

A Story of Five Children

A Chabad Rabbi in Montana shared several lessons from his experience in adopting five children. What can we learn from them to our relationship with G-d - and, of course, the connection to coronavirus.

Shortly after their wedding in 2008, Rabbi Chaim and Chavi Bruk moved from Brooklyn to Bozeman, Montana, to open the first Chabad in the state.

In the period after their arrival, they discovered that they would not be able to bear biological children. Obviously, it was devastating news. Chavi's father mentioned adoption. "So many children in the world need a warm home," he said. But they didn't think too seriously about it.

As time went on, family and friends stopped sharing news of new births, to avoid making them feel bad. Hearing about those same births later, from other sources, just made it sting even more. They were always receiving sympathetic well-wishes and blessing for a baby. And if there is one thing the Bruks don't like, it is being the subject of people's sympathy.

When Rabbi Bruk attended the International Shluchim's conference, he saw a video of the Rebbe counseling a woman to look into adoption, and he felt that it was a message to him to follow the same path. He spread the news among his friends that he is looking to adopt a child and asked them to inform him if they hear of an

appropriate case.

One day, he received a call from a fellow Shliach in Russia. A single mother had given birth to a child with serious health issues and had traveled with her baby to the United States for medical attention. The mother understood that she wouldn't be able to care properly for the child and decided to give her up for adoption. "Are you willing to adopt the child?" he asked.

They traveled to the hospital in New Jersey to meet the baby girl and bring her home, but they encountered a bureaucratic wall. It seemed easier to adopt a child from a different country than to adopt one within the United States. There is a simple process for adoption from abroad, but to adopt a child currently in the United States on a medical visa was far more complicated. Ultimately, they waded through the legal process, and brought the baby home.

Mrs. Bruk related that all the pain and heartbreak over their childlessness evaporated in the moment she held that child. All the years of suffering disappeared when she realized that she had a child of her own. They announced the adoption to their community, and by the time they arrived home, their house was covered in gifts; anything they could possibly need for a baby had been provided.

A month later, Mrs. Bruk attended the International Conference of Shluchos. She was asked by the organizers to share her story with the conference for the sake of the women dealing with their own infertility issues. Her speech made waves at the

conference.

A few months later, they received a call from a Chabad rabbi in New Jersey. He shared that a woman in his community was pregnant and, for various reasons, was looking for a family to adopt the child. It was just six months after they had adopted their first, and some people counseled them against it, but they decided to make the jump anyway.

The mother was due to give birth after the holiday season. On Shmini Atzeres, as they spent Yom Tov at Chavi's parents in Texas, they were informed that the baby had been born prematurely, and they needed to come immediately; otherwise, the baby would be delivered to social services and it would further complicate the process.

The problem was that it was a three-day Yom Tov, and there was no way for them to reach New Jersey before Sunday. After much effort, they were able to arrange for family members to receive the child on Motzaei Shabbos, and on Sunday morning, at a rental-car service near Newark airport, they met their second child.

Several years later, Rabbi Bruk visited Montreal, Canada, where he heard about a pregnant Jewish woman in New York who was giving up her child for adoption. But there was one caveat; the child would be bi-racial. Chavi was enthusiastic, but Rabbi Bruk was more hesitant. Chavi was born-and-bred in Texas, but Rabbi Bruk was a native of Brooklyn, where there were tensions between the Chassidic and African American communities. He understood that an African-Chasidic child might

encounter significant difficulties growing up. After serious deliberations, they decided to adopt him anyway. When the baby was eight days old, they gave him a bris, and named him Menachem Mendel.

Some time later, they were approached by a pregnant woman that asked them to adopt her child. It is illegal to pay for a child, but it is permitted to pay for the medical expenses of the mother. They began to support the mother's pregnancy and accompanied her through her journey, when they were suddenly informed that the mother had been involved in a car-accident and had lost the child.

They were very broken by the loss. Imagine their shock and consternation when they learned that the woman had never been pregnant at all; she had simply been taking advantage of their money and good heartedness...

Chabad of Bozeman, like many other places, has a Camp Gan Izzy. One year, before the summer, they received a telephone call from an elderly woman asking them to accept her twelve-year-old granddaughter into their overnight camp. She was mistaken - the camp was a day camp - but she begged them to find a solution. Her granddaughter's mom had died, she explained, and her father wasn't capable of raising her. The Brooks welcomed the girl into their family for the summer, and when camp was over, she returned to her grandparents.

A few days after the summer, the grandmother called again. The girl had really loved their home, she said, and wanted them to adopt her.

This raised a dilemma. Previously, they had only adopted children from birth. Adopting a twelve-year-old comes with a host of its own issues. But they decided to make the leap and they welcomed their fourth child into the family.

A few years passed, and a woman approached Rabbi Brukat the post office. "Rabbi," she said, "I know you adopted several children. My daughter is pregnant and wants to give the child to an adoptive family. Would you know anyone interested in adopting a child?"

"Yes," he said, "WE are interested in adopting a child." The woman smiled and said, "I was hoping you would say that!"

Today, the Bruks have five children, one son and four daughters.

Nature vs. Nurture

There is a famous argument of Nature vs. Nurture. Are we defined by the genes we receive from our parents, or by the education we receive in the homes we are raised?

The Bruks say that there is immense importance to the genes; they have a profound impact on the child's life. Each one of their five children is different and it is clearly expressed in their character. On the other hand, they are also cognizant of the power they have when raising their children, and they make the utmost effort for each to receive the education he needs in a warm and loving family.

They make another interesting point. They say that the love to an adopted child is greater than to a biological one,

because it's a love that is based on nothing!

The rabbi says that one thing is clear: if every child is a blessing, every adopted child is a miracle. (From Ami Magazine, Sukkos 5781).

Nature vs. Supernatural

Today we begin to recite Tefillat Geshem, the prayer for rain. Throughout the summer months we prayed for dew at the appropriate moments in the Amidah, and now we begin to pray daily for rain.

The Rebbe explained that dew is something that never ceases to fall, while rainfall isn't as regular. Dew represents the system of the natural order. But rain, which can fall irregularly – even to the extent of a drought – is compared to blessings that are 'above-nature.'

Some people think that children are like dew; that they are part of the natural order. But we need to remember that they are actually like rain; sometimes it falls, and sometimes it doesn't, and each time needs to be recognized for the miracle it is.

Develop a Relationship

Today we learn another lesson as well.

In today's prayers, we don't actually pray for rain. Instead, we 'mention rain.' We simply recognize that rain comes from G-d. The actual prayer for rain is delayed until the seventh day of Cheshvan in Israel and the fifth of December in the Diaspora.

The question arises: If we need rain, why don't we ask for it? And if we don't need rain, why must we mention it?

The Talmud answers: "Mentioning is an appeasement before the request." (Taanis 4b).

In this statement, the Talmud teaches us something fascinating. When we want something from a mortal human-being, we don't declare our demands the first time we meet. We first develop a relationship with the individual, and only after creating a rapport do we present our request.

This is also true of our relationship with G-d. We don't show up on Shmini Atzeres and demand, "G-d, give us rain." It is impolite and ungracious. First, we recognize G-d as the Giver of rain, and only afterwards do we begin to request more of it.

In the words of the Alter Rebbe, "This 'mention' is an appeasement before the request. Before asking for rain during its season, when the time for requesting will arrive, we appease G-d by mentioning His greatness in that He gives us rain." (Orach Chaim 114a. See *Sichos Kodesh* 5739 vol. 3 pg. 550).

We find ourselves in very difficult times. In truth, we need a miracle to get rid of the virus that has turned the world upside down over the past months. But the Prayer of Rain teaches us that we need to first develop a relationship with G-d before asking for His favors.

How do we develop this relationship? The clearest and surest path is through adding in Mitzvot. When we do a mitzvah, and demonstrate our willingness to go out of our way

for G-d, G-d will demonstrate His willingness, so to speak, to go out of His way for us.

But what is even more important is to internalize the message of Hashgacha Pratis, Divine Providence. When we live with the knowledge that everything is intimately directed by G-d's hand, and how everything that happens is truly a miracle, we will be able to reach out to G-d for our own miracles.