

Character Sketch of Danny Saunders from *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok

While I am often jealous of those who are smarter than I am, Danny Saunders is a brilliant character that I do not envy. He is a Hasidic Jew who was raised in a strictly religious household by his father, a rabbi, who does not speak to Danny except when they study the Talmud (the book of Jewish tradition). This distance from his father is a source of frustration in Danny's life that drives him to find friendship and guidance outside of his strictly Jewish community and ultimately drives him away from his faith.

Just by looking at him, you can tell that Danny is an Orthodox Jew. The hair on top of his head is close cropped and always covered with a small, black skullcap, but as with all Hasidic men, Danny has never shaved. At the age of sixteen he has long earlocks that curl in ringlets at the side of his pale face, and the scraggly beginnings of what could become a lifelong beard are growing on his chin and cheeks. His "uniform" consists of a white shirt, dark pants, and the traditional undergarment, the fringes of which hang out of his shirt and bounce against his sides as he walks. His shoes are hard-soled, so you always know when he's heading your way because his shoes click hollowly on the hardwood floors of the school and the pavement of the streets in his Brooklyn neighborhood. Danny's eyes are dark and deepset. He often appears tired or sad, conditions that may arise from his hours of daily reading or from the fact that he feels "trapped" to follow in his father's footsteps and become a rabbi.

Danny is a gifted student and a voracious reader. Blessed with a photographic memory, he memorizes every page he reads, recalling the most obscure passages from the Talmud when his classmates are left clueless by their teacher's questions. Just his school work requires three or four hours of reading a day, but Danny then visits the public library at night to read complicated books on psychology (without his father's knowledge or permission). "I want to become a psychologist," he tells his friend Reuven, who is shocked to learn that Danny does not wish to become a rabbi, even though that is clearly the path that has been set for him. "My father doesn't like us to mix with outsiders," Danny says, but he seeks guidance from Reuven's father, whom he meets at the public library and who offers him many reading suggestions of both religious and non-religious natures. Frustrated by his inability to understand the translated writings of Sigmund Freud, Danny teaches himself German so he can read them in their original language. His incredible capacity to absorb knowledge contributes to his growing frustration because he has so many questions that cannot be answered by his religion. It is this constant tension in his life that makes him at once a fascinating person and an annoying friend.