

WHERE DID YOU GO? OUT. WHAT DID YOU DO? NOTHING

The title of Robert Paul Smith's classic book *Where Did You Go? Out. What Did You Do? Nothing* captures the withdrawal and boredom that adult questions so frequently evoke in children. Both on the street and in the classroom, adults assume that it is their right to engage children in questions: *How are your parents? What grade are you in now? What caused the destruction of the Second Temple? Who was the first Jew?* and the ubiquitous, *What did you do on your summer vacation?* Parents who speak this way regularly find that their children respond as if to an interrogation and consequently tell as little as possible. Children are placed on the defensive. Tension is raised which stands in the way of thinking and communication.

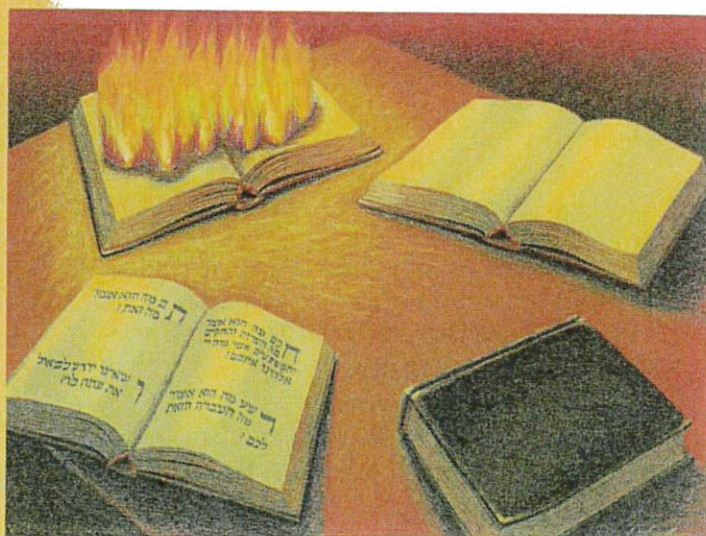
The child who does not want to communicate is perhaps the Fourth Child. This child may not ask because the child wants to avoid painful conversations with the parent. If that child neither asks nor answers but sits silently as the parents lecture, then he or she avoids greater embarrassment and tiresome interrogation. Perhaps that child has been silenced by those in authority, probing and testing for faults. Questions are often threats to authority or ways to assert authority. They play on a field of power relations between parent and child, ruler and subject. That is why they often lead not to dialogue or exploration of knowledge but to rhetorical putdowns and defensive shutting down of information exchanges. The fourth child sidesteps these battles.

Based on Joseph Lukinsky and Lifsa Schachter

A THUNDEROUS SILENCE

Open up the children who have not learned to ask. Lead them on the path to becoming a questioning personality, one who inquires about the way of the world. Open them up so they can formulate their own questions. For without questions your ready-made answers remain inert and there is no common ground between you. The silence of the child can be thunderous. The silence of the one who does not know how to ask may be the result of not having found an appropriate address to express queries. Deeply meaningful silences can issue forth secrets that resound throughout the whole world. Model for the child; show them adults who know how to ask of themselves questions. As the Rabbis said: "If the child and the spouse are unable to ask, let the parents ask themselves" (T.B. Pesachim 115a). Then there is a good chance that the child will learn to ask as well.

Yariv Ben Aharon, kibbutz author and educator



The Four Books by David Wander, 1988

IN PRAISE OF THE UNQUESTIONING PERSONALITY

No! I don't agree with the advice of the Haggadah here. The Haggadah says open the child up to critical thinking. In my judgment the parent should be silent. Just kiss this child on the forehead for faithfully maintaining loyalty to those sanctified traditions. The love of knowledge, the philosophical quest is important, but the supreme wisdom is to accept the treasures of the past without second guessing, without evaluating their historical origins and their pragmatic utility. It is essential to cherish and preserve that kind of respectful wisdom and not to tarnish it with unnecessary talk.

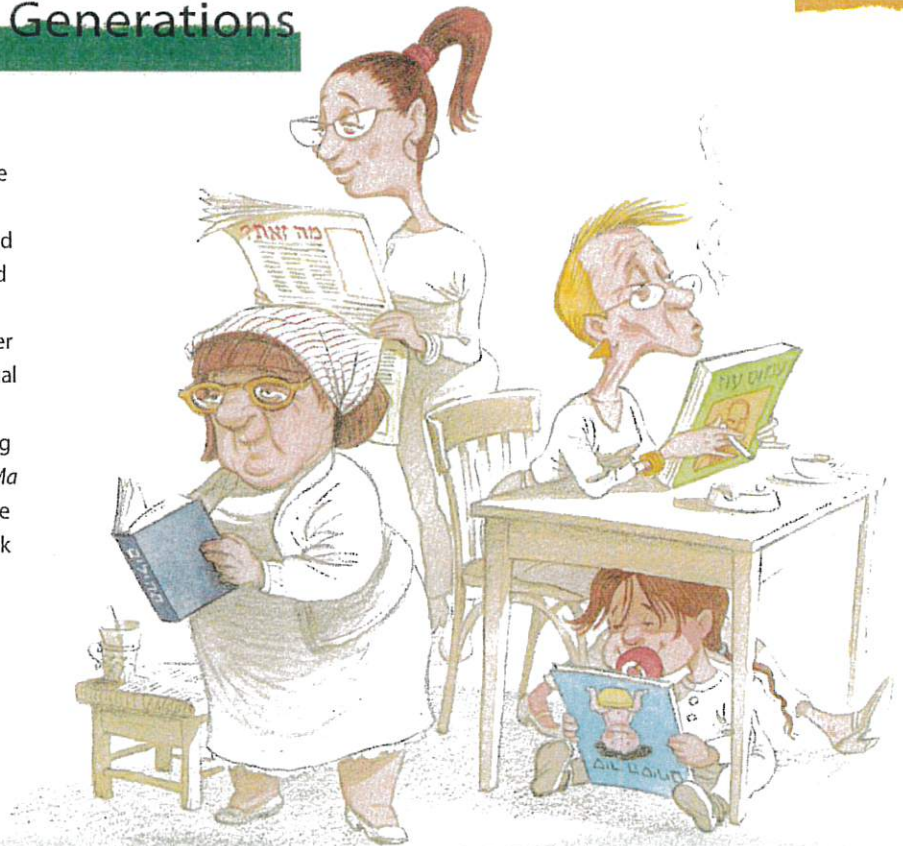
Zeev Jabotinsky, founder of the Revisionist Zionist Movement (later the Likud)

Four Generations

FOUR GENERATIONS IN ISRAEL

While the Haggadah urges us to create dialogue and continuity from parent to child, the ideological changes in Jewish life over the last 100 years in Israel have often involved revolting against one's parents' ideals in belief, in dress and even in body image. Each child is identified not by what they ask but what they read. The so-called wise child, the stereotype of the pre-Zionist ultra Orthodox, is a woman not concerned with a slim figure or stylish eyeglasses. Her daily reading is Psalms. The rebellious child is the Zionist intellectual reading the modern novelist Amos Oz. The simple child is of the third generation, which lacks knowledge and ideology. Her reading matter is a newspaper that says in the words of the Haggadah – "Ma Zot - What is this?" Last and still least is the little girl under the table who does not know how to read. She holds her potty training book upside down. Its name – *Pot of Pots* – is a pun on the Biblical love songs read on Pesach – *Song of Songs*.

Illustration by Michel Kichka



FOUR GENERATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

One might identify four generations – since the great emigration of Eastern European Jews to the New World began in the 1880s. The first generation of immigrants is the **WISE** child who knows and feels comfortable with Jewish tradition. The second generation is the **REBEL** who in the name of progress and Westernization rejects their parents' Judaism after having imbibed it at home. The third generation is assimilated. There is little knowledge and little resentment, but there is still **SIMPLE** curiosity about the customs of their grandparents. Finally, a fourth generation, without

knowledge or even mild acquaintance, is born. They **DO NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK**. They might be called "orphans in history" lacking any of the resources of Jewish wisdom against which to struggle and from which to draw personal meaning.

As a child, growing up on Manhattan's East Side, I lived among Jewish WASPs. My father had changed his name from "Cohen" to "Cowan" when he was 21. So I was brought up to think of myself as a "Cowan" – the Welsh word for stonecutter, not a "Cohen" – a member of the Jewish priesthood. My family celebrated Christmas and always gathered for

an Easter dinner of ham and sweet potatoes. Though they never converted to Christianity my parents sent me to an Episcopal prep school with a mandatory chapel service. In those years, I barely knew what a Passover Seder was. I didn't know anyone who practiced "archaic" customs such as keeping kosher or lighting candles Friday night. When I fell in love and married Rachel, a New England Protestant whose ancestors came here in the 17th century, it didn't matter in the least that we were formally an interfaith marriage. I had become an orphan without a history.

Paul Cowan, *An Orphan in History*, courtesy of his wife, Rabbi Rachel Cowan, Institute for Jewish Spirituality.

Four Biblical Daughters

Rabbi Einat Ramon, Schechter Rabbinical Seminary, Israel

The Torah speaks of Four Daughters: one possessing wisdom of the heart, one rebellious, one naïve and one who cannot ask questions.

MIRIAM, the daughter possessing wisdom of the heart, what does she say?

According to the Midrash, young Miriam confronted her father Amram who had vowed to refrain from procreation because of Pharaoh's decree to destroy all male newborns (Talmud Bavli, Sotah 12).

"Father, your decree is harsher than Pharaoh's. He will destroy all the males, but you will destroy all the females and males. The decree of the wicked Pharaoh may or may not be fulfilled, but your decree will for sure be realized." Miriam's father heeded his daughter. SO we will follow in her steps with drums and dancing, spreading her prophecy among the nations.

TAMAR, the rebellious daughter, what does she say?

Tamar was accused of adultery. She had been married to two of Judah's sons who died without producing offspring, so Judah was obligated to give her his third son in marriage so she could give life to her heirless husbands. But Judah refused, so Tamar dressed as a prostitute, Judah solicited her and without realizing it made his daughter-in-law pregnant, thus guaranteeing the tribe's survival. However Judah sought to have Tamar burned as a prostitute.

"Father-in-law," said Tamar, "recognize" the tyranny of man's rule over women and the hypocrisy of double standards. She rebelled against authority and Judah admitted: "*She is more righteous than I.*" SO we can enjoy no freedom until we have challenged unjust ways (Genesis 38:26).

RUTH, the simple and pure daughter, what does she say?

"Naomi, my mother-in-law: *Wherever you go, I shall go, and wherever you rest your head, there I will rest mine. Your people are mine, and your God my God*" (Ruth 1:16).

SO we must demonstrate simple and ingenuous loyalty.

THE BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE, the daughter who cannot ask, who will speak for her?

The Torah permits a soldier conquering an enemy to take a woman captive as a wife, but only after she has been allowed to mourn the loss of her mother and father. Only her silent weeping is heard, as it is says, "*and she wept for her father and mother*" (Deuteronomy 21:13).

SO we will be her mouthpiece and she will be our judge. So we will return her to her mother's house and we will "*proclaim liberty in the land for all its [enslaved] inhabitants*" (Leviticus 25:10). The silent weeping that erupts from this dark reality is a call to action for the cause of freedom and liberty of every man and woman born in the image of God.

STARTER CONVERSATIONS: THE PARENTS' FOUR QUESTIONS

The Haggadah suggests various types of children that ask questions of their parents. Tonight let us reverse the process and ask our children about **how they feel and think**.

To get started, imagine you have just overheard a snippet of a parent-child exchange.

Ask a pair of volunteers to read responsively one exchange. Now open the forum to anyone who wishes to step in and speak to or in the name of the child or the parent.

Children begin by loving their parents, after a time they judge them, rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

Oscar Wilde, 1890

DEAR CURIOUS CHILD

Parent: You are always asking such great questions. You are so curious and eager to learn about Judaism and about your family history. But I have a question or two for you. First, what or who turned you on to learning? Second, is it a secret burden to be the family's "good kid"?

Wise child: First, Grandma was my inspiration to learn something new every moment. She was so patient – listening to me and looking things up. Together we wondered about the mysteries of the world.

Second, I guess I can reveal to you that it is not always easy to be the studious "goody goody." Sometimes I just want to be ordinary. I try to sidestep unwanted praise – being spoken about in proud superlatives is embarrassing. I do not want to be a *nakhas*-producing machine. But I do appreciate your quiet pride in my achievements.

DEAR ANGRY CHILD

Parent: Okay, maybe I have gone overboard with my "tough love." Perhaps I have followed the Haggadah's parents in excluding their "wicked" child. But I know how *hurt* parents feel because you too have spoken to me at times with such *hutzpah*, putting down "your whole Seder thing." But I do not know how you feel beneath the skeptical façade. Talk to me – I promise not to be judgmental. After all, I too was a rebel against my parents and their Judaism.

Angry child: Your Judaism is fine for you, but not for me! You still do not hear me: I do not want to be here, at this table. This you call the "Holiday of Freedom"? Huh? Freedom for whom? Not for me! I am here because you make me, and to tell you the truth many of the adults at this table right now feel the same way! This is your Seder, not mine!

DEAR SWEET CHILD

Parent: I must tell you what a joy (and a relief) it is to have a child as easy as you. I am always happy to listen to your questions. Still sometimes I worry: will you ever become more critical and independent minded like your older siblings?

Simple child: I love you too, but it is not always so simple to be your "simple" child. In many Jewish families kids like me are considered a disappointment. But not all of us can be "the best and the brightest." I cannot read the Hebrew and probably never will. So please do us both a favor and stop asking me to read out loud at every Seder. I see what my siblings have achieved, but I have my own way of doing things. Please do not compare us, neither positively nor negatively.

DEAR QUIET CHILD

Parent: Talking comes so easily to me that I don't always understand what is hidden in your head and in your heart. How do I get through to you?

The child who does not know

how to ask: If I were suddenly to open my mouth I would tell you: Remember, still waters run deep. At this table verbal dueling dominates too often. I would ask you to learn my language in which I am quite articulate. I am comfortable in the physical language of art and dance... Listen to me speaking the language of movement, of music, or color. Can you learn the eloquence of silence? You may discover that I too am a "wise" child whose deepest insights can never be reduced to words.

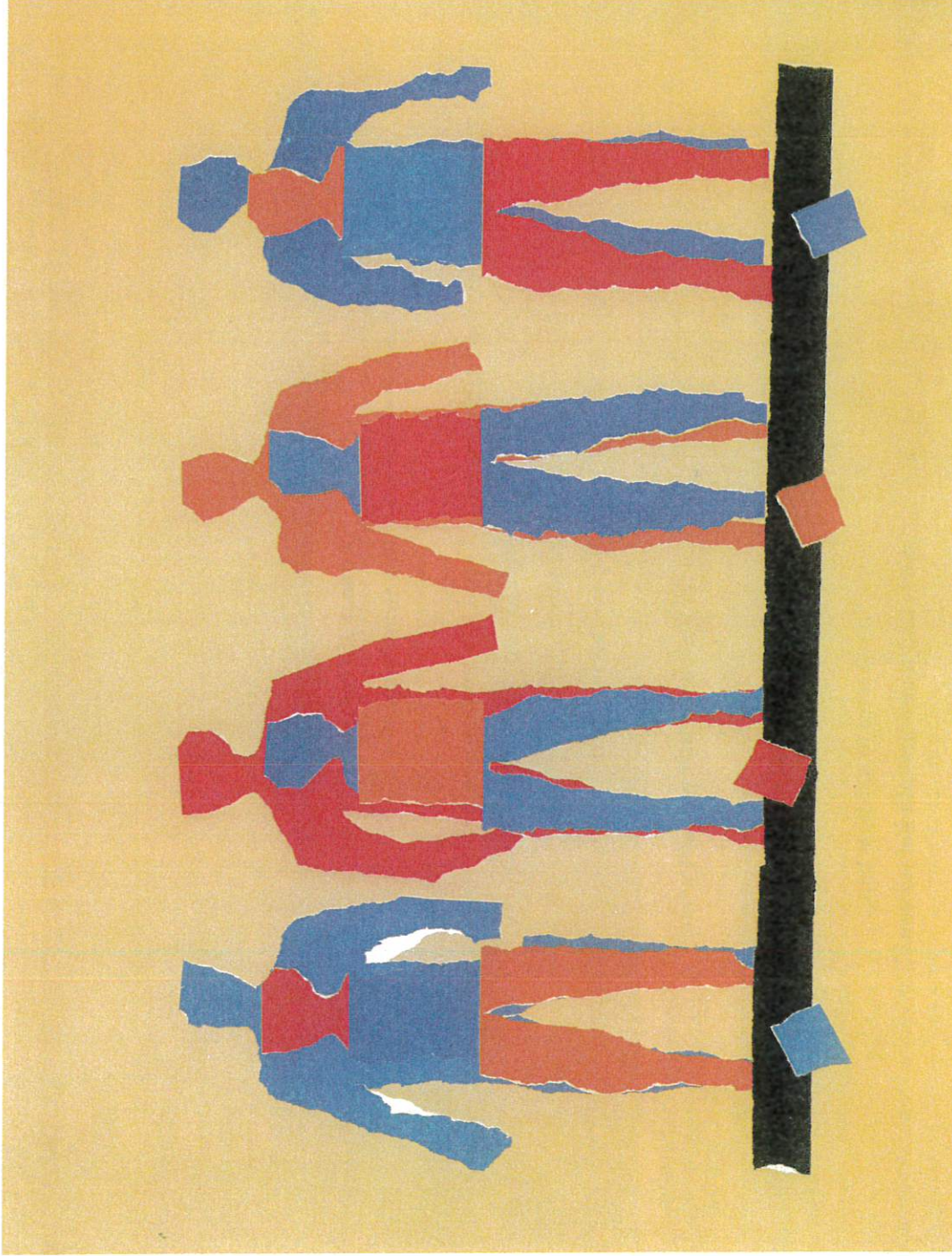
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Dan Reisinger, 1982

"We each have all the four children within us"

Rabbi Israel Salanter, founder of the Musar Movement, Lithuania, 19th C.