moreover, group leaders "generally play five major roles in the course of the group process: Information disseminator, Catalyst, Orchestrator, Model-participant, Dispenser of reinforcement/environment manipulator. Each role continues throughout the process, but at certain times, a single role has primacy" (Shapiro, Peltz, and Benadett-Shapiro, 1998, pp. 126). A rabbi experiences these roles in different forums. This project provides the rabbi an opportunity to combine all of the roles in one single context.

Chapter 3

To start this project, I will write a bulletin article to inform the congregation of the project. This will both educate the community about the presence of transcultural and transracial adoptive families in the congregation as well as solicit participation from those who fall into the project's category. If I do not hear from families who I think would benefit from these discussions, I will call them directly to encourage participation.

There will be a series of six evenings of facilitated discussion over a period of six months. Before each session, I will send out reminders and questions for the participants to think about for discussion. That way, they will be able to focus their thoughts before coming to the meetings and be more prepared to engage in a dialogue. On four evenings, I will meet with the children for one hour, followed by a meeting with the parents for one hour. The children and parents will be separated from each other for the first, second, fourth and fifth evenings. On the third and sixth evenings, we will combine both the children and their parents for a 2 hour session. I may host a concluding "party" after the sixth session.

The project incorporates different types of therapy in a combination designed especially for this project. An element of group therapy pervades each session with relatively homogeneous groups for children and parents meeting separately. Although not a pure family therapy model because all members of the family will not participate, aspects of family therapy will be part of the third and sixth sessions with parents and children meeting together. Also present in the third and sixth sessions is an aspect of cojoint family therapy, although, again, all family members will not be present.

These are the goals for the project as a whole:

Goal 1 -- Create a group which provides a comfortable atmosphere for children and parents to address issues of identity and how adoption issues affect their family.

Goal 2 -- Promote the formation of relationships among participants so they can provide support, encouragement, and understanding to each other in dealing with issues connected to cross-racial and international adoptive families.

Goal 3 -- Introduce participants to Jewish history and laws of adoption, so they may learn how their families fit into the greater Jewish community and feel connected to Judaism, to Temple Rodef Shalom and to the rabbi as their rabbi, an encouraging and supportive presence for their family.

Goal 4 -- Have the participants support and informally mentor each other through the bar/bat mitzvah process.

Goal 5 -- Raise awareness among Temple Rodef Shalom's clergy, leadership and membership of special issues facing cross-racial and international adoptive families.

What follows are the specific goals for each session:

Session 1 -- Introductions

Goals:

1. Let everyone introduce themselves
2. Study a Jewish text concerning adoption
3. Create a safe, comfortable space for discussion
4. Begin to address some of the challenging issues they may be facing
5. Solicit topics for future discussion

6. Create an environment to which participants will want to return

Session 2 -- Shalom: Integration, Wholeness and Peach

Goals: 1. Study a Jewish text concerning adoption

2. Have participants articulate the various ways that the different parts of their identity relate to each other and to the greater community

Session 3 -- Fitting in to Family and Judaism

Goals: 1. Study a Jewish text concerning adoption

2. Discuss the personal, communal, particular and/or universal rituals that each family does to connect to each other and to the greater Jewish community

Session 4 -- Searching for Who We Are

Goals: 1. Study a Jewish text concerning adoption

2. Have participants think about and verbalize the impact of the relationship between who they think they are and who they really are

Session 5 -- Future Expectations in the World and Judaism

Goals: 1. Study a Jewish text concerning adoption

2. Begin to prepare children and their parents for potential challenges that may lie ahead when they seek significant others

Session 6 -- Final Questions and Answers, Conclusions and Goodbye

Goals: 1. Study a Jewish text concerning adoption

2. Have participants share a final evening reflecting on some of the topics discussed

3. Address any topics from previous sessions that need additional time

I will assess each goal by two means – anecdotal evidence from each session and written assessment by the participants.

Anecdotal evidence will come from answering the following questions for the entire project.

Assessing Goal 1 –

1. Did participants willingly share their thoughts and feelings?
2. Did participants share personal stories, some of which they might not have shared before?
3. Did each evening have meaningful, thoughtful dialogue relating to their own search for identity and coming to terms with their feelings and insights?

Assessing Goal 2 –

1. Did they acknowledge that their issues were normative for others in similar situations?
2. Did they provide comfort to each other?
3. Did relationships form that might last beyond the group or that got expressed outside of the group context?

Assessing Goal 3 –

1. Did participants demonstrate identification with Jewish texts?
2. Did participants attend Temple Rodef Shalom functions with more frequency than before the group?
3. Did they demonstrate a closer sense of connection with the rabbi?

4. Did they share ideas of how to make Temple Rodef Shalom a more welcoming place for adoptive families?

Assessing Goal 4 –

1. Did participants share their support and advice with each other about the bar/bat mitzvah process?

Assessing Goal 5 –

1. Did members of the congregation who did not fall into this group approach me to speak about the topic?

2. Did the religious school integrate into its curriculum and teacher training issues that might be helpful for these adopted children and other adopted students?

3. Were topics of concern addressed at staff meetings? Were new approaches being planned for the future?

I will use the first meeting to discuss some of the following areas that I will use for feedback and effectiveness of future discussions. I intend to work these questions into the introduction and initial meeting in an organic fashion, so as to not bias the participants when they receive the formal, written survey at the end of all six sessions.

1. How often do you have the chance to talk about being a cross-racially adopted child/parent?

2. How comfortable do you feel discussing this topic?

3. Have you ever thought of this as something to discuss at the temple?

4. How do you feel about Temple Rodef Shalom?

5. On average, how many times are you at Temple Rodef Shalom in one month?

6. Do you think that you will feel more connected to Temple Rodef Shalom after this discussion series?

7. Has Temple Rodef Shalom met your needs as a cross-racially adopted child/parent?

8. How comfortable to do feel being Jewish?

9. Do Jewish values work for you?

10. How many times have you approached Rabbi Burstein or other members of the clergy with questions or issues, Jewish or otherwise?

11. How comfortable would you feel discussing important issues with Rabbi Burstein or other members of the clergy in the future?

12. Other questions to be determined after initial contact with families.

In addition to the survey, I will use my own subjective guidelines for assessment based on how each session goes...

1. Are participants sharing more of their thoughts and feelings as the discussions progress?

2. Do they mention or demonstrate a greater understanding of Judaism and/or a connection to the congregation?

3. Have any of the families contacted me privately during the process?

4. Do I feel a greater sense of understanding of the complexities of these families and will I be better able to address their concerns as well as other families' concerns in the future?

5. Do the people in the discussion groups make a point of saying hello or goodbye to me when they are in the temple?

Chapter 4

I felt that carrying out the project properly should include having the groups co-led with a professional who was familiar with adoption, adoptive families, and the potentially challenging, powerful, and emotional aspects of adoption. Although I had received some training on group leading and group therapy, I thought that the comfort level of both the participants (and myself) would be higher if there were someone with experience in this field to assist in the leading of the groups. I spoke with a few people at the local offices of the Jewish Social Services Agency, but no one was available to help. Although I did not think that it would be healthy for the group to be co-led by another member of the congregation, I asked some social workers in the congregation who they might know in the adoption field who would be a good co-facilitator for the project. A few people directed me to a local organization called C.A.S.E. -- The Center for Adoption Support and Education. They have an office a few miles from Temple Rodef Shalom and some of the adopted children in the congregation were adopted through this organization. I contacted them by telephone. After speaking with three different social workers at C.A.S.E. and explaining what I was looking for, Tamara Vitela ("Tammy") decided that she would like to meet me to learn the details of the project. I also asked what the going rate for leading a group would be and she said that $50/night would be fine. This money would come from Temple Rodef Shalom. We arranged a meeting at my office, where we discussed the original proposal that I had written for the project. Tammy agreed to help lead the group with me. Not only was she a professional social worker in the field of adoption who had worked with adoptive children and parents of all races, but she herself is a Latina woman who

was adopted by a Caucasian mother. She offered to share her experiences, when appropriate and/or when requested. We arranged to meet again, and at that meeting we spoke for a few hours about my goals for the project and came up with specific topics for each evening's discussion. We both agreed to take notes and discuss our impressions of each session between sessions.

I established the protocol that each participant would receive a message from me in anticipation of the upcoming meeting with questions to think about. We would then use the questions as a springboard for each evening's discussion. The following appeared in the monthly Temple Rodef Shalom newsletter in May 2003:

> Special Project to Begin
>
> As many of you already know, I have been taking classes full-time for a degree called a Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling. Each week I travel to New York City on my day off to study with other rabbis, ministers, and priests. We study many different types of counseling situations that deal with a variety of issues. The five classes each semester go from 9 am - 6:30 pm, and I have been doing this for two years. My efforts have been most rewarding, and I know that many of you have already benefited from my extra skills. The good news is that a few weeks after you receive this bulletin, I will complete all my classwork for the degree. I am very excited and look forward to a more relaxing pace after I finish!
>
> Although I hope you have not noticed my absence at temple events during the past two years, I want to thank the congregation for all the support I have received. It is wonderful when a congregation realizes the importance of continuing rabbinic education. In addition, I would like to especially thank Rabbi Schwartzman and Cantor Shochet for all of their cooperation. I could not have completed this program without their flexibility and coverage, and I am deeply grateful to them.

The last part of the degree includes an application project of some of the skills learned during the program. I have chosen to run a series of discussion groups for cross-racially and internationally adopted children and their parents around b'nei mitzvah age. Among other topics, we will discuss issues of identity, fitting in, the Jewish community, and other areas of concern that participants will bring up.

If you are adopted or if you have adopted a child from a different race or country, I would like to hear from you. I am forming a group for students in grades 6-8 and their parents -- we will meet for a series of discussions (6), during the next months. The monthly meetings, facilitated by a social worker and me, will be about one hour long for the children and one hour long for the parents. Two of the six meetings will be for both children and parents together. If you are interested, please contact me by e-mail (RabbiBurstein@templerodefshalom.org) or by telephone as soon as possible. After receiving your responses, I will then coordinate the best meeting days and times. I hope that if your family fits into the above category, you will consider helping me finish the final part of my degree. I look forward to working with this group of temple members and sharing some of my findings with the entire congregation in the future.

Thank you again to all of you for your continued support and encouragement!

Rabbi Marcus Burstein

During the following weeks, the majority of parents whose families who fit the parameters of the project got in touch with me. All expressed excitement and pleasure about the formation of this group. I also checked with the members of the TRS staff to learn if there were any other families who could benefit from the project but who had not been in touch with me. I approached four families individually and solicited their participation. It was very convenient that many of the families were preparing for an upcoming bar/bat mitzvah, so there was a

natural reason for me to be seeing them. A few of these eligible families chose not to participate. These families explained that their child(ren) did not want to join the group. I did not pressure any family to join. Two boys who participated fell outside the original age range, one being in fifth grade and one in ninth grade. I included them because their parents requested it. I thought it was good to have these two boys join the group. Also, each of them had a sister in the original age range of group participants. In the end, six out of a possible nine families decided to participate. Although all of the parents were invited to attend, all did not. The final group consisted of 9 parents and 9 children. I did not know if any of them had participated in group activities related to adoption in the past, and I did not know what previous relationships the families had with each other. The following families participated:

Family A -- (this family is related to Family B; the mothers are cousins)
father -- Peruvian, convert to Judaism
mother -- Caucasian, Jewish
(biological son, 16, who did not participate)
adopted daughter -- 13, Salvadoran, biologically related to brother, adopted at age 7
son -- 11, Salvadoran, biologically related to sister, adopted at age 4

Family B -- (this family is related to Family A; the mothers are cousins)
father -- Caucasian, Jewish
mother -- Caucasian, Jewish
adopted son -- 15, Colombian, not biologically related to sister

adopted daughter -- 12, Colombian, not biologically related to brother

Family C -- father -- Caucasian, not Jewish (did not participate)
mother -- Caucasian, Jewish
(adopted son -- 16, Korean, not biologically related to sister, did not participate; too old for group)
adopted daughter -- 13, Korean, not biologically related to brother

Family D -- father -- Caucasian, Jewish (did not participate)
mother -- Caucasian, not Jewish
(adopted son -- 16, Korean, not biologically related to sister, did not participate; too old for group)
adopted daughter -- 12, Korean, not biologically related to brother

Family E -- father -- Caucasian, not Jewish
mother -- Caucasian, Jewish
adopted twin daughters -- 13, from Former Soviet Union

Family F -- single parent mother -- Caucasian, Jewish
adopted son -- 13, from Costa Rica

In an effort to have the participants begin to think about each evening's topic, I sent out e-mails the week of the discussion. Part of this was to remind the participants of the upcoming meeting, but mostly this was done to have them ready to join in the discussion with a minimal amount of "down time" to think during the sessions. By sending the questions out in advance, I had hoped to jump-start each evening's exchange of thoughts and feelings. Each e-mail

contained a few questions that related to the topic of that evening's discussion and will appear before a review of each session.

The study texts chosen for each discussion were designed to teach participants some Jewish views and laws of adoption, as well as to teach how adoption has been an important part of Judaism since its inception. Some of the texts I chose contained more information than we could properly process within 5-10 minutes. I decided, however, that it would be better to move through as much material as quickly as possible within the group setting, and then have the participants take it home to look at more thoroughly, if they so desired. The text study for each session did not necessarily relate to the theme of each session; as mentioned above, the text study was designed to have the participants learn Jewish aspects of adoption. I will comment on the success of each text in the assessment of each session in Chapter 5.

Before each meeting, I set up the two rooms that we would be using. In the room where we would hold the discussions, I arranged the chairs into a circle. In the other room, I put out some snacks. I planned to meet with the children first, so that they could get to know each other a little before having to spend one hour without adult supervision. I had originally planned to have a movie available for the children to watch; this did not happen. I thought that a movie might provide a pleasurable experience for the children, if they did not feel comfortable socializing with each other. I was unable to get a movie for the children to watch for first session.

This is the original letter that was sent to all of the participants:

> 3 Tammuz 5763
> July 3, 2003
>
> Shalom, (names of parent(s) and child(ren))!
>
> I hope that you are well and that you are all enjoying the summer.
>
> I am very excited that you are interested in helping me with my Doctor of Ministry project. This six-month project is designed especially for members of Temple Rodef Shalom, and we will meet once each month from 7-9 pm. Our first session will begin at 7 pm on either Wednesday, July 23 or Thursday, July 24. Please let me know by Friday, July 11 which date is better or worse for you. At that first meeting, we will meet each other and begin to discuss some of the issues that will be addressed in the future.
>
> During the first hour, all of the children will meet with me (without parents). From 8-9 pm, all of the parents will meet with me (without children). There will be some refreshments available for each group while the other group is meeting. I will send out a few questions for you to think about before we get together.
>
> I look forward to hearing from you and seeing you soon!
>
> Very sincerely,
> Rabbi Marcus L. Burstein

We decided to meet on Thursday, July 24, since that was the date that the largest number of families could attend. I sent out the following e-mail on July 21:

> Dear X,
>
> I hope that you are enjoying the summer. The Temple remains full of activity as we prepare for the year ahead.

I'm very excited that we will begin our discussion group later this week! I will be meeting with all of the students from 7-8 pm, and then with the parents from 8-9 pm. Helping me lead the discussion groups will be Tammy Vitela, a social worker at C.A.S.E. of Falls Church. There will be some snacks for all to enjoy when you are not with Tammy and me. I will also have a video available to watch for the students.

In order to get the most out of our short time together, I would like for you to think about the following:
Bring in your favorite family photograph and tell us why it is your favorite.
Tell us a little about yourself. If you had to choose 5 adjectives to describe yourself, what would they be?
What is one of your favorite stories about something you did?
Who are the people you are closest to? Name a few. Why?
What makes you feel Jewish?
What is your favorite Jewish memory?
What is the best part about being Jewish?
What is the hardest part about being Jewish?

I look forward to seeing you in a few days!
L'hitra'ot,
Rabbi Marcus Burstein

Session 1 -- July 24, 2003 -- Introductions

The first session started at about 7:10 pm, after all of the participants found the correct room and we divided the children and parents into separate groups. After the parents left, I welcomed everyone and then asked Tammy to introduce herself. I shared the structure of the meeting: we would introduce ourselves, study a text together, and then proceed to the questions that were sent out in advance by e-mail.

All went around the circle and introduced themselves. Although most had forgotten a picture to show the group, all shared the adjectives that they would use to describe themselves. Every child used some combination of the adjectives smart, funny, nice, and athletic, in addition to a few other adjectives. Even in the way that they described themselves, one could see personalities emerging. One Korean girl was very shy, often giggling and looking at her friend, another Korean girl. The youngest boy acted a little silly and was clearly not at the same maturity level as the rest of the group. The other boy who attended this session acted in an ornery way, answering questions only because it was "required," but did not put his heart into his responses. One girl was very mature and took all of the questions seriously and thoughtfully responded; all present respected her intelligence and maturity. Twin sisters showed very different personalities, one acting quite outspoken, the other almost painfully timid. All responded to the questions -- sometimes we went around in a circle and sometimes we allowed them to answer in whatever order they chose. If anyone had not joined in, I asked them if they wanted to share anything, at which point they responded.

After the initial round of introductions (Tammy and I both participated in answering the same questions we had asked of them), we began a short text study from Exodus 2:1-10 and Esther 2:5-7. We also looked at some commentary from the Everett Fox Torah commentary. These passages deal with the adoption stories of Moses and Esther, two of Judaism's most famous heroes. I chose these texts to have the children realize that these Jewish heroes were adopted, hoping that they would identify positively with Jewish tradition.

I read the texts and then asked a few questions of the group. All of them already knew these stories. Three students actively engaged by answering questions that I asked the group, but the majority did not jump into the text study easily and needed to be prompted to participate. There was no significant reaction noted to the stories. At times I waited quietly for a response, not needing to direct every moment of the session. After about 10 minutes and my realization that the children might not be as interested in the text study as I had hoped they would be, I moved on to the next part of the evening. Perhaps the students were not used to studying a text in such an informal atmosphere, but I had hoped that future sessions would be a little easier. I continued by asking questions about their lives. Although I was the primary facilitator, I often made eye contact with Tammy for her to take the lead at times, in order to provide a little balance for our asking questions. Tammy usually understood my cues, but did not immediately jump in to the discussion. She took a secondary role in all of the discussions and added her thoughts usually after I indicated that she should join in.

Each student shared something during the course of the evening. One shared that she had never spoken about the topic of adoption before with members of her family and was happy to talk about these issues in the context of the group. This same child was almost at the point of tears at one moment, because she shared that she knew her birth parents and her older sister and knew the reason why she had to be taken away from her family. (She was seven when she and her four year old brother were adopted.) She did not share any more information, and we did not ask for her to do so. I did not want to ask her to share information that would make her feel uncomfortable. This revelation

affected the group, in that we all felt the emotional power of her words. Although we were all curious, we respected her privacy, and no one asked for further clarification. This revelation signaled that there were weighty, personal, and meaningful topics to discuss together. I anticipated that at some later point this child would share some more of the details of her birth family, but she never did (although she did make similar references to this same information in subsequent sessions). Because this girl had never had the chance to speak about being adopted in a group setting before, I asked the group if others had a similar experience. Two children shared that they had attended conferences for adopted Korean children and had made friends from that group. The twins from the FSU said that once a year they gathered with other children who were adopted from the same orphanage in the FSU. The other children did not have any other opportunity to talk about being adopted with a group. One boy was not very responsive and told the group that he showed up only because his mother insisted that he attend. I thanked him for participating and joining the group that night. The mature girl told the group that she used to pretend that she was a minister before she was adopted by her Jewish family, and there was laughter from two children, Tammy and me. This girl and her four year old brother were the only children who were raised with another religious tradition prior to their adoption, but I do not think that her brother remembered anything of their previous religion. The youngest boy said that he couldn't be Hispanic and Jewish at the same time. There was an outburst of responses at this point, with some almost even shouting, "What do you mean?! Of course you can!" At this point, it was already after 8 pm. Although I wanted to hear more about this comment and the reactions it evoked, we knew that the parents would be

waiting to begin. We concluded at about 8:10 pm, figuring that we should have an entire hour, even though we originally planned to conclude at 8 pm.

The following is what occurred in the first parents' session.

There was no need at all to encourage dialogue during this session, as all were eager to jump into the conversation to share. All parents were appreciative of the forum. Three were concerned about the specific texts that I chose to study for the first session, and voiced their opinion. One parent was disturbed by the fact that Moses ultimately fled from his adoptive family. I felt slightly defensive and surprised that there was an initial challenge to the text that I selected, but listened to the comments attentively. I did not focus on that aspect of the story and had not even mentioned that at all. I tried not to respond in a defensive manner, but shared with the parents that in the previous session we discussed only the beginning of the Moses story and the positive aspects of the stories. Although I had hoped to stick to the plan that Tammy and I designed, the sharing was so easy and interesting that I resisted my initial desire to control the conversation. I knew that the issues the parents brought up were probably more important to them than the issues that I had thought we should talk about. Some wanted to know what Judaism says about adoption, and I responded that we would be looking at some other texts in future evenings that would deal with this topic. There was a suggestion to include the stories of Ruth and Joseph, both of whom adopted different cultures at different points in their lives. I had not considered this aspect before it was suggested, since neither was "officially" adopted by one specific family. One mother shared that her son (an older child who was too old to be eligible to participate in the group) had felt pulled by two different groups of friends at his junior high school graduation and did not know

which one to choose, the Asian group or the Caucasian/Jewish group. This mother's moving story brought tears to many participants' eyes when she told the group that her son said, "I don't know what to do." The mother told the son that they could go to both celebrations, to which the child said, "Can we really do that?" All laughed. This same parent addressed the issue of being the non-Jewish parent in the relationship and felt a little sore that the Jewish parent was not present for the discussion and did not plan to attend in the future. I did not respond, but realized that at least two other families had similar circumstances of intermarriage. Of the two other intermarried families, however, one Jewish parent attended and the other couple did not attend the initial meeting.

Because the first hour was with the children and the second hour was with the parents, each group spent an hour of time with their peers when not talking with Tammy and me. I noticed that many of the parents talked in a different room for the first hour, and therefore immediately jumped into a meaningful discussion. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they already had the opportunity to meet each other and become comfortable with each other.

When the parents and I entered the room where the children were after the first parents' session, we realized that they had been playing with each other. As we approached the room we heard shouts of joy and entered to see most of the children sweaty from running around. The sizable amount of food left for them was entirely eaten. At least three were hesitant to leave their new friends. I then realized that they did not need a movie to keep themselves entertained and that it would be better for them to socialize with each other rather than watch a movie together.

The following e-mail was sent out before Session 2 on August 26:

Shalom to all of you!

I hope that you are well. It's hard to believe that we will be meeting again so soon. The next meeting is August 28 at 7 pm for the children and 8 pm for the parents.

Please think of the following questions in advance of our meeting. The theme for the evening will be: Integration, Wholeness and Peace.

What do you remember from the last discussion? What surprised you?
What would you like to discuss further?
What did you talk about with your parent(s)/child(ren) afterwards?
Was there anything that surprised you that you want to talk about further?
Please bring your favorite family picture with you this time!

What does it mean to be Jewish and all the other things you are?
What do you bring from being from a different country?
Is anyone having a hard time?
What things would you like to discuss in the future?
For children -- please brainstorm questions that you want your parents to answer for you sometime in the future.
For parents -- what things at Temple Rodef Shalom could be done differently to make it easier for your families?

I look forward to seeing you soon!
Rabbi Marcus Burstein

Session 2 -- August, 28, 2003 -- Integration, Wholeness and Peace

Moments before the second session began, a parent asked me if I had heard from her son. Apparently, he had called to leave a message to tell me that he would not attend the session; I did not receive the message because he called

after the temple office had closed. His mother told me that her son yelled at her that he was not going to attend; his attendance made him feel different from others and that he just wanted to be "normal." The mother was upset. I asked her if she would consider staying for the parent part of the evening and she agreed. I ran to my office to retrieve the message and called the child who did not want to attend. I briefly spoke with him, telling him that I was sorry that he was not going to be joining the group that evening and that I would like to speak with him sometime next week if he agreed to do so. He agreed and we made an appointment for the following week. When we met, I did not pressure him to return to the group, but strongly encouraged him to continue to participate. I made sure that he felt that it was his decision, one that he did not have to make in my presence. He did rejoin the group for the fourth and fifth sessions (his mother had forgotten about the third and sixth sessions).

I acknowledged the four recent b'nei mitzvah ceremonies that took place among the participants between the first and second sessions. (Temple Rodef Shalom has two b'nei mitzvah almost every week throughout the entire year.) Four children smiled broadly and each shared one special aspect of their ceremony. By coincidence, every child had attended at least one bar/bat mitzvah ceremony of the other, if not as an invited guest then as a member of the congregation that morning. All shared a few of their thoughts and impressions of their recent special occasion and the ceremonies they attended.

For Study Session 2, we discussed a section from Sanhedrin 19b about adoption, accompanied by two paragraphs of commentary by author Michael Gold in *and Hannah wept: Infertility, Adoption, and the Jewish Couple*. The following is the text we studied:

Michal [the wife of King David] was childless her entire life (see 2 Sam. 6:23), yet she is described as being the mother of five sons (see 2 Sam. 21:8). Actually, the five sons were born to Michal's sister Merab. In attempting to resolve this contradiction the Talmud gives the classical justification for adoption:

It is written, "the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul." Rabbi Joshua answers you, Was it Michal who bore them? Surely Merab bore them. Merab gave birth to them and Michal raised them, therefore they are called by her name. This teaches that anyone who raises an orphan in his home, scripture considers him as if he gave birth to him.

Rabbi Haninah learned it from here, "And the women her neighbors gave it a name saying, there is a son born to Naomi" [Ruth 4:17]. Was it Naomi who bore him? Surely Ruth bore him. Rather Ruth bore him and Naomi raised him, therefor he is called by her [Naomi's] name.

Rabbi Yohanan learned it from here. "And his wife Yehudiah [another name for Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, mentioned at the end of the verse] gave birth to Yered the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Soco, and Yekutial the father of Zanoah" [various names for Moses; see Rashi's comment: 1 Chron. 4:18]. Was it Batya who bore him? Surely Yocheved bore him. Rather Yocheved bore him and Batya raised him, therefore he is called by her name.

Rabbi Elazar learned it from here, "You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph, Selah" [Pss. 77:16]. Was it Joseph who bore them? Surely Jacob bore them. Rather Jacob bore them and Joseph sustained them, therefore they are called by his name.

Rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan, Anyone who teaches the some of his companion Torah, scripture considers him as if he gave birth to him. One verse says, "These are the generations of Aaron and Moses" [Num. 3:1] and then it says "These are the sons of Aaron" [Num. 3:2]. Aaron bore them and Moses taught them [Torah], therefore they are called by his [Moses'] name.

The Jewish attitude toward adoption is clear from this passage. The child's spiritual parents, not the biological

> parents, give the child his or her name and identity. An orphan is called by the name of the parent that raises him or her, not the parent that gives birth. The real parents are the ones who physically sustain the child by providing for his or her needs and who spiritually sustain the child by teaching the Torah. We return to a theme mentioned frequently in this book. In Judaism, being the biological parent is secondary. The real parents are those who provided a home for, take care of, and teach a child. (Gold, 1988, pp. 155-56)

The children did not seem to connect to the study text; they were disinterested and did not engage readily in a discussion. I realized that it was probably too sophisticated for most of them. After trying for about five minutes to elicit a few reactions and responses with minimal success, I decided to move on.

Because only one set of siblings brought a picture to the first session, I asked everyone to bring pictures for the second session. This time three children came prepared with photographs. These three children passed the pictures around the circle and told everyone why the picture was special to them. I found it interesting that one of the photos did not have the entire family, the adoptive father was missing. Another picture included a grandmother with the nuclear family. We did not discuss the "why" behind the pictures, focusing on what each child chose to share.

We began to address some of the questions they received in advance. Two girls shared with the group that many times others don't believe that they are Jewish and that they feel that they have to prove it. Sometimes this made them feel mad. I was quite surprised that one girl's friends did not even know that she was Jewish until she invited them to her Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

Although often frustrated by having to prove their Jewish identity, these two girls enjoyed being different from others. One of the Russian girls had taken Russian language classes in the past and would like to do so in the future, although she was not presently taking classes. She shared that it can sometimes be annoying when others assume that she speaks the language of her birth country. None of the participants fluently speaks the language of their birth country.

The children then began to talk about their ethnic or national identities. The twins from the FSU shared how proud they felt seeing the contingent from Uzbekistan in the past Olympic Games. One Korean girl again told the group about activities that she had participated in with other adopted Korean girls. The boys identified with Latin American soccer players and felt a connection to them. It was clear that the majority of these children felt some connection to the country of their birth.

We concluded with some thoughts about future sessions. They wanted to ask their parents some of the reason they were adopted and how they could contact their birth parents. I told them that we would try to bring up and discuss those issues in the future.

As with the first session, the parents easily began -- or probably continued from their time with each other while their children met -- our discussion. After a few moments of greetings and letting their conversation die down, I passed out the text study. After we read the passage, I asked for any feedback. One parent was interested in what the children thought; I responded that they did not seem to connect to it very well. The parents, however, especially identified with Rabbi Gold's commentary that the "real parents are those who provide a home for, take

care of, and teach a child." Three parents audibly said, "yes" or "right," while the other parents nodded their heads in agreement.

We concluded the text study and I then moved the discussion to talking about the children's country of origin and what contact, if any, they had with that country. One mother shared a few stories of her family's recent trip to Korea, the birthplace of their two children. During their visit, their son (who was not eligible because of his age to participate in the group) would distance himself physically from his parents; the mother thought that her son felt a visceral connection with their male tour guide and that he demonstrated a longing to connect with the country of his birth. Other parents also mentioned that their child(ren) had a strong identification with their country of origin, which directly paralleled what the children had expressed in the previous hour. The parents shared that there is a constant ebb and flow of questions about the birth parents asked by the children of the adoptive parents. I did not ask the parents to share how they answer these questions, but Tammy shared a little of her own adoption experience. She told the group that her own search for her birth mother did not take place until she was in her thirties, and the experience was filled with many conflicting thoughts, questions, emotions and feelings. The parents seemed to be surprised that their children wanted to know about their birth parents and actively questioned them; I think that they thought their children were too young to start questioning so assertively. The parents respond to their child(ren)'s questions by not explicitly answering; they tell their child(ren) that they will have to wait until they are older to get that information.

I moved the group to the next topic and asked what the temple could do to better integrate adoptive families into temple life. One parent suggested that

the staff should encourage any efforts for the child(ren) to speak about being adopted in the context of their bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. Perhaps this was mentioned because the parents had recently attended some ceremonies where it was mentioned and some where it was not. In a sense, by the student addressing the issue of adoption in the most public (and religious) way possible, he/she acknowledges the proverbial "elephant in the room" that everyone sees and no one mentions. I did not respond to this suggestion, as I feel it is the child's choice to mention this information and that it is not my role to encourage them to do so, as it might make them feel different. I also did not share that some of the students had, in fact, spoken about their adoption during their bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. I am not sure how my silence was received by the group.

In terms of acknowledging one's adoption, the parents then brought up the issue of when to disclose this information with others. Three parents expressed some discomfort about the choices that they constantly have to make about how much to acknowledge about their reason(s) for adopting and/or the current racial make-up of their family. Again, I did not offer any advice, but rather mirrored their comments to keep the conversation going. When the parents switched topics and said that they wanted to know what makes a child Jewish from a religious, ritual point of view, I told them that we would study some of those laws when the group next met with parents and children together.

Two mothers shared the difficult stages that their daughters were going through. A mother of a Korean girl said, "My daughter is in her dumb blond stage." Everyone laughed at this great, ironic description. Another mother said that she wished she could meet the "aliens who sucked the brains out of my daughter." All laughed, presumably in common understanding.

Many questions were raised by the parents during this session. How much should they, as a parent, disclose to their children? How do you prepare and protect a child from the (inevitable?) search? How can one answer the question, "Why did my parents have to give me up? How could she (my birth mother) do that? Didn't she love me enough?" What do our children hope to get out of the search for their birth parent(s)? One parent was surprised that there is a piece of her daughter that is so needy and so interested in knowing that maybe there is someone else out there for her daughter. Neither Tammy nor I responded directly to the questions presented, we just gave the space for each person to ponder his or her own response. Simply knowing that other families were dealing with the same issues provided the parents with a sense of comfort and solidarity. The nodding of heads in agreement with the questions posed and the affirmation that each parent has similar questions showed that the concerns of some struck a chord with others.

The two Jewish-Jewish couples wanted to know how the different branches of Judaism would view their children and wondered if their children felt "as Jewish as more observant Jews." These two couples shared that their families keep kosher, a Jewish custom that the others do not observe. This was a noticeable difference of the levels of Jewish practice within the group. I wondered if these couples were, in a way, asking themselves, the same question -- Would their families be accepted as Jewish by more observant Jews? I told the group that one of the study texts would be a comparison of the different requirements for conversion among the branches of Judaism.

The following e-mail was sent out before Session 3 on September 9:

Shalom to all of you!

I hope that you are well – and that the school year has gotten off to a good start!

I want to remind you about our next meeting, THIS THURSDAY, September 11, 2003 at 7 pm. As you know, this meeting will be for parents and children together and will last about 2 hours.

Please think of the following questions in advance of our meeting. The more you think about them, the deeper our discussion will be. The theme for the evening will be: Fitting in to Family and Judaism.

1. For children: How did/does your family make you a part of their family? How do you acknowledge/remember some of your heritage of the time before you were adopted?
For parents: How did/do you claim your role as parent?
2. What rituals, transformations, and/or milestones have occurred in your family's life? In what way were/are they important?
3. Do you have any family rituals? What are they? Why and when were they created?
4. What makes you Jewish?
5. Could Temple Rodef Shalom make it easier for you as a family? How?

Thank you for taking some time to prepare, I'm looking forward to seeing everyone on Thursday!

L'hitra'ot – See you soon!
Rabbi Marcus Burstein

Third Session -- September 11, 2003 -- Fitting in to Family and Judaism

We began the third session with a quick round of introductions, because one new family joined the group and also all of the children did not know all of the parents and vice versa. The mood was very friendly, with many smiles and warm greetings. Some children sat with their parents and some sat with their peers. All seemed eager to be there that night and the novelty of both groups meeting together added an extra bit of excitement -- I think from the perspectives of both the parents and children, as well as Tammy's and mine. As always, I thanked everyone for being there and passed out the text study for the night.

For the third text study, we looked at the following passage from Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg's *Adoption and the Jewish Family: Contemporary Perspectives* which details some of the variations among the branches of Judaism.

> Differences in Conversion Laws and Rituals
>
> The problem that arises for parents planning to convert their adopted children to Judaism is that the traditional and liberal branches of Judaism have different requirements for conversion. Moreover, the Orthodox and traditional Conservative movements do not accept other rabbis' authority in this area. The decision adoptive parents make about conversion can have life-long consequences for their children. Some rabbis require proof of Jewish lineage before they will enroll a child in a Jewish school, permit synagogue membership, or conduct a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or wedding. They may request the certificate from a child's brit and/or mikvah to determine where and by whom these rituals were performed. Parents need to consider that, regardless of their own level of observance, they have no way of predicting their child's future interest in and observance of Jewish ritual. It is devastating for an adopted person who has been raised as a Jew to be told that he or she "isn't really Jewish." Some adoptive parents, therefore, choose the most traditional path. They should seek rabbis within the

halakhic community who are sensitive to adoption issues, says Rabbi Richard Fagan, and educational consultant at the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education, in Melrose Park, Pennsylvania. Others select a more liberal procedure, while anticipating how they and their child will handle whatever future complications might arise. Whatever their decision, it is critical that adoptive parents have accurate information. Because the laws are complex, they should consider consulting a rabbi who is well versed in the halakhah relation to adoption.

Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism takes a liberal approach to Jewish law, maintaining that halakhah is no longer binding and should be changed or modified to meet the needs of modern Jews. Reform Judaism does not require the formal conversion of a child born to a non-Jewish mother, if the child is to be raised as a Jew. However, many of the traditional rituals, which were eliminated or modified as Reform practice developed, have since been brought back as people's needs have changed. Recognizing the differences among the branches of Judaism, and the difficulties this can cause adoptees later in life, some Reform rabbis suggest that people may wish to comply with more traditional practice. ... Others, like Rabbi Simeon Maslin, Rabbi Emeritus of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, do not recommend conversion, but do suggest that all children have a brit ceremony, at home or in synagogue, that formally marks their entry into the community.

Reconstructionist Judaism

Reconstructionist Judaism holds that the traditional halakhah "has a vote, not a veto." By defining Judaism as the evolving civilization of the Jewish people, Reconstructionism endorses the value of observing traditional laws and rituals, but maintains that they are not binding. The movement requires conversion, unless the birth mother or father was Jewish. (Patrilineal descent is not generally accepted by more traditional Jews. Such a person, adopted or not, may be asked to convert if they want to

involve themselves in the more traditional branches of Judaism.) The traditional rituals are seen as "imperative parts of the conversion process," and it is recommended that "their meaningfulness and transformative potential" be emphasized. ... Rabbi Sherry Shulewitz, associate executive director of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, explains that in the Reconstructionist view, "conversion is a gateway to membership in the Jewish people and the gift that the Jewish people offer new members." The conversion itself is considered only the beginning of Reconstructionist Jewish life; like all groups, the movement encourages lifelong Jewish learning, synagogue membership, Shabbat and holiday observance, and involvement in home and family rituals.

Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism accepts the authority of halakhah, but also maintains that modern life necessitates some modifications of certain laws. To be acceptable, these modifications must be made by authorized rabbinic authorities and supported by halakhic reasoning. For a child to be considered Jewish by most Conservative rabbis, he or she must be formally converted to Judaism under their authority, or one that is more rigorous. Discussion concerning the details of conversion under Conservative authority can be found in a document entitled "On the conversion of Adopted and Patrilineal Children." With the Certificate of Conversion, the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly provides a "Parental Statement on Conversion" in which parents pledge "to rear their child according to the [teachings of the Torah and the] Jewish faith" by providing "a [comprehensive] Jewish education, bringing the child [regularly] to synagogue, establishing Jewish observance in the home, and surrounding the child with the warmth and joy of the Jewish religious practice in the home."

"A conversion is required by Jewish law and is a beautiful ceremony and a celebration," says Rabbi Michael Gold of Temple Beth Torah of Tamarac, Florida and author of and Hannah wept: Infertility, Adoption, and the Jewish Couple. "Although a Conservative ceremony may not be recognized by some Orthodox rabbis, I recommend that

people try to maximize their observance while doing the best they can within their reality."

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism holds that the Torah was given directly to the Jewish people by God. Therefore, only strict adherence to traditional halakhah, as expounded in the Torah and interpreted in the Talmud is permissible. Since performing these rituals is seen as a direct act of obedience to God, they have to be performed in the most proper manner. Accordingly, most Orthodox rabbis will not accept anything other than an Orthodox conversion, not out of prejudice, but because they believe that any deviation would be disobedience of God's will. The Rabbinical Council of America's Commission on Gerut, "Standards for Conversion of Adopted Children," requires that both adoptive parents be Jewish, keep a kosher home, be affiliated with an Orthodox synagogue, have a sponsoring rabbi with whom they will continue to be in contact, have knowledge of basic halakhah, and promise to provide a Jewish day school education. The rabbis who comprise the *bet din* must be Orthodox and the *mikvah* must be kosher according to Orthodox standards. (Rosenberg, 1998, pp. 12-15)

One of the most powerful aspects of this session was the ease with which all participants shared. I was very surprised that the children felt so comfortable that many volunteered to read sections of the above or to respond to questions that I asked to make sure that everyone understood the similarities and differences. During the course of the next two hours, three or four children felt sufficiently at ease to even appropriately interrupt statements made by their peers, parents, or even others' parents. For example, in the discussion that took place about adopted children looking like their parents, when one parent spoke about an experience she had with her daughter, another child interrupted and shared that she did not have the same type of experience. The comfort level in

the room was so high, even though the group had not been together in this setting before, one would have thought that the group had been together for years. In a sense, even without knowing each other, they acted as if they had known each other for years. All shared aspects of their journey to this point including adoption, involvement in the Jewish community and in Temple Rodef Shalom in particular, and the experience of going through bar/bat mitzvah as a family.

One of the most powerful moments throughout the entire set of discussions was when one father shared the moving story of the adoption of his children. He told the group that he and his wife went to a program to meet some children and to finalize the final steps towards adoption. As the couple got out of the car, he saw a seven year old girl clutch the hand of her four year old brother and run into the building. At that moment he said to his wife, "Those children will be our son and daughter." Later on that evening when they met face to face, the parents did not say anything special to these children, but they knew that they were the ones they wanted. The father then explained how the agency had "lost" their papers on purpose because another couple had wanted the pair, but he went and fought with the agency to make sure that he could adopt them. He told everyone that he never told his children that story before; there was not a dry eye in the room. After a pause to digest the power of the moment, I simply thanked him for sharing.

I then directed the group to the questions that I had sent out in advance by e-mail. The children shared some of the rituals that their families observe to mark their entry into the family. One family spoke about the two "Gotcha Days" they celebrate, which are the anniversaries of when each child was adopted. On

this day, the child can do whatever he/she wants as long as they spend time together with their family. One child remembered that his adoptive parents bought him whatever he wanted the day he was adopted, and all laughed. He was four years old at the time and his sister was seven. (The twins from the FSU were four years old when they left the "baby home," and also remembered minor things before they were adopted. The other five children were adopted as infants and did not remember anything.) All of the parents felt that the moment they saw their child for the first time was the moment they felt that child was part of the family. Two families said that their presence at large family reunions make them feel the children have been accepted into the family, as they are treated just like everyone else's children. One family celebrates the Jewish holidays with other families who have adopted children from other countries. It was unclear as to whether or not they celebrate with other adoptive families in lieu of their own or somehow celebrate with both sets of people. One family feels closer each time there is a meaningful and/or difficult topic of conversation that they work out together. Another family observes the anniversary of the day the court issued a certificate finalizing the adoption. Each family was eager to share their personal rituals, with little encouragement needed from either Tammy or me.

One child asked the group if anyone ever says, "You look like your parents." There was much laughter and animated responses as they shared similar stories. I was very happy that this child felt comfortable changing the topic and beginning to influence the discussion; I smiled to myself, not just from the content, but because of the group dynamics. After the laughter subsided, I probed a little deeper and asked how they respond when someone states that

they look like their parents. Almost all of the children do not know how to respond when they hear that they look like their parents. Yet, three of the children said that they even enjoy playing along at times. I thought it was interesting that the children said that they had not always told their parents when they had been mistaken for being their biological children.

I then asked the group about other challenging moments that present themselves. Both parents and children responded that there are difficult moments in both public and religious school. Whenever there is an assignment to make a family tree, tensions can increase. Almost all the children find it difficult to answer the question, "Where are your ancestors from?" One family even found it challenging to attend their own family reunions, although they did not elaborate. One mother painfully recounted the incident when her adopted son from Korea chose to receive a zero on a school project that dealt with genetics instead of complete the project. Genetics is not only discussed in science class, but in other classes as well; this makes most adopted children feel uncomfortable. A majority of those present thought that there can be a high level of insensitivity by teachers and classmates when the topic of genetics comes up. One child, who has a birth family, a foster family, and adoptive family said that when people ask her how many siblings she has, she responds, "About ten." If people look at her strangely, she chooses not to elaborate.

Five parents (and three children) shared their thoughts about how Temple Rodef Shalom could be better about making cross-racially adoptive families feel more comfortable in the temple. A number of the responses had nothing to do with their specific, unique situation, but highlighted challenges of a large congregation. Some shared that they did not know many other members, or they

did not know many people at Shabbat services. Although I suggested some other temple activities that they might enjoy, I mainly listened to their concerns. Some felt that the policies of the temple were too rigid and did not take any personal factors into consideration. I chose not to respond in a defensive way. A few people expressed the desire for a Chavurah (a group of families from the temple), or social group, for families with adopted children. I did not promise that I would spearhead an effort to form such a group. Three parents felt that the intense connection formed between the teachers and the clergy is lost soon after the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony and wished for some more opportunities to be together with the clergy. I responded in a defensive way by saying that we would like to continue those connections, too, but that it can be difficult with other temple responsibilities. We concluded the session just after 9 pm.

The following e-mail was sent out before Session 4 on October 22:

> Shalom to all of you!
>
> I hope that all of you are well and that the New Year is off to a good start. We finished all of the holiday celebrations and now have a little time to get back to "normal..."
>
> I want to remind you that we will be meeting TOMORROW EVENING to continue our special discussions. I was so proud of the last session with everyone together! All participated, took turns sharing, and became involved in the group. I thought that it was a particularly moving session.
>
> For tomorrow night, we will be talking about searching for who we are. I would like for you to think about the following questions that we'll discuss:

1. How do you search for who you are? (Judaism, family, friends, etc.)
2. How do you make conscious decisions about your identity?
3. How do you choose to identify yourself in the world?
4. Who are your peers? How do you fit in with your peers? Why?

I look forward to another meaningful evening of sharing.

See you tomorrow!
Rabbi Marcus Burstein and Tammy Vitela

P.S. Remember to put on your calendars our last 2 sessions on November 13 and December 4!

Session 4 -- October 23, 2003 -- Searching for Who We Are

The session with the children began with much laughter and camaraderie -- there was definitely a feeling that they had bonded with each other at this point. Tammy and I let the banter continue among the children, joining in and asking questions about whatever topic they were talking about. After this free-for-all of about 10-15 minutes, I had everyone turn their focus to the study session.

The text study came from a chapter on adoption in Isaac Klein's book *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*. Each child read one paragraph:

Introduction

"And Pharaoh's daughter said to her: 'Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.' And the woman took the child and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son" (Exod. 2:9-10).

"And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother, and the

maiden was of beautiful form and fair to look on; and when her father and mother died, Mordecai took her for his own daughter" (Esther 2:7).

"This teaches you that whoever brings up an orphan in his home, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had begotten him" (B. San. 19b) (Klein, 1992, p. 434).

Adoption in Jewish Life

1. May Jewish parents adopt a child whose natural parents are not Jewish, even if the latter consent?
2. May a child whose parentage is unknown be adopted?
3. If the parents are Jewish, does the child retain the natural father's name or that of the adoptive father, e.g., when he is called to the Torah, do we say "Isaac the son of (the natural father's name)" or "(the adoptive father's name)"?
4. In legal documents, such as a *ketubah* or a *get*, do we use the name of the natural father or the adoptive father?
7. If the natural parents are not Jewish and the child is converted, do we use ben or bat Avraham Avinu as with other proselytes, or the name of the adoptive father?
8. When the adoptive parents die, is the adopted child obliged to sit Shiv'ah and say Qaddish?
9. May an adopted child marry a member of the family of his adoptive parents? (Klein, 1992, pp. 435-6.)

Halakhic Stipulations

To which category do children given into adoption belong? The overwhelming majority of children given into adoption today are the offspring of unwed mothers who are not in a position to take care of them, or who give them up for other reasons. This eliminates them from the category of *mamzer*.

The mother may be either Jewish or Gentile. If she is Jewish and married, we assume that the child was sired by the husband (B. Sot. 27a), even when there is only a remote chance of this (Rivash, resp. 446). If she is not married, we assume that the natural father was not of a category that would make the intercourse incestuous.

If the mother is not Jewish, and the law of the land does not forbid the adoption of her child by a Jewish family, the

child is required to undergo conversion as prescribed in the rules of conversion....

If the child is of unknown parentage, a very rare situation today, we assume that the parents belong to the majority of the population, which in the diaspora is Gentile.

Theoretically, if the natural parents are Jewish, the adopted child should bear his natural father's name when we use the patronymic "son of so and so"; if the natural parents are not Jewish, and the child is converted as prescribed, it should be called Avraham ben Avraham Avinu. Nevertheless, it is permitted to use the name of the adoptive father instead in order to avoid awkward and embarrassing situations....

The same is true regarding the use of the name in legal documents, such as the *ketubah* and the *get*....

It is also the obligation of the adoptive father to have his adopted child circumcised and to recite the blessing that the father normally recites....

If the adoptive father dies, the adopted son is obligated to say Qaddish for him....

A serious problem is posed by marriage and kinship. When the identity of the natural parents is unknown, there is a danger that a brother and sister may chance to marry, or that the child may be a mamzer. There is also the question whether the adoptee may marry members of the family of his adoptive parents. The first apprehension is not taken into account because the possibility of such occurrences is extremely remote....

As to the question of the adopted child's kinship to the adoptive family, there is a difference of opinion. Theoretically, only blood relations are forbidden to marry each other because of consanguinity, and the adopted child is not a blood relation. Some authorities, however, raise the question of unseemliness. People who saw them grow up as sisters and brothers and see them get married will consider it an incestuous marriage... (Klein, 1992, pp. 437-8.)

I made sure that even though we tried to get through the text quickly, all understood the different laws. I did this so that the participants could take the

text home with them after the session to study it further, if they desired. Although three students actively engaged in the learning, the others participated only because they were expected to do so. They read when asked to read and answered questions directed to them, but they did not eagerly participate. I tried to pique their interest and at one point started writing some examples of names for adoptees on the chalkboard in the room. (This was the second time that we were in a classroom; the first and third evenings were in larger meeting rooms.) Writing on the board effectively engaged the students.

After going through the reading, we began to talk about how the children identify themselves. There was a significant amount of discussion about being Hispanic and Jewish at the same time. Three Hispanic children (out of five total) did not feel that they identified with other Hispanic children, but more with their Caucasian family and other Jewish people. One said that he felt the Hispanic lifestyle of his peers was so different from his own lifestyle, socially and academically. All the Hispanic children said that at times people come up to them and begin speaking Spanish, yet these children do not speak Spanish. Tammy shared that the same thing would happen to her in the past, and continues to happen from time-to-time presently, too. Tammy also shared that she felt that this experience was awkward for her, because some of her felt that she should know more about her birth culture. Two children vocally agreed and said that the experience can be a frustrating, because they do not understand what is being said to them. Three children said that they often respond by saying, "I don't speak Spanish," which then elicits strange glances that the children usually brush off. Four children said that they feel "white" more than anything else (Hispanic, Asian, etc.). One Asian girl has been hanging out with a

group of self-described "punks." "Even though they look like freaks," she said, "they are all nice people." This same Asian girl shared that many of her friends did not even believe that she was Jewish until her bat mitzvah ceremony. All of the children realized that there are stereotypes of race in American culture which can affect how others see them. Two Hispanic siblings are in a Spanish immersion program at their public schools, yet neither of them thought that it had something to do with them being Hispanic, rather that it was a challenging academic setting that would benefit them in the future. I did not push them to hypothesize about why their parents may have wanted them to be in the program. We concluded on time and then had the groups switch rooms.

With the parents, too, there was a different dynamic of sharing with each other in this session. The parents noted with pleasure that they and their children had enjoyed the group a great deal and wished that it would continue past the original six sessions. The parent who missed the previous session apologized for being "out of it" and forgetting the date. The other parents easily "forgave" her for missing. I think that she felt a little bit left out while the other parents commented on what had happened in the last session. I told her that I thought that her son would have particularly enjoyed it, because of the presence of a new male child who was close to his own age; at least two parents chimed in to agree with me. The new young man (the oldest of all the children) was articulate, insightful, and "cool," and would have been a great role model for the younger, only child of a single-parent mother. At least three members thought that her son could have benefited from being there and felt badly that the mother and son had missed that opportunity.

The conversation continued with the parents sharing that their children told them that they missed their own time together during the last evening; the children enjoyed talking and playing by themselves for part of the evening. The only family with a genetic child in addition to their adoptive children shared that they wished their birth child could have been part of the group. They said that they felt differently about some issues because they have both a birth child and adopted children, although they did not elaborate. The other parents did not react to their comment, and I simply repeated his words of frustration, not adding my own perspective.

The parents each read one of the paragraphs of the text. I also made sure that everyone understood each of the principles before moving on, and referred to the notes I had taken on the blackboard from the first session. The text study on this evening immediately prompted a discussion about birth fathers and adoptive fathers. One father particularly appreciated hearing some of the laws that dealt with fathers, as he often feels that the birth father is usually left out of the picture. He said that he often feels disenfranchised as a father, because it's almost as if the birth father doesn't exist. This father seemed angry that most people only talk about the "birth mother" and how she might have felt "giving up her child." He said that no one ever mentions the birth father and how he might have felt. I wondered if his comment had anything to do with his current marital problems, which will be discussed in the next chapter. A single mother also appreciated some of the Jewish laws that relate to conversion and the giving of a Hebrew name. She felt her son's Hebrew name, which included Avraham (Abraham), was a source of pride to her son, in that he has a spiritual father, even if she is raising him as a single-parent mother. I said, "The text affirms the

fact that your son does have some sort of male relation to Judaism, too," to which she strongly responded, "Yes!"

At this point, one of the parents brought up the issue of her child's outward rebellion towards her parents and even at times to Judaism. I did not have to ask for corroboration before two other parents shared that their children have said to them things like, "I'm not really Jewish" or "You're not my mother." Although adolescents who are born Jewish may rebel against their parents and their Jewish involvement, Jewish children from birth do not have the "ammunition" to say that they are not "really Jewish" or that they are not "really" that parent's child. The majority of the parents seemed to believe that their children internally, however, do not question their religion or their adoptive parents' love for them. One mother made up a term called "psychogenetics," which she uses to describe the emotional issues that play out between adoptive children and parents. The parents still feel as much commitment and connection to their child, even in the face of trying outbreaks of rebellion.

I then moved the group to answer some of the questions that were sent out in advance. The question of how one defines oneself was answered in different ways. Five parents felt that their occupation, their location, and/or their children define who they are. For those who adopted at a later stage in their lives, becoming a parent created an entirely different identity for them.

After answering the questions briefly for themselves, one mother began wondering how her Korean daughter viewed and defined herself. She mentioned that her daughter was struggling with feeling attractive and feminine in a culture that does not view her body type and her race as the "model" type. She shared that the media was sending images to her daughter that made her

daughter struggle with self-esteem issues. The mother continued to talk about body images and how her daughter perceived herself. Two other mothers shared similar feelings. It turns out that three of the girls at age 13 still enjoyed sitting on their mothers' laps, and some of the girls are even taller and heavier than their adoptive mothers.

It seemed that these mothers were surprised at their daughters' need for nurturing in this way and didn't quite know how to handle the situation. The mothers wondered what their adopted daughters saw when they looked into the mirror. They also wondered how much longer their daughters would want to be so physically close and intimate with them. Three mothers had read some literature that said girls can benefit from playing sports which help them with self-esteem and provides them with positive body images. The other parents nodded as if they were aware of the same literature.

Just as I was beginning to tell the group that we had to finish for the evening, the single-parent mother shared two very positive comments that her son had made about Hebrew school in general and me specifically. I am not sure why she said this in front of the entire group, but it sounded sincere. Perhaps she herself wanted to share her own gratitude for the group and thought that this was a nice way of doing so. With regard to her son, I think that, like most children, he complains to his mother about going to Hebrew school, but once he gets to the temple he realizes that it is not so bad. I simply thanked her for sharing this with me. This was the same child who did not want to attend the second session, because he "just wanted to be normal." These comments made me feel that this child was not only receiving some benefit from the group, but that he was making a stronger connection to the congregation and me. I did not

act any differently towards them in the future, but I have noticed that he now greets me with a big smile when I see him in the religious school.

The following e-mail was sent out before Session 5 on November 12:

> Shalom, Everyone!
>
> I hope that all of you are well. It's hard to imagine that three weeks have already passed since our last meeting. This is a reminder that we will be having our discussion on Thursday, November 13, 2003, 7-9 pm.
>
> Tomorrow we will be talking about Future Expectations.
>
> Please think about the following questions:
> 1. What do you think dating will be like for you (as a young person and as a parent of a young person)?
> 2. Have you thought about dating? What have you thought about?
> 3. How do you see yourself in 10 years? How will it be similar/different from the way you see yourself now?
> 4. In what ways do you think your family will change? In what ways will they stay the same?
> 5. What other things have you thought about for the future?
>
> We look forward to another meaningful evening of sharing.
>
> See you tomorrow!
> Rabbi Marcus Burstein and Tammy Vitela

Session 5 -- November 13, 2003 -- Future Expectations

Similar to the previous session, the atmosphere for this night with the children was particularly boisterous and lively. It took a while for the students

to calm down and to begin discussing the topic at hand. We did not ask them to quiet down for a while, but let them enjoy their animated conversations with each other for about 15 minutes. After the session, Tammy mentioned that she thought their excitement and restlessness was a manifestation of what was discussed from the prior session. She thought that it was difficult for them to contain the feelings that came up. It seemed that they were ambivalent to begin the "work" of the evening -- they almost did not want to get into the topic, yet at the same time they were excited to talk about it.

I finally asked the group to calm down, and we began looking at the text I brought for the group that night.

> An adoptee who was converted as a child retains the halakhic right, upon reaching the age of religious majority (Bar or Bat Mitzvah), to renounce the conversion and Judaism. Rabbis differ on how this difficult and controversial issue should best be handled. Some rabbis advise that a child must be informed of the situation and consciously choose Judaism. Others believe that this is too difficult and open-ended a choice to offer a teen, who is often in the throes of adolescent identity crisis and rebellion. Most Jewish adoption professionals agree that this is too emotionally charged a decision to present to so young a teen, and is likely to offer a rebellious adolescent a convenient target. They recommend that any real decision making be left for adulthood when religious affiliation will be one among many choices that adults make.
>
> Diane and Richard are members of an Orthodox synagogue and their daughter Marla's original *bet din* was conducted by Orthodox rabbis. They were told, however, that the conversion "wasn't complete" until, at the age of twelve years and one day, Marla took responsibility for herself as an adult Jew and "reconfirmed" her commitment to Judaism. At that time, the same rabbis conducted a second *bet din*, asking Marla herself questions about her

commitment to Judaism, and she, again, immersed in the *mikvah*. Diane and Richard explained to her that they believed it was important and right for her to accept this responsibility for herself, and they made the ceremony special by giving her a *hai* [the Hebrew symbol for "life"] pendant. Marla herself, however, says that she felt a great deal of anxiety about this event, especially since other children in her day school told her that she wasn't really Jewish until she had reconfirmed her Judaism. Sometimes, she says, she felt like saying, "If I'm not really Jewish, then never mind."

Sara and Shoshana, who are also Orthodox, say that their rabbis have advised them that such a step is unnecessary because the children have been converted to Judaism, and raised as Jews, and "the minute they start doing mitzvot [good deeds] it is as if they have accepted Judaism." Michael, the Conservative rabbi, says that while the conversion must be confirmed by "a positive Jewish act at the age of majority," any positive Jewish step will suffice.

Many rabbis and adoptive parents consider the Bar or Bat Mitzvah itself a reaffirmation of an adoptees conversion, says Rabbi Michael Gold, and find particular significance in the ceremony for this reason. Susan and Carl helped Joel select a number of meaningful rituals to incorporate into his Bar Mitzvah ceremony, as specific acts of reaffirmation. While not providing him the choice of rejecting his Judaism, they presented the positive idea of reconfirming an act that he was, originally, too young to understand. He selected a tallit [prayer shawl] on a pre-Bar Mitzvah family trip to Israel and his grandparents presented it to him and helped him to put it on at the ceremony. During the point in the Torah service when their Reconstructionist congregation's tradition is to hand the Torah from generation to generation, Susan, Carl, and each grandparent read a portion of a poem about passing on their Jewish heritage. As Joel accepted the Torah from them, he recited lines acknowledging his acceptance of this heritage as his own. (Rosenberg, 1998, pp. 22-23.)

At first I was surprised at the lack of response to the text. No one had a comment to make, even after a prominent pause and ample time to respond. Perhaps those who had freshly become b'nei mitzvah felt that it was "too late" to do anything about it. I had hoped that by sharing this text their recent ceremonies would relieve them of any doubts that they had about being "completely" Jewish. My guess (and hope) is that, even if they did not verbally share, they internalized its teaching and felt "completely" Jewish.

I then moved the discussion to the questions that they received prior to that night. When I asked who they would date, not one person mentioned that Judaism was important to them. I was quite surprised by this, especially with me -- their rabbi -- present! After further thought, however, I realized that not only was the children's reaction to my question similar to what would be true for most Jewish teenagers, but that the reality of the congregation is that over 35% of its families have one Jewish parent. In a tone as nonjudgmental as I could summon, I then asked them if dating a Jewish person mattered to them at all; they all answered, "no." (It made me think of a story that I read about an adopted girl who brought her non-Jewish friends home to her parents. Her parents told her that she should only associate with Jewish friends. What ultimately came out of the discussion was that the child felt that her parents were judging her original identity as a non-Jew as unworthy. The parents realized this only after much difficulty and outside help.) Tammy also looked surprised, and gently asked again. Two girls responded that they were not going to marry the people they would date, they are just dating them. I did not push the issue of religion any more. When I asked what characteristics were important to them

they said smart, attractive, and nice. Tammy and I were impressed that they answered in such a mature manner.

I then asked them if they thought that race was important. I thought it was fascinating that all of them thought that race was unimportant. One said that she would not necessarily stick to dating those of her race or religion, but that it was good to learn about other cultures. Many agreed with this statement. They did realize that a person's physical qualities are not as important as what is on the inside. Everyone assumed that his/her parent(s) would be okay with whomever they dated. I was not so sure that the children were tuned in to possible difficulties of acceptance by other members of their family and community. I pushed them to think about how their grandparents might react to a person of a different race or religion. Most of them giggled and could not imagine that their grandparents were thinking about them dating at all. At first I was again surprised to hear that they thought their parents did not mind who they dated. Then I realized that the parents clearly had modeled acceptance of a child of another race, so the same would likely be true for their children. During this session I realized the power of love that their parents had modeled for their children and was amazed at the influential impact it made on their children's lives. Also, how could these children not positively identify with people of another race? To do anything else would be to deny themselves and their acceptance in their parents' lives. Although I would have liked to have further probed their thoughts about others' thoughts, it was hard to decide how far to push.

The youngest member of the group did not identity with the discussion on dating, yet unsolicited he brought up a topic that concerned him. He shared

that he was nervous about his bar mitzvah in about one year. All of the other children immediately gave him encouragement and advice, sharing some similar feelings of apprehension that were followed by feelings of pride and accomplishment. It was quite touching.

I tried to move the conversation back to the topic of dating and the future. I asked the children what their thoughts were about having children. One said that she wants to have children of her own and wants to adopt in order to make someone else's life better. At least three other girls agreed. The youngest boy said that he only wanted children of "his own." No one commented on his statement.

Because the final session was going to be with their parents, I asked them if there were any questions that they would like to have their parents answer. Six children expressed their desire to meet and know their birth parents sometime in the future. Despite this yearning, they were afraid that they might hurt their adoptive parents if they spoke about their birth parents. The children didn't want their parents to think that they didn't love them. Tammy shared some of the challenges, hopes, frustrations, and difficult emotions associated with searching for one's birth parents and suggested that they wait at least until they are 18.

Tammy and I anticipated that the children would again bring up the topic of searching for their birth parents. We did not promise to discuss this at the last session, because we were not sure it would be helpful to open up the proverbial "can of worms" and then end the discussion series. Tammy later told me that she thought these children, at their age, seemed much more concerned and assertive about searching for their birth parents than other adoptees of the same age.

Before we began discussing the questions sent in advance with the parents, there was another plea by the parents for a continuation of the meetings in the future -- at this point in the discussions, there was to be only one more combined meeting. A few parents mentioned how important and meaningful the discussions were to them and their child(ren); even despite a significant amount of homework and other responsibilities, their child(ren) wanted to attend. The parents made many possible suggestions about how the group might continue in the future: yearly reunions, by themselves; they could agree to attend temple activities as a group, have dinners together, meet twice yearly, etc. A few parents expressed their satisfaction that in the format of these discussions their child(ren) could meet with their peers and have a chance to open up and discuss topics that normally do not come up. My guess is that they felt the same way for themselves, but did not explicitly state this. The parents thought that this unique gathering could not be duplicated in other settings. I was extremely hesitant at that point to offer any extension of the meetings and responded to the above comments by smiling and nodding, not offering any verbal response. Because this part of the discussion lasted for about 20 minutes, we did not study the text that we had studied with the children. Instead, we continued with the topic of dating and the future.

After finally getting to the topic of dating, one father made a powerful statement to the group. First, he said that he hadn't thought of his children dating very much (they are 14 and 12 years old). Then he said that after thinking about the questions received by e-mail, he thought it would be okay for his son to marry a Catholic woman some day, and that he thinks that he would feel differently if his children were their birth children and not adopted children. I

pushed him a little on this question, since I was so surprised by this remark. When asked how old his children were when they were adopted, he said they each were three months old. There was almost an audible gasp in the room, and I certainly felt that there must be some deeper issues for this man about the "Jewishness" of his children. In fact, I think that he himself was surprised and shocked at his thoughts and comment, which was probably the first time he articulated these feelings. After a pause, I decided not push him any further, but assumed that he would be doing some thinking about his comment in the future. No one else challenged him, although I'm not sure why. Perhaps they could not believe what he said, or perhaps his thoughts were shared by other members of the group, too. Because of time and intensity, I felt that it was more important at that moment to simply address the issue and not necessarily process the issue as a group.

In continuing the discussion about passing Judaism on to the next generation, one parent emphatically stated that she "can't pass her genes on, but can damn well pass on her heritage" [as a Jew]. Although her declaration elicited some laughter, I think that others resonated with her strong feelings. One woman shared with the group that she often tells her [Korean] daughter and son, "now make sure you marry a nice, Jewish, Korean wo/man." Again, there was laughter. The parents wondered if their children truly listen to them and realize how important their Jewish heritage and tradition is to them as parents. Many parents thought that their child(ren) was(/were) struggling with how to integrate the different aspects of themselves into a whole. They hoped that their child(ren) would figure out who they are and make decisions that make sense for them when they know more in the future. Although the parents might not be

happy with all of the decisions that their children would make in the future, they said that they would love them anyway. It seemed that the parents were more concerned with how the children felt about themselves as people than Judaism.

Because the questions sent in advance focused on what the future might bring, we broached this topic. One parent spoke about the search for her children's birth parents. All the other parents indicated either verbally or by shaking their heads that they expected this to happen. The parents were very concerned about not discussing this topic at the last session, because they felt that it would be unfair to bring up the topic without having an appropriate amount of time to talk about it. Tammy and I told them that the children had already asked us to talk about this, but we realized that the subject was particularly sensitive. We did not say that we would not talk about it at the last meeting, but did share that we understood their perspective and respected their opinions.

The last parents-only session concluded with more gratitude expressed by the parents for the group.

The following e-mail was sent out before Session 6 on December 2:

> Shalom, Everyone!
>
> Believe it or not, our last meeting will be on Thursday, December 4, 2003, at 7 pm. We will all meet together for two hours. Please try to be here as close to 7 pm as possible.
>
> Because it will be our last session, I would like you to not only think about the following questions, but would prefer if you WROTE your answers down to hand in. You do not have to put your names on them (and you don't have to do

it at all if it will make you uncomfortable). This written feedback will help me with my project -- we'll discuss the questions regardless of whether or not you write your answers down.

Please think about the following:

1. Are there any unfinished questions from the last meeting?
2. We talked about some issues related to connecting with birth parents last meeting. Is there anything that you'd like to discuss about this tonight?
3. Was there anything you wished we would have discussed in these meetings?
4. Were there any topics of conversation that were more difficult than others to discuss? What were they?
5. What are your hopes for the future in your family?
6. What were your most significant experiences concerning our group? What were the most important experiences of our discussion?

ALSO -- I'm anticipating that there will be an article in the Washington Jewish Week about our group in the next few weeks. I will NOT mention any names or identifiable information, but if you would be agreeable to be interviewed by a reporter, please let me know and I will pass on your telephone number. If not, no problem.

Of course I will thank everybody in person on Thursday for all of the wonderful discussions of the last six months, but here is the first thank you for all of your sharing. I look forward to another meaningful evening together.

See you on Thursday!
Rabbi Marcus Burstein and Tammy Vitela

Session 6 -- December 4, 2003 -- Concluding Our Time Together

After careful consideration of the topics we wanted to discuss and in order to have enough time to discuss them, we decided not to have a text study for the last session but rather leave more time for the participants to process their feelings and thoughts.

All gathered in a circle. Similar to the last time the entire group was together, some families sat together and some were divided, where parents sat next to parents and children sat beside their peers. I thanked those present for joining together for the final evening. I began by telling the group that we would not have a text study to make sure that there was enough time for all of the individual sharing.

I asked the group if there were any unfinished questions from the last meeting. One couple (both Jewish) said that after the meeting they began to think about other families in which both parents were Jewish -- they wished that there were more models for their family in the congregation. (This couple was the only couple who both had Jewish childhoods; one other couple was Jewish-Jewish by conversion of the father, but all other families in the group had one Jewish parent and one non-Jewish parent.) I shared that although the congregation does have a high percentage of intermarried couples, many families exist where both parents are Jewish. The parent who asked the question looked skeptical, but did not respond further; perhaps he thought I sounded defensive.

Returning to the original question of what was unfinished from the last session, one parent brought up the challenges of learning about immigration to the United States in religious school. She said that there does not seem to be much room for exploring those who did not come through Ellis Island from

Eastern Europe. This parent continued by saying that it would have been very awkward for her Korean daughter to dress up as an Eastern European immigrant for her grade's unit about Jewish immigration. There was very little information or choice for her to come as anything else. The parent thought that the school could do a better job of being sensitive to other ways that Jews came to the United States. Three other parents nodded their heads in recognition that more could be done.

When I asked for any more follow-up to the previous session, there were no comments. I then went on to the next question all were sent about issues related to their birth parents. In the next 10-15 minutes, almost all of the children and parents openly discussed searching for one's birth parents at some point in the future. The two children who knew and remembered their birth parents would like to see them again; other children just wanted to know their birth parent(s)' name(s), whether or not they had any siblings, or even to see a picture of their birth parent(s). One mother said that it was a "no brainer to search at some point" for her children's birth parents; all families seemed to think that a search would be a reality in the future, and all expressed support for the search at a later time in their child(ren)'s emotional development. I let Tammy take the lead during this part of the conversation. Just as she had shared a glimpse of what her general experience was regarding the search for her birth mother in the last session with the children, she again shared with the group a few aspects of the search process, but did not share any personal details. I think that she wanted to alert the children that it would not be an easy process, logistically or emotionally, but she avoided going into the specifics of her own search. After Tammy finished, there were no more questions on this topic.

I then asked if in the course of the past few months there was any topic or issue that people would have liked to address more thoroughly. One parent said she would have liked more guidance on how to meld or integrate the Jewish, Korean, Christian, and Polish aspects of her family. Rather than respond to that comment, I thanked her for that suggestion. Three parents and two children wanted some type of orientation as to how to connect with birth parents. Again, I did not respond, but thanked them for sharing. Two parents and two children wanted to talk more about challenges to their Jewish identity in the world.

Another parent suggested that a subject for a future group might include the challenge of letting others know about their adoption(s). The parents felt that many families go through stressful times related to when it is appropriate to share with others about the adoption. Although one would think that others can immediately realize that their child/parent could not be their biological parent, situations for both children and parents occur where the children and parents are not with each other, yet the family still feels obligated to share this information. Five children and parents said that they sometimes feel "forced" to disclose this information when they would rather keep it private. Although they did not give specific examples, I think that if they were planning to share that information at all, they wanted to share it on their own terms. Labels can be rough on both the children and the parents. The parents thought that the burden of disclosure rests with the children. They should decide when to let others know about their adoption and their adoptive parents. One child told the story of the day that she was formally adopted; she arrived late that day and the teacher asked her in front of the class why she was late. When she responded that it was because she was adopted, the teacher made a big deal. The student did not feel very

comfortable about this at the time. She explained that she can control who knows about her adoption by only revealing that she is adopted when directly asked by others. This child's younger brother (the youngest and least mature group member) interrupted his sister at this point and wanted to know what it was like for his parents the day that he was adopted. They told him that they would tell him later. My sense was that they did not want their son's immature outburst at that point to derail the discussion; the parents' response reflected their understanding of what was appropriate for their child and that it did not fit in with the group at that moment.

One parent wished that before she adopted her children that she could have received more preparation for the actual day of adoption. I did not understand why this would be relevant to a group whose children were near b'nei mitzvah age, so I did not respond to this comment. She continued and said that on the day she adopted her daughters she had been "reading the wrong books!" She should have been reading books about being a mother and not books about adoption. One child wanted to know when he realized he was adopted and when he was Jewish; he remembered that for a long time he couldn't figure out why he "was a doctor." Everyone laughed. The parents could not remember how old he was when he realized he was adopted.

I then asked the group if there were any topics in the past evenings that were particularly difficult to discuss. One couple expressed their disappointment that the group did not welcome their birth son and shared that they thought that it was unfair that their request was not fully or properly discussed when they brought the issue up months ago. There was no response from the group, and I simply thanked them for sharing. When I asked for more

comments, three children mentioned that it was difficult to talk about their birth parents with their adopted parents in the same room. When I looked to the other children who were present to see their reaction, two more nodded their heads in agreement. (This was talked about in session five with the children). Three children do not understand why they cannot know things about their birth parents now; they do not want to wait until they are 18 years old. One parent concurred by mentioning that a driving issue in her relationship with her children, at this point, is that they keep asking her questions about their birth parents.

When I asked if there were other difficult issues to think about, three children briefly shared a few thoughts about the challenging aspects of being adopted. They think about what life would have been like if they had continued to live with their foster parents or birth parents. One brother and sister still miss their parents because they remember them. One child said that his "parents must think about me on my birthday." This sobering statement for the group acknowledged that the children often think about their birth parents, even though they might not discuss their thoughts regularly with their adoptive parents. I imagine that the silence that followed his statement was a silence of identification.

Towards the end of the session, I asked each person to share some of the significant and special moments they had experienced within the context of the group. One parent was especially pleased to know about and meet this group of people and said that the social aspect was important, especially for the children. One parent was impressed by the fact that adults and children could speak together about meaningful topics on the same level. Feeling known by the rabbi

and other members of the congregation was very refreshing and satisfying to one parent. One child felt very comfortable sharing and being part of the group and thought that it was good to discuss the different topics and make connections with each other. One parent commented that it was so easy to speak her thoughts and feelings in the context of the group; she felt that there was an immediate feeling of trust and that all of the participants understood what was addressed. One child said that being in the group was a novel experience; this child made new friends and learned about his cousins and about others who are adopted from outside the USA. Another child enjoyed talking about the topics each evening and felt comfortable sharing her thoughts. Four children said that they felt comfortable in the group and shared some information and feelings with others that they had never previously shared. One parent noted that it was particularly special to have the parents and children together, and that it was so comfortable to share things not only in front of their children, but others' children, too. For the majority of people, this was the first time that they had been in a group such as this and it was the first time that they were sharing such thoughts and feelings. One child said that being in the group was the only time that she felt that she could fit in; she felt that she could trust everyone in the group. After each person shared, I thanked them for their comments. Tammy and I also shared that the group was special for each of us.

At the end of the evening I announced that those who had written feedback should please leave it on the table or somehow get it to me in the near future. I told the group that I hoped to see them at other temple activities, thanked them again for their participation and said goodnight. Almost all of the

participants thanked me and Tammy as they left, and eight of them hugged and/or kissed me goodbye.

Chapter 5

Assessing Session 1 --

For the first meeting, I asked the group to bring in their favorite family picture and tell us why it was their favorite. Only one family remembered to bring the picture. I do not think that this related to anything other than the fact that they forgot it; I do not think that they purposefully did not bring a picture in. I asked them to bring a picture for the following session.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the first text study with the children did not go as smoothly as I had hoped. Although all of the students were familiar with the adoption stories of Moses and Esther, there was minimal discussion. I speculated in the summary that part of this may have had to do with the fact that they were not used to an informal text study in this type of setting. Despite the fact that it did not elicit much reaction, I thought that it was good for the students be reminded of two adoption stories that they already knew -- Moses and Esther.

Looking back upon the sessions as a whole, it was clear from the first interaction with the students how they would interact with and benefit from the group. The shy Korean girl timidly responded to most questions (and ultimately dropped out because of a conflict with a dance class). The other Korean girl eagerly engaged in all of the discussions. The mature girl continued to share insightful and meaningful comments. The youngest boy ended up being somewhat of a comic relief for the group, and because of his immaturity did not contribute much of substance, but was still seen as a welcome member of the group -- I think the children enjoyed playing with him when the parents met. The reluctant boy, as mentioned in Chapter 4, dropped out, but then rejoined the

group. The twin sisters continued to show their distinctive personalities, but the shier one did open up more as the group progressed.

At times throughout Session 1 (and in subsequent sessions) with the children, some of the children only responded after Tammy or I personally invited them to share. I think most of this was because they were shy, or perhaps they did not feel that what they had to share was valuable. When a child ultimately responded, however, I almost always tried to validate their feelings and thoughts with a positive remark of encouragement. Some of the reluctance of the first session might have been because the children did not know each other. The only reason that I invited people to share in subsequent sessions was because I did not want them to think that I did not care about their thoughts and feelings.

In the first parents' session, I was surprised at the confrontational reaction to the text study about the adoption stories of Moses and Esther. While the children did not seem to look past the text we studied, the parents immediately reacted to the later part of the Moses story (which we didn't study) in which he leaves his adoptive parents' home. The parents clearly revealed some of their own fears that their children would leave their home and, like Moses, reject their upbringing. Unfortunately, we did not address this issue further, but I would try to revisit their reaction and what it meant for them with future groups.

I found it interesting that even after the first session, the group seemed to fit some of the typical group formation patterns. Yalom sees "an initial stage, characterized by orientation, hesitant participation, search for similarities, search for meaning, and dependency. This is followed by the second stage, characterized by conflict, dominance, and rebellion. The third stage ... involves

the development of cohesiveness" (Shapiro, Peltz, and Benadett-Shapiro, 1998, p. 12). I think that the initial "stage" occurred when the adults had the chance to get to know each other and overcome any hesitancy in the hour before the discussion began. The conflict/rebellion stage manifested itself when they challenged my selection of the study text. The personal sharing then moved the group into a stage of cohesiveness. Of course, although usually used over a period of weeks, months, and years, and I realize that I am referring to this "pattern" after only one session, there are some definite parallels. The remainder of the sessions stayed in the cohesive stage, although there were mini-conflicts or rebellions later on. (For example, in the fourth and sixth sessions, the couple who has a biological child as well as adopted children expressed the fact that they were different from group. They also wanted to have their biological son join the group.)

The benefits of meeting with the children first and their parents afterwards were greater than I originally expected. I chose to have the students meet with Tammy and me first, so that they would not be nervous and/or concerned about being in a room with peers they did not know for an hour. This seemed to be fruitful, because even after the first evening, it seemed that the children had fun with each other. The additional benefit, as mentioned already, was that the parents had a chance to begin to get to know each other before we began our formal discussion. In that way, they used the preceding hour to become more comfortable with each other, take care of any small talk, and be ready to jump right into the topic of the evening. I would definitely use the same model in the future.

Assessing Session 2

The text study for Session 2 with the children did not engage the students. Their apathy disheartened me a little, but I soon realized that the text was too sophisticated for them. I had originally wanted the children and the parents to study the same texts, with the hope that they might even continue their discussion after the sessions. I do not think that this worked out with all of the texts. In the future, I would not necessarily use the same texts for both groups.

Towards the end of Session 2, we talked about the languages of their birth countries; none of the children fluently spoke that language. I did not pursue what this meant to them, but in the future would ask them to address the feelings and thoughts they have about this. The children did, however, strongly identify with the country of their birth. Their parents encouraged this affinity through various means from talking positively about the country to making visits. In the future I would ask them to share a little more about their connection to their birth country and how they might want to maintain that connection in years to come.

In Session 2 for the parents, the text study was better received than the first text study. The parents were interested to hear how their children reacted. As mentioned earlier, one line particularly resonated with the parent: "real parents are those who provide a home for, take care of, and teach a child."

Later on in the discussion, one mother mentioned that she was so surprised that her daughter is so needy for attention from others. Perhaps for the daughter it is manifesting what Erikson called "identity hunger," the part of an adoptee that hungers for nourishment from others because they do not know their birth family. For the mother though, her daughter's need for others'

attention might be a threat to her motherhood, in that she cannot provide for all of the needs for her daughter alone. Some of this may simply be related to a child's growing up and not necessarily related to adoption issues at all.

Assessing Session 3

Session 3 began with a round of introductions of the parents and children. There was also a new family (Family B) that joined the group that evening. They had contacted me prior to that night by e-mail to see if it was worth it for them to join the group. I encouraged them to attend, since we had not even had half of the sessions. I also thought that it would be good to have another boy join the group. Family B, as mentioned already, is related to Family A, so even though they missed the first two sessions, I assumed that their cousins either told them about what happened and/or would do so in the future. Everyone in the group welcomed this family, and they were able to easily jump into the conversation. Even if these factors had not existed, I probably would have welcomed them into the group.

The parents and children did not necessarily sit next to each other during the session. For those children who sat with their peers, my sense was that the parents were happy that their children had made new friends. I did not think that the children were avoiding their parents, but rather that they were eager to be with their friends.

Although the text study for Session 3 was lengthy, it seemed that all were engaged in the discussion. I think that the text spoke to them because the subject matter was more immediate and interesting to them. They could learn some of

the different understandings about adoption among the branches of Judaism. In a sense, they were the subject, instead of some distant characters in the Bible.

The conversation about genetics reflected the principle mentioned in Chapter 2 that for adoptees, "much of their psychic energy has been taken up with adjusting to the mystery of their origins" (Lifton, 1994, p. 10). Even when genetics in the abstract is taught in school, the children personalize the subject immediately, because it is such a present and immediate issue for them.

Assessing Session 4

Upon reflection, I realized that the e-mail I sent out prior to this session might have made those who missed the previous session feel a little badly. However, I wanted those who did attend to know how successful I thought the last session had been. Perhaps the positive feedback would even serve as an incentive, of sorts, not to miss any future sessions. I also briefly mentioned to the group that one of the families dropped out because of a conflict with another activity.

About half of the children seemed to enjoy the text study for Session 4. Three tried to personalize some of the laws of adoption. Again, I realized that there was too much information to properly process in such a short amount of time, but they did seem to understand most of the teachings.

The text study for the parents for Session 4 prompted an interesting discussion that I had not anticipated. The laws concerning the child's Hebrew name -- including both a mother and a father -- spurred a discussion about birth fathers and adoptive fathers. I was surprised, and pleased, that simply having Abraham's name in the name of a convert provided comfort to the single-parent

mother and her son. I was also surprised that this led to one father feeling upset about birth fathers and their losses never being mentioned. Clearly the text study not only taught the parents about Jewish laws relating to adoption, but struck a chord for many, too.

In Session 4 with the parents, the couple with the adopted child and biological child said that they wished their son could participate in the discussions. I was not in favor of including this child, especially at this point, with only two sessions left. Because he is the biological son of the couple, I thought that it would not be fair to the other participants, both in the children's and parents' group. The dynamics of each group might significantly change, as this was designed to be a safe space for adoptees and their adoptive parents. I also knew the child who, although highly intelligent, can be uncooperative. Lastly, he was older than all of the rest of the children and was clearly outside of the age range of the group. Had I met with this family as part of a pre-screening process before the group began and heard their request, I might have had the chance to ask the other participants in the group their opinion. I let the issue drop, and then directed the group to continue with the text study.

Later on in Session 4, a mother spoke about some of her daughter's rebellious remarks to her. Had I not been familiar with the literature about adoption and adolescence, I would have been very surprised, because her daughter had just proudly celebrated becoming a bat mitzvah a few months ago. Knowing the literature, however, made me realize that this reaction is just par for the course.

Assessing Session 5

The text study for this session also was not particularly successful. One reason for this could be that the text itself presented conflicting Jewish views of adoption, even within the same branch of Judaism. Nothing was mentioned about Reform Judaism in the text, although I made sure to share the Reform perspective after we finished reading it. Despite the fact that the participants did not readily engage in a discussion of the text, I do think it accomplished the goal of having the children understand the importance of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony in cementing and formalizing their entry into adult Jewish life.

I found the conversation about dating to be particularly interesting and powerful, especially as I began to understand and process some of the responses the children -- and, later on, parents -- gave to the original questions I sent out in advance of the meeting. At first, I thought that dating another Jewish person would be something that the children would want to do; or at least they would say so in my presence. As I mentioned in the summary of Session 5, I quickly realized that in general most Jewish teenagers do not have dating another Jew as a priority. Then I assumed that these children would be interested in dating someone either from their own race or Caucasian people, as they were being raised in a predominantly Caucasian atmosphere. This, too, did not prove to be the case. I realized as they were speaking that -- for them -- it made sense to be "color-blind" in choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend. After all, their parents modeled this behavior for them. Even after I realized this, I wanted them to try to imagine how others might view them dating someone who was either not Caucasian and/or not from their own race. Although I did not think of asking this question in advance of the session, I asked them how they thought that their

grandparents would react to them dating someone of a different race or religion. This question arose from my quick learning curve and desire to appropriately engage in a meaningful and thought-provoking session with them. Throughout all of the sessions, my sensitivity to these children grew, closing the gap of my personal experiences of being a non-adopted, born Jew (of two Jewish, Ashkenazi parents), Caucasian rabbi with their vastly different experiences. With each session, I was gaining greater insights to these families.

As I mentioned in the summary of Session 5, in the course of the discussion, I realized that their parents had done such an amazing job of welcoming them into their families, that the children did not think twice about having intimate relationships in the future with people of other races. At the moment of realization, I was touched by the power of their parents' love and acceptance.

As the discussion ended, most of the children expressed their desire to have children in the future, and most of them also wanted to adopt children, even if they could have biological children. This was the best way that they, too, could positively understand their experience of being adopted. Their desire to replicate what their adoptive parents did served as a way of validating their own experience. The comment by the youngest boy that he wanted to have children of "his own" was a clue to Tammy and me that he was still struggling with some of his own feelings of identity and self-worth.

The parents' Session 5 began immediately with a plea to continue the sessions after the original six scheduled ones were over. The group intently began to discuss this, and so we did not have time to go over the text study, as originally planned. I thought that it was best to focus on their energy around

this issue, since they could study the text at home, if they desired. (Maybe I also realized that because it did not work so well in the last session, it was not worth taking much time in this session to review.)

Concerning the request to continue, I felt the following. While I, too, had significantly enjoyed each evening and getting to know these families better, I was not willing to promise to do any future sessions at this point. Plus, even if I had wanted to continue, I did not know how Tammy felt about this. There was the additional issue of payment; Temple Rodef Shalom was paying Tammy to help co-facilitate these discussions. If we continued the group, I would have to clear any future spending with the congregation's administrator and put it in the budget. In some sense, it seemed that the group had become too successful. If we were to continue in the future, the tone of the group could potentially be very different. I would have to screen all the participants again to see if they were ready and prepared to go to a deeper psychological level. In a sense, it would almost be like starting over again. I did think about some type of follow-up meetings, perhaps in a year or two, but I did not offer this as a possibility to the group at that point.

When we finally got to the topic of dating, two aspects caught me by surprise. First I was surprised by the father's discomfort about thinking about his children dating at all. However, upon further reading, I realized how normative his comments were.

This same father also surprised me, the group, and even himself when he expressed his feelings about his children and the different expectations he has for them vs. biological children he might have had. I did not anticipate this feeling (nor did he, it seems!), yet I did some research into this issue and came up with

two possible explanations. One is that most parents first dream of having biological children and then, only after infertility issues, think about adopting children (Beauvais-Godwin and Godwin, 2000, p. 7). The other idea is that there is a general sense in the American public that adopted children are not "as good as" biological children (Melina, 1998, p. 307). Perhaps the father shared some of these thoughts.

I mentioned in the summary of Session 5 that the other parents did not respond to his comment, perhaps because they were stunned. Because the group seemed to be open and supportive, I would have thought that some of the other parents would have pushed him to explain his thoughts. My guess is that, on some level, they might have been dealing with similar feelings towards their own children and did not want to put someone "in the hot seat."

A mother also seemed to have some concerns about her children dating and finding a partner in the future. She tells her son and daughter "now make sure you marry a nice Jewish, Korean wo/man." I felt that this mother used humor to diffuse a very complex set of emotions for her; perhaps she was very concerned about the possibilities of her children marrying someone Jewish (although she did not marry someone Jewish!), and does not know how to confront and/or articulate her fears. In retrospect, I wished I would have pushed her to explain her statement and what it meant for her.

Assessing Session 6

As mentioned above, we did not study a text in this session because we thought that we would run out of time.

The issue of when a child realizes that s/he is adopted appeared in Session 6. The realization that one child was not "a doctor" matches the literature mentioned in Chapter 2 with regard to the child's process of understanding his/her adoption status.

There were a few suggestions about challenging moments for the participants. For the family who wanted their biological child to participate, I already mentioned that a pre-screening of the families could address and/or solve this problem. In terms of the children feeling a little uncomfortable discussing their birth parents in front of their adoptive parents, in the future I would ask the children to prepare some thoughts in advance that we could discuss without the parents being present. At that point I would validate their concerns and share with them that it is healthy for them to express their thoughts and concerns. I would also share with the parents in advance of a combined meeting that it would be helpful for them to encourage their children to share their thoughts, too.

The session ended with eight people hugging me goodbye. Prior to the sessions, I think in the past only two had hugged me before. I felt good that they wanted to express their appreciation not only with words, but physically, too.

Assessing the Overall Goals of the Project

Goal 1 -- Create a group which provides a comfortable atmosphere for children and parents to address the issues of identity and how adoption issues affect their family.

This was the basis of accomplishing all the rest of the goals. A sense of group cohesiveness quickly emerged even in the first session. At the first session

with the students, one girl was at the point of tears after sharing a little bit about her birth parents; the group felt a bond of intimacy. In the parents' first session, the comfort level was easily noticed by the amount and type of sharing expressed. In each successive session, every person participated in some way by sharing their thoughts and feelings. The atmosphere created engendered a very high comfort level among the participants. Various members presented personal, sensitive, private, and even never-before-shared memories and experiences within the group. Each evening contained personal -- and sometimes powerful -- disclosures relating to their individual and family situations. Tammy and I were able to create an atmosphere conducive to sharing and caring, where the group members formed a strong sense of cohesiveness. I am sure that the fact that the group shared many aspects of "groupness" even before participating in these discussions played a part in the success of our group. This was due to the fact that they were all adoptive families, had similar-aged children, were members of Temple Rodef Shalom, and shared other similarities, too.

On a basic level, the group's cohesion was important and lended to its success. On a deeper level, each person's own understanding of where he or she fits in with their adoptive family was critical to their own self-understanding. On the broadest level, the pre-/adolescent's understanding (and the parent's understanding, too!) of how s/he fits into a larger temple community and Judaism was the basis for organizing this project in the first place. All contributed to this goal being accomplished on many levels.

Concentrating on efficiency is another important factor in successful brief group therapy (Yalom, 1995, pp. 273-4). I tried to run the discussions with a

relatively homogeneous group, with specific goals to accomplish. At times, we did not have the luxury of waiting for each person to respond to each question before moving on. When parts of the discussion trailed into other topics, we were careful to bring the focus back to the topics planned for that evening. Also, reminding the group that there was an endpoint was a concern that I, as the leader, kept in mind. At the fourth session, I began to remind them that we had only two more sessions. In that way, the group began to prepare for its termination.

Attendance at the discussions was not consistent. Only one family had each of its four members attend every session. One family could not attend the first two meetings and so missed out on all of the initial introductions to the other members. One family missed half of the sessions and another family dropped out after the first three sessions. One family had very erratic attendance, with parents and children having inconsistent attendance -- only one night did all of four of them attend. Although the discussions proceeded as if all had been to all sessions, I think that the experience might have been richer had everyone attended all sessions. As mentioned above, however, the group cohesiveness did not seem to suffer because of erratic attendance.

By the end of the six sessions, it was clear that those families which invested the most in terms of preparation, attendance and participation benefited most and connected more solidly than with those whose attendance and participation were minimal. This was demonstrated by the number of times that individuals thanked me in the context of the group meetings and at other times when we met at the temple. Also, the parents who attended every session with

their entire family were the only ones who wrote down their feedback about the group for me.

Personalities played a role in the discussions, particularly with the parents' group. One couple joined the second parents' discussion and frustrated other members of the group (including the other leader and me) by monopolizing the discussion. I had not expected this to happen, despite the literature about group dynamics. I had known from other sources in the temple that this couple has significant marital problems and perhaps their behavior was a way to get attention. Although their comments related to the topics at hand, they did not allow others to share equally in the conversation. Some other parents were visibly upset about the all-consuming presence of this couple. Yalom describes this personality appropriately as the monopolist, someone who is "anxious if they are silent; if others get the floor, they reinsert themselves with a variety of techniques..." (Yalom, 1995, pp. 369-370). After realizing that this couple's behavior could affect the group in an unhealthy way, Tammy and I discussed ways to be proactive about aborting any monopolization and/or derailment in future discussions. The two of them together never attended another discussion and the mother only showed up once again following the second session. Because there was not a repetition of this monopolizing behavior due to the absence of this couple, the impact on the group was minimal. As is typical in other groups, one of the effects could have been "indirect, off-target fighting, absenteeism, dropouts, and subgrouping" (Yalom, 1995, p. 370). I think that one parent was sufficiently turned-off enough to eventually drop out of the group (in addition to other factors).

At the other end of the participatory spectrum, there was one child who did not contribute much at all verbally to the group. This child only shared when directly asked to share, and even then shared very minimally. This is the same child who did not want to attend the second session -- he told his mother that he wanted to be "normal." As mentioned above, I did meet with this child, who then decided to continue to attend future sessions. He could be identified as "the silent patient." Although I feel that his decision to reenter the group and attend was positive for him and for the group, I think that he could have gotten more out of each session if he had participated more actively (Yalom, 1995, pp. 375-6).

Because there was a relatively quick termination date to the discussions, the group did not necessarily behave in traditional group fashion. First of all, because of the scarcity of time, I tried to jump-start our discussions by sending out a day or two in advance the questions that would frame our sessions. I did this by encouraging the participants to spend some time thinking about their responses before they attended the meeting. For the most part, I think this worked; the vast majority read the questions in advance and started to mentally formulate their answers. Also, because the parents had a full hour to talk amongst themselves even before joining the discussion with Tammy and me, I think that they had the opportunity to catch up on social niceties and begin to share their thoughts and feelings about the topics at hand or any other topic that interested them.

Were I to conduct a more formal therapy group, I would have focused more on prescreening. Because this was not a formal therapy group, the criteria that I used for "pre-screening" were minimal -- I made sure that each family

knew what the project was about and had a general idea of what we would be discussing. Had not all of the families been members already of Temple Rodef Shalom, and had I not had some type of relationship with all of them previously, I would have had a much more involved screening process. I might have discovered, even before the sessions began, some of the challenges mentioned above, either with the couple who had marital problems and/or the child who felt ambivalent about attending.

Future Changes Related to Goal 1

There are a few aspects of the project relating to the first goal that I would change in the future. I would have individual, pre-screening sessions with each family to get a better sense of where they are psychologically and emotionally with regard to adoption, their family dynamics, and Jewish knowledge about adoption. I could also be alerted to the issues of intermarriage and other biological children, where applicable. This pre-screening meeting would also give me a chance to prepare the families for some of the topics that we would discuss to see if they are ready to delve into these subjects. At times, Tammy and I felt that we had to censor ourselves, because we did not have overt permission to probe some of the more challenging topics of conversation. With a chance to meet alone before the sessions started, I could better gauge the comfort level of certain each family in the group. I would also see how they felt about having biological siblings join the group sessions, where applicable. In the future, I might also have an individual debriefing session with each family. In that session, I could hear feedback from each family in a private setting and continue to give support for their specific needs and concerns. At that meeting I could

also serve as a bridge between the child(ren) and parent(s) in continuing the discussions we began in the group.

In the future, I think that I would add another two to four sessions for the entire group. We did not get into the subjects of loss and grieving for either the children or parents. For children, it could be helpful for them to talk about the loss of their biological family and to hear their thoughts and feelings about them. For parents, there is loss, too. I do not know the particulars of why each family decided to adopt children, or why they decided to adopt non-Caucasian children. Although I assume that parents had the opportunity to share some of their feelings of loss and grief as they were going through the adoption process years ago, it might have been helpful for them to share these feelings with their peers in a Jewish context. We might also talk about possible loss in the future and the parents' concerns and fears of having their child reject Judaism and/or their upbringing. This issue came up in the context of studying the adoption of Moses story in the first session. Having another two to four meetings would also give the participants a chance to better figure out how the group might organize activities in the future, if they decided to do so.

It was coincidental that the four children who became b'nei mitzvah did so between the first and second meetings. Ideally, it might have been better if the dates were staggered. I also think that it might have been better for the children if there were a better balance between boys and girls (There were six girls and three boys, but all three boys were only present once together at the same session.) With the parents, I would more strongly encourage both parents to attend all of the sessions.

In the future, I might have the parents study 5-10 minutes worth of psycho-educational literature about adoption to supplement the Jewish literature in each session. This learning could help the parents be better equipped to keep the conversation of adoption-related issues going in their family. For both parents and children, I would make sure to give out resources for further discussion and learning after the last session.

Goal 2 -- Promote the formation of relationships among participants so they can provide support, encouragement, and understanding to each other in dealing with issues connected to cross-racial and international adoptive families.

We addressed many of the issues related to their adoption, including: each family's own rituals for marking the official day of their child(ren)'s adoption; the desire of the children to search for birth parents; and the parents' concerns about disclosing information about their child(ren)'s birth parent(s); what it felt like to be Jewish and non-Caucasian; and how the children are viewed by their peers in school. It was clear that the group bonded with each other. As mentioned above in each session's summary, the fact that the groups had a chance to bond with their peers outside the group context and by themselves helped foster a sense of openness and sharing in the discussions themselves. At one point in the discussions, I thought that the "true" work being done occurred when the members of the group were with each other! A benefit that I had not originally considered was that the parents gather in a room together while Tammy and I spoke with the children allowed them to begin their discussion even before we met as a group. In this way, they were already "primed" to talk about the topic at hand and they had, presumably, had the opportunity to catch up and simply

socialize with each other. This led to fruitful discussions of the questions sent out in advance, as well as other topics that were brought up by the participants themselves.

As with the case of most types of therapy, issues can arise within the group context, but a significant amount of work is done by the participants between sessions. Many issues were addressed briefly as a group, but I assume that outside of our meetings the families continued some of the discussions that began in the group. (Even other temple members told me that they heard about some of the topics we discussed.) The topics of concern will continue to appear over and over again throughout these families' lives.

Providing the opportunity for Jewish, cross-racially adopted children to meet with each other and to talk about who they are gave these young people a chance to realize how their own identities fit with those of their peers, within the congregation and within a greater Jewish and communal context. Many of the questions that we had the children focus on came from the idea of helping them figure out who they are. Being with a group of children in a similar situation helped them to realize that their thoughts and feelings were normative.

With the parents, one mother's amusing comments about her daughter caused the group to laugh. In the second parent's session, one parent shared that her Korean daughter was now -- "In her 'dumb blond' phase of life," which reminded me of Erickson's comment about "psychosocial moratoria" during adolescence. The other parents easily identified with the challenges of their preteen and teen-aged children and bonded over their struggles, and saw that the issues they faced were normative, too.

Discussing differences in race allowed the children to express their thoughts and feelings. One of the most interesting reactions of the children was during the first session in response to one boy's saying that he cannot be Hispanic and Jewish at the same time. All of the others disagreed and the group talked about the integration of their different identities into a complete whole. The fact that this boy did not bring the subject up again could be an indication that he learned from the group that it is possible to be both Hispanic and Jewish at the same time. Although his peers' initial reaction to his statement was not expressed in a supportive way, the underlying information they communicated to him was probably comforting; he realized that the different parts of his identity could complement each other.

The friendships and bonds formed within the group -- even after only a few sessions -- continued throughout the six month period in each peer group. I imagine that these connections will continue into the future, too. I feel that the way Tammy and I led each group contributed to the comfort level and the successful interchange. Of course, the fact that I had already had previous relationships with each of the families also could have contributed to the sense of comfort within the group.

Future Changes Related to Goal 2

In the future, I don't think that I would change anything related to accomplishing the second goal.

Goal 3 -- Introduce participants to Jewish history and laws of adoption, so they may learn how their families fit into the greater Jewish community and feel

connected to Judaism, to Temple Rodef Shalom and to the rabbi as their rabbi, an encouraging and supportive presence for their family.

In the first five sessions, we studied texts related to the laws and customs of Jewish adoption. I felt that we addressed important topics relating to Reform Judaism's approach to adoption, as well as some divergent views from the Conservative and Orthodox branches of Judaism. We did not study a text in the last session, in order to have enough time to appropriately address the concerns of the children and parents. Tammy and I spoke about this before the last session and felt that even 5-10 minutes would take away from what we had hoped to accomplish. Realizing now that we still could have easily continued to talk about any number of topics at the last session and even continue the group for more sessions afterwards, I guess that it would not have been so intrusive to study another Jewish text concerning adoption for 5-10 minutes during the last session.

I did not feel that the children engaged in the text study as easily as I had hoped. The parents, too, seemed a little defensive at times -- especially in the first two sessions -- about the particular selections I brought for them to examine. I am unsure as to why this was the case. Perhaps initial feelings of anxiety about participating in the group were expressed by grappling with the texts and/or a lack of familiarity with Jewish tradition in general or those parts that dealt specifically with adoption. Additionally, adult Jews often feel inadequate when asked to engage in text study, if they have not done it before. I will mention the reaction to the texts in assessing each individual session. The text study part of the evening would not normally occur during a group therapy session, but one of the goals of the project was to help the participants feel more knowledgeable

about Jewish views on adoption. The short text study each evening also centered and focused everyone at the beginning of our time together.

While the discussions were based on the religious principle "Love the stranger as yourself," we did not study the particular text. After the group began to meet, I did not feel that it would have been helpful to categorize them as "other" within the temple context, or even within a general Jewish context. Although a few of the text studies addressed the status of adopted children as "other" within Judaism, the reasoning behind sharing those texts was so that they could learn that "others" have always been a part of Judaism. At one point, I asked the parents that since others may treat them as "other," do they also give people they perceive as "other" the benefit of the doubt. Unfortunately, they were not able to make the link to treating "others" with extra care, but hopefully talking about this might have alerted them to this possibility. A few parents verbally expressed that just being known by name in the temple by a member of the clergy (me) was enough for them to feel more welcome and not be a "stranger."

With regard to connecting to Temple Rodef Shalom, I think that the families felt good that their membership gave them access to this type of special program. They certainly connected to other temple members within the group. Throughout the six months, other temple members shared positive comments from their friends who were in the group, so I know that the group members shared some of their experiences.

Having members of the group feel a stronger connection to me as their rabbi and Temple Rodef Shalom in general was part of goal three. I articulated this goal because I thought that this minority within a minority might feel

especially vulnerable and/or distanced from the community. When I asked what could be done to make these families feel more welcome at Temple Rodef Shalom, I was somewhat surprised at the answers. A few suggestions specifically dealt with these families' interracial issues, but the majority of the suggestions could have easily come from any member of the congregation. What I realized was that any member of the congregation can potentially feel like an "other." Although the discussions in this project concerned cross-racially and internationally adopted children and their families, I think that I could probably run any type of similar discussion group for all those who are feeling like an "other" within the temple community. In some sense, anyone who does not know anyone or who feels comfortable with only a few people would then fall into the category of "other." This observation makes me realize the incredible applicability of this type of focused discussion group format to any members of the congregation.

Future Changes Related to Goal 3

In the future, I would give the parents a chance to talk about what the impact of having a non-Jewish spouse has on the family, where applicable. When I first conceived this project, I did not think about any issues of intermarriage that might relate to the group. In the first session, however, one non-Jewish parent shared that she was "sore" that it was she who attended the meetings and not her Jewish husband. I imagine that there might be additional issues that could be discussed in the context of the group. Even if it does not seem to relate exclusively to adoption and/or cross-racial families, I am sure that intermarriage has an impact on these families. For future groups, a challenge

would be to appropriately discuss any issues without alienating the Jewish-Jewish parents in the group.

Goal 4 -- Have the participants support and informally mentor each other through the bar/bat mitzvah process.

Although I felt that this happened to a small extent, the timing of the ceremonies did not lend itself to accomplishing this goal. Four of the students became b'nei mitzvah between the first and second meeting, and there were no other b'nei mitzvah ceremonies during the project. The one girl who became a bat mitzvah after the project ended dropped out after the third session. I assume that, for the parents, some of their anxiety about the b'nei mitzvah process was discussed with their peers in their encounters with each other while I was meeting with the children. As mentioned before, there was some touching support offered by the children to the youngest member of the group who is still in fifth grade. It remains to be seen how, if at all, the discussions affected the three students who will become b'nei mitzvah in the future.

Future Changes Related to Goal 4

Choosing the specific meeting times of the group so that four children would not become b'nei mitzvah in a single month would be better for future groups.

Goal 5 -- Raise awareness among Temple Rodef Shalom's clergy, leadership and membership of special issues facing cross-racial and international adoptive families.

In terms of educating the clergy and school directors about some of the results, this goal is still in the process of being accomplished. Certainly, I learned a lot about adoption in general and specifically how it relates to the specific families that participated in the project. While I have shared some of my observations and some of the concerns of the participants, I have not yet officially met with the clergy, religious school and nursery school directors to see how some of these concerns can be appropriately dealt with in the future. I plan to do so after the final write-up is complete. The membership of the congregation has become aware of the project through the two bulletin articles I have written; informing the congregation about it and asking for participants, and thanking those who were in the group. I have also spoken about the project to many members who knew that I was pursuing this degree. At least four families with younger, cross-racially and internationally adopted children hope that I will run a similar group in the future. I feel that the congregation, in general, knows that I have been working on this project and, at the very least, knows that Temple Rodef Shalom is actively addressing the issues of diversity within the congregation. I anticipate that an article in the Washington Jewish Week will appear shortly, so that many congregations in the area will learn about the project and may even contact me for some information and/or assistance.

Future Changes Related to Goal 5

As mentioned above, this goal is still in the process of being accomplished. At this point I do not have any thoughts for how to change the process to better achieve this goal in the future.

Assessing My Assessment

I did not have the members of the group fill out a written survey after the completion of our sessions together. After being with the group, I did not feel that surveys were necessary. Also, a written form would have seemed too formal and did not fit in with the tenor of the discussions. I also was a little self-conscious about reminding them that the project was done to fulfill an academic requirement and felt that a survey would be too school-like. In retrospect, I could have gotten more detail about what they felt worked and why they wanted more sessions, as well as other more specific feedback. It will be easier for me to do so with future groups, because they will not be connected to any academic project. (One couple did provide me with written feedback about a few of the aspects of the discussion series.) The fact that the group members repeatedly spoke of their desire to continue the sessions demonstrated the success and the helpfulness of the group. Also, a few parents explicitly stated that even when other activities conflicted with attendance for their children, coming to these sessions was a priority for the children themselves. The group discussed publicly some possibilities for future involvement in temple activities, both formally and informally. Some even wanted to broaden the group's membership in order to include more families with children of different ages in future gatherings and discussions. I also heard the comment, "My son thinks that Rabbi Burstein is really cool" from one mother; coming from the mother whose son was "the silent one" who chose to reenter the group after dropping out made this remark even more special to me. At random times after the sessions ended, I received spontaneous hugs in the hallway from the children in the group as well as a plate of homemade brownies, actions that I think were directly related to our

bonding together as a group. A few children publicly spoke about being adopted during their bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies, something they may not have done without the support of the group and the higher profile of this subset of temple members through my articles in the temple bulletin and other temple publications. As mentioned above, another indicator of success was the formation of friendships that probably would not have been made without this context. It was healthy for the students to realize that they were not alone in their family situations. The children's offering support to each other for the future bar mitzvah of one student was a particularly sweet moment of bonding. By all of these informal measures, it is clear that many of the original goals were accomplished.

CONCLUSION

I feel that the project accomplished the majority of the goals that I set out to accomplish, even if all of the initial thoughts of measuring the success of the group (as stated in Chapter 3) were not employed. The providing of a forum of discussion groups for children and parents of cross-racially adoptive families enabled each group to address issues of importance in their self-understanding. The sharing that occurred within each group and between the groups at the combined sessions inspired and connected parents and children, families to each other, and all of them to Temple Rodef Shalom and me in ways that could not have happened without this series. Not only could this format be used by other rabbis in congregations around the country to support cross-racial adoptive families, but the same principles that guided this group could be used for almost

any other group in temple life. The lessons learned will contribute to a better understanding of many aspects of ministry in my rabbinate.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Belinfante, Randall. Telephone interview. 22 Mar. 2004.

Berk, Michael. Telephone interview. 30 Mar. 2004.

Brodsky, Kathy. Telephone interview. 29 Mar. 2004.

Eckman, Mark. Telephone interview. 17 Mar. 2004.

Eisenstadt, Merry Madway and Debra Nussbaum Cohen. "Adoption: The 'changing face of the Jewish community.'" Washington Jewish Week. 3 February 2000. <http://hometown.aol.com/merryeee/adoption.htm> (8 March 2004).

Fields, Harvey J. A Torah Commentary for Our Times; Volume Two: Exodus and Leviticus. New York, NY: UAHC Press, 1991.

Fox, Everett. The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995.

Izes, Lisa. Telephone Interview. 18 Mar. 2004.

Klein, Isaac. A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice. New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. 434-38.

Plaut, W. Gunther. The Torah: A Modern Commentary. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981.

United Jewish Communities. The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01. NY: United Jewish Communities, Sept. 2003, updated Jan. 2004.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Robin, Kate Coopersmith, and Kimberly T. Renoylds. A Framework for Managing Relationships within the Adoption Triad. Falls Church, VA: C.A.S.E. -- The Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc. 1998.

Beauvais-Godwin, Laura and Raymond Godwin. The Complete Adoption Book: EverythingYou Need to Know to Adopt a Child. Avon, MA: Adams Media. 2000. 7.

Berman, Kenneth K. "Multiple Family Therapy: Its Possibilities in Preventing Readmission." Family Therapy: An Introduction to Theory and Technique. Eds. Gerald D. Erickson and Terrence P. Hogan. Monterey, CA: Brooks/ Cole Publishing Co., 1972. 279-283.

Berzoff, Joan, Laura Melano Flanagan and Patricia Hertz. Inside Out and Outside In: Psychodynamic Clinical Theory and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Contexts. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996.

Broderick, Carlfred B. Understanding Family Process: Basics of Family Systems Theory. London: Sage Publications, 1993.

Brodzinsky, David M., Marshall D. Schechter, and Robin Marantz Henig. Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992.

Buchdahl, Angela Warnick. "Kimchee on the Seder Plate." Reform Judaism Magazine 32 (Spring 2004): 64.

Carter, Elizabeth A. and Monica McGoldrick. The Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy. New York: Gardner Press, Inc., 1980.

Elias, Magda. "For Papa." Reform Judaism Magazine 32 (Spring 2004): 50-1.

"Focus: Jewish Diversity," Reform Judaism Magazine 32 (Spring 2004): 51.

Gold, Michael. and Hannah wept: Infertility, Adoption, and the Jewish Couple. New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988.

Lifton, Betty Jean. Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness. New York: BasicBooks, 1994.

Lin, Patricia. "Patricia Yu Chava Esther Lin bat Avraham." Reform Judaism Magazine 32 (Spring 2004): 53-62.

Mattei, Lourdes. "Coloring Development: Race and Culture in Psychodynamic Theories." Inside Out and Outside In: Psychodynamic Clinical Theory and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Contexts. Eds. Joan Berzoff, Laura Melano Flanagan, and Patricia Hertz. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996. 221-245.

Melina, Lois Ruskai. Raising Adopted Children: Practical, Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, Inc. 1998. 307.

Nichols, William C. Treating People in Families: An Integrative Framework. New York: The Guilford Press, 1996.

Ormont, Lewis. The Group Therapy Experience. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Pavao, Joyce Maguire. The Family of Adoption. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998.

Pertman, Adam. Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000.

Rosenberg, Shelley Kapnek. Adoption and the Jewish Family: Contemporary Perspectives. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998.

Schoettle, Marilyn. W.I.S.E. Up Powerbook. Falls Church, VA: The Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc., 2000.

Schoettle, Marilyn and Ellen Singer. Parent Guidebook for the W.I.S.E. Up! Powerbook. Falls Church, VA: The Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc., 2000.

Scroggs, Patricia Hanigan. Una Chapman Cox Sabbatical Leave Program of the U.S. Dept. of State. Multicultural Families Formed through International Adoption. No date.

Shaffer, John B. P. and M. David Galinsky. Models of Group Therapy and Sensitivity Training. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.

Shapiro, Jerrold Lee, Lawrence S. Peltz, and Susan Benadett-Shapiro. Brief Group Treatment: Practical Training for Therapists and Counselors. Washington: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1998. 180-185.

Tobin, Gary and Diane Kaufmann Tobin, "Diversity Strengthens Us," Reform Judaism Magazine 32 (Spring 2004): 66.

Verrier, Nancy Newton. The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child. Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, Inc., 1994. 120-23.

Washofsky, Mark. Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice. New York, NY: UAHC Press, 2001.

Yalom, Irvin D. The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy, Fourth Edition. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995.