

MAGIC

by Joshua Kruger

Once upon a time:



Aaron rushed into the house, "Dad, Mom, you have to see this! I won this cool set of magnets at school - they're so cool!"

Aaron's mom turned around to see him unpacking his prize as she set the table for dinner.

"I'm gonna practice some magic trick, okay?" Aaron pushed aside a corner of the tablecloth to start practicing his tricks.

"Sounds good, sweetie," said his mother as she headed to the kitchen. As she worked in the kitchen, she heard Aaron's little sister, Rachel, come into the dining room.

"Hey, Rachel," Aaron called out, "I have something to show you. Look, I'm gonna move this tissue across the table by just pointing at it with my hand."

Aaron's mom took a peek into the room and saw how Aaron put a tissue over a magnet on the table, and used the second magnet under the table to move the one above it. Rachel watched, with big eyes and an open jaw as she watched her brother perform his trick.

"How do you do that, Aaron?" asked Rachel.

"It's magic!" exclaimed Aaron, very pleased with his performance.

"Magic?"

"Yes, I send a force from my finger to move the tissue. I have a super-force power!"

Aaron's mom entered the dining room and spoke casually to Aaron, "You know it could be very fun for you to teach Rachel how you do that trick. It would be very big-brotherly!"

Aaron turned to his mom and whispered, "But I want her to think that I have super-force!!"

"You know, we don't believe in magic, or fairies, or sorcerers or spells....we wouldn't want Rachel to think that people can have a super-force, right? Only Hashem has special powers."

Aaron did not want to ruin his fun. He loved seeing the amazed look on Rachel's face.

Discussion:

Q: What is the connection between our story and the *parsha*?

A: In this week's *parsha*, Moshe is sent by Hashem to Pharaoh to perform supernatural acts in order to demonstrate the Hashem's power. Pharaoh instructs his *chartumim* to perform similar acts using their evil magic.

Q Rabbis that lived many years ago, were concerned that performing magic involved an *aveira* called "*geneivas da'as*". What is "*geneivas da'as*"?

A *Geneivas da'as* literally means "stealing someone's knowledge". It refers to creating a wrong or misleading impression about oneself. In the case of a magician, the acts that they perform can give the false impression that they have superhuman powers. The Rambam wrote that performing hand tricks or sorcery is transgressing the law of *geneivas da'as* and that the magician should be punished for this (*Sefer Hamitzvos*, negative mitzvah 32). The examples that Rambam used were turning a rope into a snake or throwing a ring into the air and then pulling it out of the ear of someone in the audience.

Q Do you think that *geneivas da'as* is still a problem today?

A Many years ago, when people were less educated and did not know about the rules of science, that they would watch magic tricks and truly believe that miracles or sorcery were being performed! Nowadays though, most people will watch a magic trick show and say "how did you do it?", which indicates that they know that the magician does not have any supernatural forces. They are a normal person who has unique skills and talents. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein says that using a talent or a skill for magic tricks should not be considered a sin (*Iggros Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* 4:13). He gives examples of people in Tanach who used God-given skills to perform amazing acts. Can you think of any? (*Shimshon's strength and Naftali's speed*)

Q Is there a way for a magician to introduce his show that might be more *halachically* acceptable?

A The magician can inform his audience before the show that they do not have any supernatural power, and that their acts are all 'natural' (*Iggros Moshe*, *Yoreh De'oh* 4:13).

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, and based on his article entitled A Halachic Glance at Magic

<http://www.dinonline.org/2011/07/04/a-halachic-glance-at-magic/>)