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But Daddy, You're Such a Square, 1965.

BUT DADDY, YOU'RE SUCH A SQUARE

February 14, 1965

The Temple

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

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When I had completed these musings on the art of parenting, I reminded myself of a vignette from my own life as a parent. I had been asked to bring home a certain item, and, as is the way of fathers, I chose the wrong size and the wrong brand. As I was unpackaging my good intentions there was a moment of pregnant silence, broken only by my then six-year old saying, "Well, Dad, back to the drawing board."

There are no master blueprints guaranteed to build the happy family. I am sure that while Dr. Spock was raising his sons he often went back to the drawing board, to his books or his clinic, in order to understand and to cope with them. Remember, when the philosophy of "togetherness" was being peddled about as the cure-all, the master plan? If you only became a pal to your child all would be well. Remember those seemingly interminable hours spent watching with feigned excitement the Little League games? How you tired yourself out driving two-thousand miles and more on a week-end for a single negligent, over-the-shoulder "Hi, Mom" from a pre-occupied camper? There is no statistical evidence that the father-pal or the mother-sister solved the enigma that is junior any more successfully than the father-father or mother-mother. There is a great deal of statistical evidence that father's aching bones precipitated an early recognition that he had come to middle age.

"I just don't understand it, Rabbi, we did everything together. The family was so close. I just don't understand why he should feel the need to pick up and leave this comfortable room here and set up an apartment of his own."

Remember that wonderful cartoon by Mr. Charles Adams...you see the usual sorrow-faced, emaciated, ghostly figures - mother and father and the two

monsters, happily busy together, running out of the door of a bank, guns in their hands, and the caption: "Now There is Real Togetherness for You."

Parenting defies neat phrasing. I think that it's time we all buried those ten commandments for parents - these guideposts which are thrown out to us from the newspapers and the magazines and the popular pulpit. Some of them are quite pretentious. You've seen them. "The family that prays together, stays together." Allevai. Then there is a variation on the theme. "The family that plays together, stays together." At least until father suffers a heart attack on the basketball court, or mother breaks her leg skiing. Some of the best parents I know have done nothing more athletic with their children except a fast game of chess on a long summer evening. It took one of the manufacturers, a man who made a molding compound to cap this silliness: "The family that clays together, stays together." I found this a bit sticky, but I admit that it does point out the utter lack of content to all of these one-line guides to do-it-yourself parenting. Psychology, parent education, sociology, yes, even Judaism, cannot give you the wisdom with which to raise your children. There are simply too many variables: their talents and yours, their emotional structure and yours, each family's standards of discipline, of values, the family's social economic level, and so on and on. Besides that, there are always the many defeats that the psychiatrist and the sociologist and the child-guidance expert and, yes, even the rabbi suffer in their own child-raising. If our science were so complete we would escape these, but, believe me, we have dark unexpected turns in our lives.

I remember when our oldest was but two. We planned to take a vacation. I had been trained to be sensitive to psychological factors, to think always of the emotional context, so I became worried when two days before our scheduled departure, the youngster became fretful, moody and given to temper. Visions of all manner of trauma danced before my eyes. You guessed it. A day later, even

as we were discussing whether or not we ought to cancel the trip, he broke out into a good healthy rash. It was nothing more or less than Roseola. All of our wisdom, then, is but the beginning of wisdom. We have good advice. The inherited wisdom of the race has taught certain basic truths about the art of being a parent. That's about all. Being a parent is to struggle. There is no science to it. There are no guarantees. There is no neat formula we can put upon a blackboard and say, "Follow this equation and you will have solved your problems."

Once upon a time, when a parent said he was raising his child by the book it meant no more or less than that he was making the boy toe the mark. There was discipline and strictness in the home. Today, the phrase must be construed quite literally. So many of us set aside our own judgment for some expert's pet theory. You know the classic story of the mother whose darling threw a magnificent temper tantrum on the floor of the kitchen, and who said to the child as she walked over his churning body: "Darling, keep it up a minute or two more while I run upstairs and get Dr. Spock so that I'll know what to say to you."

The book for many parents today is Dr. Freud. Many parents are turning the discipline of parenthood into the discipline of psychiatry. They refuse to take what the boy or girl says at face value. They must always look under and behind and within. 'Dad, can I have the car tonight?' 'Why?' 'I just want to go out with the boys.' 'Why?' 'I don't know. I just want to have fun.' 'Tell me son, is it that you want to get away from me? Is it that you have to get away from the home? Just tell me. Let's sit down, there's nothing we can't talk over.' 'Dad, for once in your life give me a straight yes or no.'

There is the parent who raises the child by the bible of frankness: The

full, utter, exact, unadulterated, indigestible truth. 'Mommy, where did I come from?' This is the moment that many contemporary mothers wait for with great preparation. They are primed with a forty-five minute lecture on the bald facts of reproduction. This mother plunges into a science lecture. Forty-five minutes later when she stops for breath: "but, Mommy, teacher asked us in school today where we came from, and Junior came from Buffalo, and Jimmy came from New York City. I just want to know where I came from."

It is strange, isn't it, how often we bend our best judgment before the opinions of others. It is important to have an open mind, but is important also to make up our own mind. 'Rabbi, what shall I tell my daughter about God?' 'Has she asked you?' 'Well, yes, as a matter of fact she asked me last week.' 'Well, what did you tell her?' 'I told her that I'd ask you.' Now, a rabbi can help but please remember I don't know your child as well as you do. Some children can be answered quite literally; must be answered literally. God is the Creator, the fashioner of the world. Some children can think in abstract terms. God is the spirit that infuses the universe. Some children ask for no better reason than to divert your attention from some other subject nearer at hand. Some children ask because their playmates are asking their parents. They don't really want an answer. I don't know your child. I don't know the context in which the conversation took part. We can give you information, but ultimately you must apply it. It is your child, in your home, your life and your understanding.

A school child guidance counselor has met with your boy or girl for three or four hours. He has before him some diagnostic results. Clean figures and clear paper, but the tests themselves are of uncertain reliability. Another person can give you important information about college and vocation, but his world is limited by his attitudes, by his preconceptions and by his training. Ultimately, you must take that which is available and make the judgment for yourself. What he says to you is not gospel truth, Torah Le-Maoshe Mi-Sinai,

the revealed word of God to Moses on Sinai. I am constantly amazed at the number of parents who suspend their own judgment and bow meekly before some presumed expert. Science permits experts. Art does not. Child raising is an art not a science. Art requires appreciation. Painting and architecture require some creative talent. There are no absolute rules. Some men paint in one medium. Some men paint in another. Some parents raise their children successfully with discipline and some successfully run a rather permissive home. There are no guarantees in either case. It is you, you alone, who know your child best. I prize, therefore, a phrase from our Book of Proverbs. It is somewhat excessively stated, but there is a truth in it nevertheless: "Train up your son in the way he should go, and he will follow you all the days of your life." Now the best of sons raised by the best of parents will not follow that parent the rest of his life. Human nature is simply too idiosyncratic. But the address of this proverb appeals to me: "Train up your child." You train your child - you, father, you, mother - yours is the responsibility; not the synagogue's, not the school's, not the vocational counselor's, but yours and yours alone.

Take back unto yourselves the burden of the responsibility. You must discharge it. When a generation such as ours shows a tendency to have little faith in its own judgments, we must ask the reasons why. Why is it that so many parents run to the book? Why is it that so many parents run to the psychologists or to the Rabbi? Why is it that they have so little faith in their own judgment? In part, the answer lies in the current mystique of expertise. We are ignorant in the fields of science. We need guidance. In science there is only one right way. Any other is wrong. Any man who is a scientist can lead us into his discipline. We have somehow assumed that there are the social sciences and human sciences, and, hence, fully capable teachers and guides. There are not. There are no experts in the human disciplines. There are men of understanding and sympathy, but no experts. Yet this mystique of the expert is part of the air

that we breathe. God forbid that we should teach our children to read unless we have a teaching certificate.. Our children are being told to choose their careers by a number of diagnostic tests which a computer ranges against the average skills of the average person in the average field. There are no averages. We run to the experts. We seek assurance, but in life there are no assurances. Ultimately, we must make our decisions ourselves. There is no science to it - only love and understanding and wisdom.

The mystique of expertise is only part of the answer. As parents, we bow to the judgments of others for other reasons. Most of us live under the fear that as parents we may permanently and forever scar our youngster. We breathe the atmosphere of psychological cliché. Dr. Freud showed, clinically, that neuroses are often related to childhood trauma. Any number of theoreticians jumped off from there and said: After six or seven or ten, personality and character are fixed and immutable. There is a point in the cutting of a precious stone when a single tap will break away the husk and reveal the full beauty of the diamond. Neatly hit, the full range of the stone's beauty is revealed. Muffed, the lines of force within the jewel are such that it disintegrates into worthless powder. Most parents today live as if they are about to take that final tap. We are indecisive, because we are anxious about the carnage Junior deserves a smack across the backside, but our hand hesitates.

There is a foreboding quality to being a parent today, and there is an ugly reflex of this childhood fixation in the child becoming adult. How the weak love to sit back on some couch and pore out their troubles to some patient friend, and blame their laziness, and their own insufficiencies on the self-sacrifice and love of parents long gone. It is all part of the culture in which we live, but it is not science nor scientifically so, and it is time that parents were freed of unnecessary fear. The child, himself, sculpts the man. The child determines what he will be.

Some years ago I asked the confirmation class, on their final examination, to explain each of the Ten Commandments. One of the youngsters wrote an unwitting truth. He interpreted the commandment, "Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother That Thy Days May Be Long Upon the Land Which the Lord Thy God Giveth Thee." "This means that our parents brought us here and are raising us here to the best of our ability." The best of our ability, not of theirs. Parents are not Gods. Parents do not determine whether a child will work, whether a child will have goals, whether a child will discipline himself. The best of families produce black sheep. It is up to the child, not to the parent. Even God, does not assume responsibility for the grown man.

'See, I have set before thee
this day the blessing and
the curse, life and death
Choose ye life, that ye may live.'

You choose it. You are responsible. Not I. My son, you choose the life that you will live. Yours is the responsibility, not theirs or ours.

On Yom Kippur when we get up to confess, we do not say "for the sins which our parents sinned against us;" but, "for the sins which we have sinned against Thee." Ours are the sins. Many of you look on the ancient Hebrew laws as rather grim. But it is interesting that our fathers required only three things of the adult in his relationship to the child. The father must provide protection, provision and education. The rest is up to the child. Protection, provision, and education. The rest is up to the child. Nothing is said about love, tenderness, gaiety, life, being pals, only protection, provision, education. It is up to the child to study and to take advantage of opportunity. It is up to the child to help to bring happiness into the home. Why must parents always entertain the child? Why do we assume that we alone are responsible for bringing interesting conversation to the table? Why cannot the child be responsible for his share of family life? All this may sound a little grim. Surely, a home

ought to have lightness and happiness within its walls. Parents must do their share, but the ancient law does put the shoe on the right foot. The ultimate responsibility for the man is the child's not the adult's. Raise him and raise him well. Give him as many advantages as are possible. Help him to become an adult. Make his life as happy and healthy as you can. But ultimately, you don't and can't live his life for him. You do not bear the final responsibility. Men have come out of horrible surroundings and become great men. All manner of emotional carnage has been inflicted upon some young unfortunates, and they have grown into fine men, sometimes into saintly men. The quality is the child's. The decision is the child's. The responsibility is the child's.

There is still another reason, I believe, why we quiver to make judgments and why we are afraid of our own rules and regulations: it lies in the simple fact that we have children often before we have judgment. Let me ask you a question. When your child first turned to you and said, 'Daddy, don't be a square.' How did you react? Be honest. It hurt. We do not like to think about ourselves as old fogies and fuddyduds, as relics of some prehistoric age. Why did it hurt? It hurt because we live in a world which prizes being carefree, the young in heart, those who break the bounds. Our art is pointedly without rules. Our music is frankly experimental. Our philosophy is determinedly open-ended. Our morality is flexible and relativistic. We pride ourselves on breaking the rules. When was the last time that you were called by a teen-ager something other than Al or Bert? You are made happy by being brought down to the child's level. Why? Because there is something childish in our culture. We are rebels constantly rebelling. It has brought us great technological advance, but it has roiled every fundamental of social living.

What does it mean to be a square? It means simply that you have made up your mind. You are convinced that there is a right and a wrong. This is the way you live and you will not live any other way. Now, it may be very advanced to believe that moralities are mere conventions. You may feel yourself above

moral conventions, but a child needs to know what is right and what is wrong. How else can he develop a conscience? It may be avant-gard to believe that spiritual things are relics of some ancient past, but a child needs spiritual rooting. He needs to feel anchored and wanted in this world. You may like to feel yourself a free spirit soaring happily above society, gay and carefree, fulfilling every one of the Madison Avenue requirements of the sociables, but a child needs rules. He needs to know exactly how he can please. He needs to have his lesson in living set out for him - black on white. Deny this to him and you deny him emotional security.

A parent must, perforce, be a square. He must give his child a square deal. He promises, he must pay. If he speaks to his child of discipline, he must live a disciplined life. Mother has been complaining that her children have been appropriating the playthings of their neighbors. Such reproof is expected of mothers. That evening, as youngsters sit around a table, mother and father chortle with glee at some rather mean and nasty bit of political chicanery. Parents must know the commitments, the standards, the moral values which are theirs, which cannot be compromised, which they will not compromise. Firm principle is the beginning of wisdom for a parent.

There are many among us who refuse to make such square decisions. They have their pet rationalizations. You have heard them again and again and again. What they do is done in the name of freedom. "I want my child to make up his own mind" 'I want my child to find out for himself', 'experience is the best teacher.' How in the world is any child going to re-live the cumulative experience of the race - civilization - in twenty years? We do not ask a budding scientist to repeat all the experiments performed since the days of Hippocrates and Galileo. Why should we force our children to make every mistake that has ever been made by man since his days in the cave? How long will a child live if he must find out for himself whether he can dart into the street after a ball? And you know this too, there is nothing we do that is more difficult

than decision-making. Who is paid the most by our society? The executive who has the ability to be decisive. Most of us shy from it. We are afraid of the consequences. Yet we ask the child, young and innocent, his mind not yet developed, to make every basic moral decision. It took mankind a hundred thousand years or more to come to the Ten Commandments. We expect a child to have distilled these and every other commandment of modern living by his early teens and on his own. What nonsense! A child needs rules. Later on, if he disagrees with you, he will change the rules. Raw energy is useless until it is channelled into useful and usable lines of action. How do we channel the raw energy within us? The psychiatric term is sublimation. We build rules. We set up a structure. We set up a structure - social living. A child learns that there are certain things he cannot do and gradually his energy flows into constructive and beneficial channels. Aggressiveness becomes the release of sport. The drive to dominate becomes the drive to learn.

Children need parents who have matured to the point where they can make their own judgments. There is no worse parent for a child than a childish parent; a parent who is afraid to be a square; a parent who wants to keep on being a child. What I am saying then, can be simply put! The art of being a parent is no more and no less than the art of being an adult. To admit that we are beyond the carefree years does not mean that we cannot be happy or that our homes cannot be filled with laughter or that we cannot venture out intellectually or emotionally into the great world beyond. It does mean that we are anchored to the ties of love which we have voluntarily assumed, anchored to the ties of work which provide, and anchored to the ties of community which support. It means that our mind has squared itself away, come to some certain judgments as to the right, as to the proper and as to the necessary. "Train up your child in the way that he shall go and he will follow you all the ways of his life."

No man can make you that promise. The best of training may fall short, but this much is sure: the responsibility to train is yours and you can only discipline the child when you, yourself, are disciplined. You can only discipline the child when you, yourself, are certain of the values that you hold sacred. Before you have children, grow up! If you have children already, cease to be a child.

Well, dad, back to the drawing boards.



[illegible]

She's interested - Why couldn't she ask?

"Will she be interested in - Teacher asked when
all came from - going from from school -
going from N.Y.C. - I just remembered
when I came from

Can I be afraid in an examination unless I see it that
it's enough. We don't have enough confidence in our own
judgment. We always assume some report will be better

Richard, ^{which} should I tell my daughter about and
then she asked you

Yes, and much

What did you say

I told her, ^{WRHS} and

no revelation and just information and pragmatic one might
people, we are aware of such study and research has been
been done, we are helping you with and enough in our process
But believe me there are no 4 part in the art of
living. There are all shapes & ways in children whom
about and. Some children think abstractly - others and in concrete
ways - some ask to know - others and become polytechnic
have been looking about it. no one thinks you could on
enough as you do! Free yourself of the mythology of education -
to just be convinced at school and you could 3-4-5
hours, but before being a gallery of art results - many

figured to be sure - but if uncertain reliability, it is
a man - have divided between, a liberal, his own st. of good
values - he is trying to be helpful. ~~has shown in the~~
unful - but it is not good, then our judgment need
not qualify before him.

It would be good to listen. Sometimes when there is some
problem here, as having parent, block out the ugly truth. We need
have a open a receptive mind - but - all such cannot reliability
study.

Turn up your child - You have to be up - Don't understand
anything or on the judgment for your own.

When so many in a generation, absolutely unreliability - we
must ask why? Part of it is in the modern mythology of
expertise. You can't help your child to understand what you have a
to say certificates.
Before you can understand to look up a parent's head in
reaction to what you need the certificates of a
graduate historian at the pro the historian of the
modern work.

Before you learn on a course, you must feel in
a sub called the work in the field to know
you will only only the modern work in the
field.

Finally, the degree of open political unreliability to the modern
work unreliability the modern work unreliability. I support it
because in an unreliability the modern work unreliability. unreliability
There can need to be seen by the work. But the modern work unreliability is a work

- an ~~unpleasant~~ pleasant - not a predictable day - a man's

Why do we fail to ~~not~~ remember on point? well, not
of the upside down is one few of consequences, we live in
a world where we are half conscious psychology is dead -
One of these ^{half} emphases is that the man never escapes being what
he was made into in a child, Dr. Trowel stated the need
for very realistic advice to be given on developmental issues,
many pushed from the clinical description to the intuitive judgment
conception that what happens is dead - is just 6 or 7-8 10
years from now for life, Parents are in a world where we
are not helping them, if parents are 35 years old, and if he
simply can't wait to see, or if he is in the middle of a crisis - or one
person is not understanding - we are in the middle of the process of
the man is in the middle of the process of the man, and we
are disappointed in him.

There is a point in the history of a disorder where a
single step will break the stone over, however big the step
may be, will be remembered in the middle of the stone where
it was placed and. To-day parents are made to feel that
they are always just at the point of the stone where it was placed. The
and think to give the child that which was in the middle
of his spiritual and of his body - we are in the middle
of his life, we are in the middle of the man, because
it has become the portentous and unavoidable stone.

It's the stone where it was placed, it's the stone

fault, does meekly, but not in your upbring but in you self."

On Y.K. Confessionals speaks to truth

"Tale says rules are being served against the

does not permit us to retaliate

"Tale says rules are being served against the"

moderns after but we need balance been called out by - a

full need to see of ³ ~~the~~ ^{three} ~~the~~ process, protection, and

education. It says we need rule over recovery and love,
justice

ad, attention, Home should be light into soul time - one

exercises need to be recovery and love - but it must be slow

was on the right foot - a ball point & balance time will

for it.

WRHS



