

# Adopting a child

## from a different cultural background

« *Parce que, devenir parent est quelque chose qui s'apprend, pour tous les parents du monde.* »

Adopting a child is an adventure, adopting a child from a foreign country is a second adventure superimposed on the first. The challenge for the future parent and for the child is to succeed in creating a family which will incorporate the child in spite of his initial "foreignness" and make him part of the parents' family history. Success – if we may call it that – depends on multifarious factors which we have tried to explain and to analyse in this book.

Every individual has to come to terms with a contradiction: how can one keep alive, at one and the same time, forgetfulness and memory, each essential? For a child, recollections of his previous life elsewhere and of the culture which surrounded him or her may not be physically visible but are certainly hidden in his unconscious where time is a meaningless notion. However all that has to be "forgotten" if a child is to be able to adapt, to become part of a family and to commit himself to a new life.

The lives of children and parents may be disturbed by this contradiction, to a greater or a lesser degree, depending and how they have prepared the ground beforehand and how they have coped with the contradiction afterwards.

The language of the birth country need not be kept up nor need it be completely forgotten. It is probably important to remember that it is his or her mother tongue and that once the child has grown up he will do what he likes. Preparing the ground means thinking things through beforehand, accepting fundamental differences as well as similarities: an adopted child is first and foremost a child. Preparing the ground does not mean stuffing one's mind with mountains of facts about the country of origin but becoming more aware of both.

We trust that we have managed to explain:  
- how important it is for the future to have understood one's own self and the implications of this particular project.

- how fundamental the legal aspects and their ethical component are and how essential it is that they be respected. The regulations concerning adoption by a foreign national have been drawn up to protect both parents and children.

- We hope that our guide-lines have helped you to think through your project and to see the route ahead more clearly.

Fanny Cohen Herlem

