



pact's

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The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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Union and Transition A Ceremony of Entrustment by Rebecca Weller

Rituals to mark and heighten a child's transition from family of birth to family of adoption are personal and highly moving. Here are excerpts from the entrustment ceremony for my son Elijah. The value of ritual and symbol of acknowledging and sharing sacred space in a community of friends may provide especially useful comforts to adopted children who must make meaning of the transition from one family to another.

Facilitator

You have gathered here today in a moment of union and transition in the life of this newborn child, whom you all love, and whose life will always be entwined with all of yours. Today, you mark the entrustment of this child by his birth parents, [names of birth parents], to [names of adoptive parents and siblings] to be his enduring family.

A proverb of the Ibo people of Nigeria says that "It is children that make relations." This proverb certainly holds true for all of you here, for this child's birth and adoption link together your once-separate families. This belief in the importance of extended family is reflected in the Ibo naming ceremony, in which relatives from both sides of a family may bestow several names upon a child. In this spirit, and in your shared devotion to this child, and even before his birth and before his entrustment, you four together have chosen for this child his many names, each reflecting an element of the histories he embodies.

First, the name of the great prophet, revered in both Jewish and Christian traditions; next, a name that reflects that this baby is indeed, for all of you, a "gift of God"; then, a Spanish word that combines his birth father's name with his birth mother's heritage; and finally an African name, meaning "chosen by Chi," an Ibo spirit guardian who chooses and then remains with a child from the moment of conception until death. Having together created this rich and complex combination, you now together call your son, for the first time, by his own name:

[All the family members speak his name, and continue:]

May God bless you and keep you. May he lift his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you and grant you peace.

Facilitator

[Names of birth parents], here and now you make a great and difficult decision. In your desire to do your best for your son, in seeking and finding [name of adoptive parents and siblings], by your blood and your sweat and your tears, you have built a bridge for this little boy into a life with his new and forever family. By his birth and life, and by this decision you two have together made, you will always be linked to one another and to [name of child being placed for adoption].

[Names of adoptive parents and siblings], in having stood with [names of birth parents] through this difficult time, you are linked to them in your child's earliest history. As [name of child being placed for adoption] grows, he too will grapple with the history of this early challenge; and as he does, you will stand beside him, offering him love and comfort.

[names of birth parents], do you here and forever entrust [name of child being placed for adoption] to this family?
We do.

And [name of adoptive parents and siblings], do you here and forever embrace [name of child being placed

for adoption] into your family, to love and care for him, always and forever?

We do.

But if there are difficulties, even as [name of child being placed for adoption] first breathes and dreams, there is also sweet joy in this moment, for here we celebrate the life of this little boy. All births, like all beginnings, are filled with hope and uncertainty. Who, we wonder, will this person be? What will he need? Will we know enough, understand enough, be gentle enough and wise? But like all parents, we find hope and faith to imagine the unknown wonders of the life to come.

Just as many streams — known and unknown, small and large — contribute to a river's strength and course, so too the course of this life to come will be shaped, in part, by its many tributaries. [name of child being placed for adoption] is a birth child; he is an adopted child. He is African American, Latino and Caucasian; he is Roman Catholic, Baptist, Protestant and Jewish. He is the son of [names of birth parents], and of [names of adoptive parents]. He is little brother to [names of adoptive siblings] and, as well, to [names of birth siblings]. Perhaps he will have [name of birth mother]'s lovely voice, or [name of birth father]'s ready laugh. Perhaps he will have [name of adoptive father]'s humor or [name of adoptive mother]'s love of words or [name of adoptive sibling]'s sense of joy. We hope he will be blessed with all of these, and more.

But whatever may come from all of us, however much he is of all of us, [name of child being placed for adoption] will also be his own unique self. And it is this paradox that makes every child, every life, a source of wonder.

In the same way that this single candle is strengthened and enriched by its many strands and brightened by its many lights, so too may this child grow strong in the light of all our love. As we light these candles together, let us celebrate the brightness of this new life.
[light the candles]

In Judaism, there is a ceremony, the Shehekiyanu, said at the beginning of all new things. In it, we give joyful thanks for having been brought safely — not always easily, not without struggle or sorrow, perhaps, but

safely, nonetheless — to a new season. [name of child being placed for adoption] will have many occasions to participate in this ceremony at his family's table. But for this, his season of first transition, [name of adoptive parents and siblings] will say it for him, and for us all.

[Shehekiyanu, spoken by [names of adoptive parents and siblings]:]

Praised are you, oh Lord God of us all, King of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

There is much that we wish for, as we move forward from this moment of transition, wish not just for this child but for one another. Let each of us here offer one another our wishes:

[each member of the family offers a wish]

At the close of the Jewish Sabbath, we pass a small box filled with the sweet and complex smells of many spices, to remind us of the complexity and richness of the Sabbath's sweetness and of our love for one another, a love that will stay with us amidst our daily lives. As we near the close of our ceremony of entrustment, let us share the pleasures of the spice box's smell. Like the memory of this scent, may the memory of this ceremony reside with us, remind us, and bring us peace.

[pass the spice box]

We have all spoken; all but one, the one too young to speak or comprehend; the one at the center of today's attention. Since he cannot offer words, let his hand-print serve as his place in our covenant to him. Just as our wishes, and our histories, and our love, surround this child, so too this mosaic of his expanded family's hand-prints should have [name of child being placed for adoption] at its center.

[Together, [names of birth parents] place the baby's hand on one mosaic; then [names of adoptive parents and siblings] place his hand on the other two.]

[Names of birth parents and adoptive parents and siblings] and [name of child being placed for adoption]:
May you go forth in peace and comfort, and remember always this day of union.

Rebecca and Ed Weller are parents to two sons, one by birth and one by adoption, and are joyfully creating connections with their newly extended families.