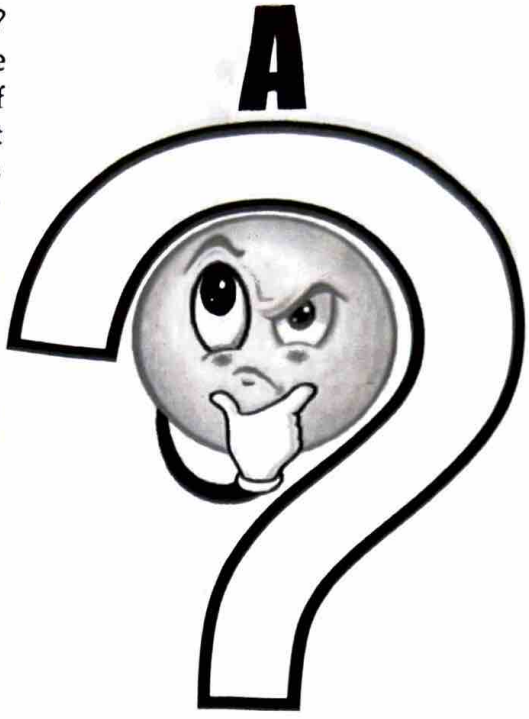
A ? is a question





Let's get the answer right!

■ by Wg Cdr D.P. Sabharwal

Choli ke peechay kya hai...? became a hit song, a decade back. It did create a lot of ruckus at that time but, not going into the righteousness or otherwise of the wording, just ponder the question posed in the song. It is a simple question that could, at best, be termed as naughty. You cannot call the question to be vulgar or stupid.

After all, it is a question, a plain and simple question. You would agree to this view, when you consider the answer provided in the next line of the song, *Choli ke peechay dil hai mera.*

Now, consider another scenario, when the same question is asked. Many other answers would have made the question look dirty. The answer could be, 'You shameless guy, how dare you ask me that?' or 'The same thing as your mother or sister is having,' or even the most honest answer, 'It is boobs, you idiot.'

In this scenario, the question no longer appears to be innocent. But, come to think of it, it is not the question that has changed. It is the answer that has given a different colour to the question. Yes, that is the point I wish to make: "No question is ever foolish or stupid. The answer can be."

This fact was taught to me, more than three decades back, by a professor, when I was a post-graduate student at the prestigious Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Seeing the poor response of the students by way of almost nil or extremely poor interaction in his class, one day, he asked why we did not ask questions.

When none was forthcoming, he said, "It is all due to our system, which discourages asking questions. When you ask a question to a teacher, particularly a difficult or out-of-the-mill type question, and the teacher does not have a ready answer, the usual response is: 'Shut-up, what a stupid question, sit-down.'"

Answer that deserves a prize

Many years ago, the famous comedian I.S. Johar used to run a column in *Filmfare* magazine. I do not recollect the name of the column nor the exact amount of the prize money, but he used to answer questions and give a handsome prize to the best question. Invariably, it was the answer that made the question look like the best one!

To get a feel of what it used to be, consider the following questions and the associated answers. I am sure he would have given the prizes to these answers.

- 'Do animals also have blood groups?'

There could be many answers like 'yes', 'no'. The one that deserve kudos is: "No, unlike humans, they don't have groupism."

- 'Why is buffalo's milk thicker than that of a cow?'

The actual answer would be based on scientific knowledge, that might not be available to a normal teacher. A conscientious teacher would say, "I shall check up and let you know tomorrow," but a smart teacher's answer would be: "The cows are more calorie-conscious."

- 'Why are freezers at the top of a refrigerator and not at the bottom of it?'

This question can rattle even the most intelligent person but never a person with common sense and a sense of humour. The answer such a person would offer could be: "Because the temperature is more at lower altitudes," or "If you keep your head cool, only then can you perform well."

- 'Why do children's hearts beat faster than those of adults?'

Well, many of us might not even be aware of this fact, so the answer could be in the form of a question like, 'is it?' But then there are many answers that would satisfy the one asking the question. Some of the choices are: "They are in a hurry to grow into adults," or

"Time takes its toll," or "Being childish, it has no control."

Questions for the heck-of-it

There are many students and grown-ups, who are in the habit of asking questions not for seeking an honest answer but just for the sake of asking questions. They do so either to try and impress or try to act smart by testing the knowledge of the other person.

Such people invariably ask contoured questions that are generally longer than what the answer would be. Else, they ask questions, that are not clear or at best ask questions that seek comparison between two things.

Whatever the case may be, even such people should not be snubbed because a question is, after all, a question and needs to be answered. Yes, the answer need not be a technical one, highlighting the actual differences, since it could be really tedious and taxing. However, do not let such a person enjoy at your cost. Instead, provide him the answers that he would not be able to find fault with. Get a clue from the following set of questions-answers:

- What is the difference between a metropolitan and a cosmopolitan city?

  The degree of pollution.
- What is the difference between an ordinary refrigerator and a deep freezer?

An ordinary refrigerator is an amateur, whereas a deep freezer is a professional.

- What is the difference between being in a coma and being unconscious?

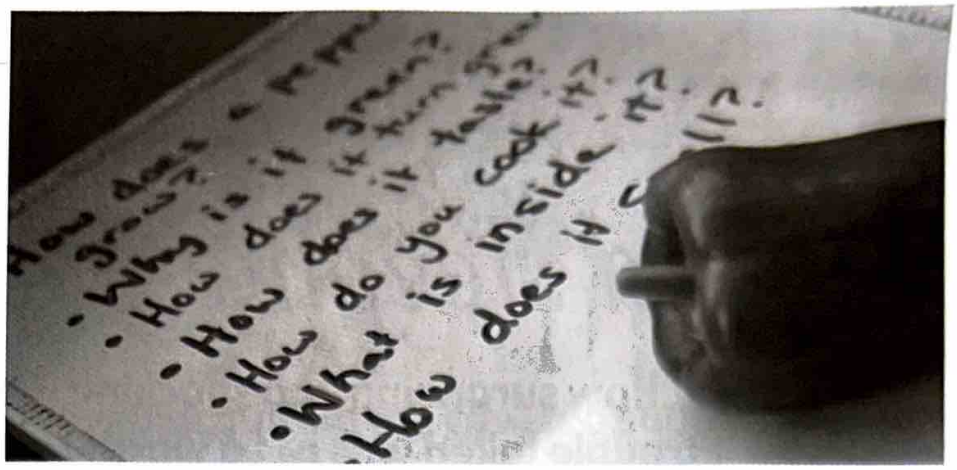
Coma denotes the married state with hardly a chance of recovery. Unconsciousness, on the other hand, is like falling in love: you do have a chance of recovery!

- What is the difference between wooing and seducing?

When the heroine does the act, it is wooing; when a vamp does it, it is seducing.

- What is the difference between firing and shooting?

Your asking a question is like firing; my answering is akin to shooting.



Answering young kids' questions

Young children are not only bundles of endless energy, they are also an encyclopaedias as far as asking difficult questions are concerned. I use the word difficult in the sense that there are invariably no easy answers or answers that can be easily explained. Having brought up two kids, who were definitely more intelligent than I was at their age, and interacting with hundreds others during my school programmes, I have realised the fruitfulness of providing interesting and, at times, comic answers.

In this endeavour, I am usually helped by my other colleagues. A few of such questions are as under:

- How is it that light can travel in a vacuum whereas sound cannot?

  Because you can turn a deaf ear to sound but not a blind eye to light.
- How come a low-flying aircraft does not get caught by surveillance radars?

  Because such aircraft keep a 'low profile'.
- Why do some people have higher IQs than others?

  Some have a higher IQ just because others have a low one!
- How is it that ice floats on water while it sinks in alcohol?

  Who can float after getting drunk?
- Why are petrol and oil mixed in some bikes and separately provided in others?

  To suit individual tastes!

The masterpiece

Pappu, a four-year-old, was watching his mother breast-feeding his new baby sister. After looking intently for some time, he asked, "Mama, why have you got two? Is one for hot and one for cold milk?"

I am sure, such a question would test anyone's ingenuity in providing a suitable question. What would you answer? ■

CHILD IS A CHILD IS A CHILD

Twisting rhyme

My four-year-old nephew Jojo is a witty person. He always has an answer to every question. There was a recitation competition in his school and his class teacher selected him for taking part in the contest. On that day, he smartly went to the podium and began to recite the poem "Twinkle twinkle little star". After reciting the first line he was in a soup as he could not remember the second line. Instead of getting nervous he smartly recited. "Half I gander what you are". Hearing his own rhyme the audience burst into loud laughter.

— *Indramani Chakravarti*

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