

Kehillah

Chiddushim and Insights for Shabbos | 21 Tevet, 5783 | 4



The Call of the Burning Bush

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer

Upon beholding the wondrous sight of the burning bush, Moshe Rabbeinu asks himself the question: Why is the bush not consumed? (Shemos 3:3). The Torah does not make the answer explicit. Fire cannot burn without fuel, yet in this case, the burning fuel remained unconsumed. How could this be?

The answer, however, is latent in the ensuing revelation. Hashem calls Moshe from within the fire as though to declare: the fire would, indeed, burn the bush to a cinder, but the presence of Hashem prevents the consumption. As Rashi explains, the bush represents the Jewish People, while the fire is the Egyptian furnace. They would have no hope of survival were it not for the continued Divine presence among them, protecting them from inevitable destruction.

This insight prepared Moshe for his mission of leading the nascent nation out of Egyptian bondage. Hashem is present specifically in our weakness, in our frailty. It is true both personally and nationally.

Each of the three signs Hashem gave Moshe to demonstrate his Divine sending thus illustrated another aspect of human vulnerability. The stain of leprosy on his hand indicated the frailty of our physical condition; we all too quickly suffer from multiple ailments. The staff that turned into a serpent embodied the transience of our possessions, here today, gone tomorrow. And the water that turned to blood illustrated how even our world is inherently unstable; things can go horribly wrong.

Nevertheless, Moshe continued to reject the mission, claiming that he was “heavy of mouth” and “heavy of tongue.” In response, Hashem spoke the message explicitly: “But Hashem said to him, ‘Who gave man a mouth, or who makes [one] dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, Hashem?’” (4:11). Hashem is present specifically in Moshe’s heaviness of tongue, for “I will be with your mouth” (4:12).

Moshe clearly had tremendous virtues. He was courageous, as demonstrated by his killing the Egyptian tormentor and saving Yisro’s daughters at the well. He had an acute sense of fairness and justice and also felt an intense loyalty and commitment to his people. Moreover, Moshe was supremely humble, hence his repeated refusal to accept the mission. Yet, his leadership demanded that humility be accompanied by confident action, as taught by the core lesson of the burning bush.

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Our imperfections define a process, the one we call life. This same process is where we find Hashem

When we are frail and vulnerable, as a bush threatened by fire or the Jewish People under the yoke of the Egyptian superpower, then Hashem is among us. And when Hashem is among us, we find the resilience and strength to survive and even to thrive and flourish. Moshe’s leadership was not despite his being heavy of tongue; his heaviness of tongue allowed the space for Hashem to enter, such that Moshe’s leadership ultimately became the leadership of Hashem Himself.

We, our possessions, and our environment are imperfect. They always will be. This imperfection calls us to action, for in a perfect existence, what would we do? It also calls us to Hashem, for in a perfect existence we would not need Him. Our imperfections define a process, the one we call life. This same process is where we find Hashem.

Due to Moshe’s supreme level in realizing the process, he is termed *Eved Hashem*, a true servant of Hashem, representing Him fully and totally in all his ways. We, too, are called to serve. Our service begins with recognizing flaws – in ourselves and our society. It continues by striving to rectify them in partnership with Hashem.

What Can We Learn From Moshe's Donkey? Rabbi Asher Meir

In our *parasha* Moshe, following Hashem's instruction, returns to Egypt to free his people, bringing his family members on a donkey (Shemos 4:20). According to the Midrash, cited by Rashi (Bamidbar 16:15), Moshe recalls this episode as defense against the claims of Korach and his company that he is a despot (*Bamidbar Rabba* 18:10)

"I have not taken one donkey from them": That which I had [a right] to take I did not take. By universal custom, one who works in the sanctuary receives wages from the sanctuary. [In my case, however,] when I went down from Midian to Egypt I had a right to take a donkey from them, since it was on behalf of their needs that I was going down [there]; but I did not take [one].

Moshe's claim seems perplexing. How was he supposed to take a donkey *from* the Jews in Egypt in order to travel to Egypt? One possible answer is that Moshe was entitled to be reimbursed, but voluntarily waived this right. This would be parallel to the situation of the sanctuary workers. Or perhaps Moshe is pointing out that he had no obligation to incur expenses to fulfill his mission, but he willingly did so. At any rate, this Midrash presents a good opportunity to review the laws of reimbursement.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 101a) states that "one who entered another's field and planted trees in it without the permission of the owner of the field" must be compensated according to the lesser of the owner's benefit and the usual expense incurred for the work done. (This situation usually arises due to a misunderstanding; see e.g. *Bava Metzia* 76b.) The Rema (*Choshen Mishpat* 264:4) adds: "Likewise, anyone who performs a labor or a favor for his friend, [the friend] cannot say, 'Since I didn't instruct you [to do the work, it is considered as if] you worked for free.'"

A common example is asking a neighbor to babysit in an emergency, or accepting a Shidduch suggestion from a friend or relative. Even if the helper was not explicitly hired, and even though it is not unusual for people to agree to do these things for a mitzvah and without payment, the usual remuneration for a babysitter or Shadchan is due.

Another common reimbursement *halacha* is adjudicating when repayment is offered, but the exact extent is unclear. For example, an expense account covers "business related expenses" but it is not clear if an extravagant business lunch with a client is included. Here we apply the rule of the Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 7:1, 83a in the gemara) whereby all working conditions follow the general custom unless otherwise stipulated.

Moshe's Risk

The example of sanctuary workers noted in the Midrash

is given because public funds in general, and especially sanctuary funds, have strict limitations on their use. As the Midrash mentions, the Mishnah (*Shekalim* 4:1) and Tosefta (*Shekalim* 2:6) give broad latitude to pay Mikdash craftsmen from sanctuary funds. A *beraita* (*Kesubos* 106a) extends this permission to Torah scholars who teach *halachos* to Kohanim; here is an early precedent for today's custom to ensure that Torah teachers receive suitable recompense for their considerable efforts.

None of these explanations seem applicable to Moshe's situation. Moshe did not go to Egypt at the bidding of the people, but rather at the bidding of Hashem. Furthermore, Hashem did not instruct Moshe to bring his family with him.

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None of these explanations seem applicable to Moshe's situation. Moshe did not go to Egypt at the bidding of the people.

Perhaps the most apt analogy to the events of our *parasha* is the following: In general, a person is not required to incur any loss to fulfill the mitzva of rescuing somebody else's endangered object. In fact, one is allowed to forgo saving an object worth millions of shekels so as not to lose something of trivial value. To partially rectify this regrettable situation, Chazal allow a rescuer to stipulate that he undertakes rescue on the understanding that his loss will be compensated by the owner; this stipulation is generally binding (Mishnah, *Bava Metzia* 2:9, 30b in the Gemara; *Choshen Mishpat* 264:4-5.) The Shulchan Aruch uses the term "one who descends in order to save" to define the rescuer.

Moshe took a great risk by bringing his family to Egypt. Indeed, Chazal (cited in Rashi, Shemos 18:2) tell us that Aharon was amazed when he saw them, and admonished Moshe to return them to safety in Midian. Evidently, Moshe sought, as always, to throw his lot in completely with the Jewish people. If their families were at risk, then his family would be too. Moshe did not seek any privileges; he "goes down" to Egypt only "in order to save" the people of Israel.

If Moshe had been interested in minimizing his risk, he could have left his family in Midian. At the very least, he could have stipulated that he expected the people to reimburse him for the expenses of bringing them. But Moshe does exactly the opposite: he shows self-sacrifice over and above what is required, by not only descending to Egypt himself but even by bringing his wife and sons to demonstrate solidarity with his people. This is the essence of his rejoinder to Korach.

Redemption is from Hashem Alone Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

“The Torah is acquired in forty-eight ways... and one who attributes something to its originator. We thus learn that one who says something in the name of its originator brings redemption to the world, as it says, “Esther told the king in the name of Mordechai” (Avos 6:6).

The last of the 48 qualities uniquely necessary for the acquisition of Torah is attributing a Torah insight to the originator or, more simply, giving credit. A strange add-on follows this. One who follows this practice “brings redemption to the world,” evidenced by Esther reporting the uncovering of the plot to kill Achashverosh “in the name of Mordechai.” It was this added element in her report that led Achashverosh to honor Mordechai, ultimately leading to Haman’s downfall and our redemption.

After explaining the importance of this quality for the acquisition of Torah, the Maharal (*Derech Chaim*, Chap. 6, Mishna 6) elaborates on the connection between giving credit and bringing about our redemption.

Certainly, this is not a cause-and-effect relationship; for centuries, people have taught Torah ideas in the name of their originator, not taking credit for themselves. And yet, redemption did not come!

The Maharal explains that when Hashem brings redemption, it must be recognized and clear to all that it was He alone Who wrought it. As long as credit can be attributed to anyone but Hashem, redemption cannot come. Therefore, only one who never takes credit for what another does or says can play a role in the redemptive process. Hashem will only enlist those who take no undeserved credit, for otherwise, this will take away from the clarity that redemption is from Hashem alone.

Moshe Had to Make Thing Worse First

Attributing an idea to its originator is thus not *sufficient* to bring redemption; it is an absolutely *necessary* condition. Only someone like Esther, who took no personal credit for herself when she could have, can play a role in bringing about redemption.

This insight helps us understand a strange exchange between Hashem and Moshe at the end of this week’s *parasha*. After Pharaoh responds to Moshe’s repeated requests to free the Jewish people by increasing their workload (Shemos 5:6-18) the Jewish people complain to Moshe concerning his role in bringing on this extra burden. Moshe goes to Hashem complaining, “Since I have come to Pharaoh, speaking in Your name, he made

it worse for the Jews.” Hashem’s response (6:1) seems strange. “NOW you will see what I am going to do to Pharaoh.” Now? Hasn’t this been the goal from the very beginning?

Attributing an idea to its originator is thus not sufficient to bring redemption; it is an absolutely necessary condition. Only someone like Esther, who took no personal credit for herself when she could have, can play a role in bringing about redemption.

Combining an idea from Rav Yakov Kamentsky (*Emes L’Yakov*, Devarim 32:36) and what we have learned from the Maharal, we can understand why this intermediate step of Moshe making it worse was needed before Hashem moved ahead with His plan.

Had things run their course, from when Moshe appealed to Pharaoh to ask him “let my people go” through the ten plagues, the exodus, and the splitting of the Sea, the people would have looked at Moshe as one who played a crucial role in the redemption.

To avoid this, Moshe had to be perceived not as part of the solution but as part of the problem. Once Moshe was viewed through those eyes, Hashem could say, “Now you will see what I am going to do to Pharaoh,” with you as the intermediary.

As we stand today in the midst of the redemptive process. Sometimes, we rub our eyes in disbelief at the privilege of living in the Land that so many generations could only dream of. Yet, we must realize that redemption happens in a way beyond our grasp. Imputing any power to people, parties, or events that appear to bring about the ultimate redemption is counter to Hashem’s plan for redemption.

This, says Rav Kamenetsky, is the intention of Chazal when they teach us, “Moshiach doesn’t come until the people give up on the redemption” (*Sanhedrin* 97a). Certainly, we are anxiously waiting and longing for redemption. We never give up. But until we give up the thought that intermediaries will make it happen, it simply won’t.

We are called upon to fulfill our Torah responsibilities for their own sake. The redemption process, whichever way it unfolds, is credited absolutely to Hashem.

Handling Frustration with Daughter's Behavior ?!

Rebbetzin Tamar Pfeffer

Question

First, many thanks in advance for listening and for your wise counsel.

I am a mother of five. The eldest is 11, a very sensitive girl with a huge heart but (or therefore) very easily hurt.

Recently, we have been receiving many complaints, some of them from children who travel with her on the bus, about her being verbally and sometimes even physically aggressive towards them. At the same time, we've received complaints from the school about a decrease in motivation for learning and unsatisfactory behavior – she is not being rude or crossing hard boundaries but splashes water on her friends, giggles, chatters in classes, and so on.

On the other hand, in a parents' meeting, the teacher

described her as a sweet girl with good manners who speaks politely and pleasantly. Teachers even mentioned the attention she gives others. But at home, we certainly know about a lack of control towards brothers, expressed in unkind words and violent and offensive behavior.

So what to do? Should we punish her? How? She really expresses frustration when we express our disappointment with her behavior, as if she's doing just fine, which is clearly not the case.

I should note that our daughter was diagnosed with ADHD and aggressiveness, though the teachers at the school say they don't feel the aggressive side.

Please give me some good advice on this issue.

Response

Very Dear Mother!

When I read your question (and I read it several times), a sentence that might seem less significant caught my eye. "She really expresses frustration when we express our disappointment with her behavior, as if she's doing just fine."

Where does this frustration come from?

The frustration comes from our "disappointments." Our disappointment in the child frustrates us as parents, which passes on to our kids. This is a central point worth dwelling on.

I feel in your question the natural and understandable need as parents to give the situation a positive heading: "A sensitive girl with a huge heart," or "the teacher describes her as a sweet girl with good manners." And so on. Just a couple of corrections, and all is good.

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Unconditional love will show her she's
always cherished and wanted. Because
of your love, she will learn to love
herself, giving her the strength to keep
moving forward.
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However, the educational process is long, sometimes very long. A child is not molded in the image that parents have in mind. That's not our job, but rather to

accompany him on his own path.

An 11-year-old girl who hurts her siblings, is mischievous in class, and behaves aggressively towards friends doesn't fit under the heading of bad or disappointing. She doesn't fit under any heading. She is a child, living, breathing, and dynamic.

A parent who puts his son or daughter under a label, even a positive one, is boxing them in rather than accompanying him or her on their journey. Each of your five children has his own journey, different from that of the others, and your task as parents is to accompany them on the path, which involves a process of growth for you and them together.

It is always good to refrain from labels: My daughter is like this or like that. Rather, my daughter has many shades and sides and has her own path to walk. Her path has ups and downs, just like mine. Going down a descent does not make her worse, just as in ascending, she does not become righteous. She's simply making progress along her path. If you think and feel this way, your daughter will also learn to think this way about herself. And when things are down – a complaint from school, a problem on the bus, issues with siblings, and so on – she will not see herself as bad or disappointing but as a normal girl who needs to move forward.

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An 11-year-old girl who hurts her

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siblings, is mischievous in class, and behaves aggressively towards friends doesn't fit under the heading of bad or disappointing. She doesn't fit under any heading. She is a child, living, breathing, and dynamic.

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Her strength to keep moving forward comes from your love – *ahavas chinam*, unconditional love. When you hug her or tell her how much you love her, and when this is not contingent on achievement and good behavior, and comes even after you get a complaint from a teacher, she

will have the power to transcend labels and go forward. Unconditional love will show her she's always cherished and wanted. Because of your love, she will learn to love herself, giving her the strength to keep moving forward.

To conclude, you mention that your daughter has been diagnosed with ADHD. I want to note that even if she begins to take medication to help with the condition, all of the above remains relevant to the same degree. The medication might assist as a tool, but it's the positive attitude – yours and hers – that will ensure she develops and thrives.

*I wish you much joy in the process,
Tamar Pfeffer*

Loving Children Vs. Loving Spouses Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Who do you love more? Your spouse or your children? I have asked this question to many couples when feeling slightly mischievous. The couple look at each other and wonder what to do next. It's that "I'll raise my hand if you do" moment. Ultimately, after the awkward moment has passed, most couples will confess that they love their children more.

It's not that we actually love our kids more than we do our spouse. It's that we love them differently. Understanding the nature of the difference, however, can teach us an important lesson.

The love we have for our children is a compulsion. We love our children before they're born, we love them before they are cute, before they smile, before we know them. We love them when they're selfish, thankless babies and when they're ungrateful teens. We love them for nothing that they have done to warrant that love. Try explaining why you love your child: any reason that you come up with will simply fall short. It will not cut it. It will not be enough to justify the feelings that you have for them.

The truth is, we love them because they are extension of ourselves. The Torah teaches us to love others as we love ourselves. Notice that the Torah doesn't command that initial self-love. It assumes it.

The love we have for ourselves (even if it's mired with some bad self-talk and some low self-esteem here and there) is the reason we get offended when people insult us, the reason we get upset when people misjudge us, and the reason we try to protect ourselves when people are hurting us. It's part of our selfish nature to feel self-love. Even when people self-harm, G-d forbid, it is usually in order to achieve a sense of relief from a deeper pain.

Since our children are extensions of ourselves, it stands to reason that the same force that creates our self love drives the love we have for our children. It is a love born from compulsion. There's very little you can do about it.

The love we have for our spouses is something entirely different. Our relationship with our spouse is one of a spiritual nature. And the realm of the spiritual is such that our experience of it will depend on our choices.

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We can get it right, but we can also get it wrong. We can grow in it, we can fail in it.

Our marriages are not functions of compulsion but of decisions, commitments, and *bechira*. How much love can we experience in them? The sky is the limit.

How much effort are you willing to invest? How favourably are you willing to judge your spouse? How much are you willing to give to your relationship? How much are you willing to receive from your relationship? Do you prioritize your marriage? Are you willing to be humble and grateful?

How much you love your spouse has not been decided by nature. It is not a compulsion. It's a choice. The key is remembering that the real answer to the question of how much love can inhere in our marriage is... It's entirely up to us.

Stories that inspire Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

The Iriya Already Paid!

Levi had no father. He lived with his mother and younger sisters in a small apartment in Yerushalayim. Things were challenging for Levi and his mother. Every week seemed more difficult – Levi's family barely managed to scrape through each month.

Usually, Levi's mother was able to hold it together, but on that memorable day, it all became too much. As she saw the boiler burst and water gushing out onto her small antiquated kitchen floor, she could no longer control the pain of the last ten months and couldn't hold back the tears.

"Shouldn't we call the plumber, Ima?" asked 14-year-old Levi as he reached for the phonebook. Levi had been forced to grow up fast. "Uri, the fix-it man, can fix almost anything!"

"Let's try his number...."

Ten minutes hadn't passed, and Uri's confident smile was seen at the door. He didn't need to ask questions; he saw the river streaming from the hallway. He got to work immediately, turned a few valves, and soon the water began subsiding.

Uri looked around the sparse apartment, and his eyes turned to Levi's mother. He was about to begin speaking. He stopped. And then, with a twinkle in his eye, he started again. "Mrs. Levy, Today is your lucky day! I was just at the Iriya, where they gave out thousands of vouchers for replacing old boilers! I know that your boiler's model is exactly the type of boiler they are replacing! You will not have to pay a penny, and I will be back this afternoon with a new Iriya Boiler!"

When Levi heard Uri's pronouncement a grin broke out on his face. This was precisely the break his mother needed.

When Levi heard Uri's pronouncement a grin broke out on his face. This was precisely the break his mother needed.

Twenty-five years passed, and Uri was now in his 70's. It wasn't easy for him to get around, he had developed asthma, and his knees gave him a lot of trouble. Years of running around were now taking their toll.

Because of his condition, it was difficult for him to breathe. After consultation, his doctor encouraged him to get an air-conditioner to help him with the heat. "An air-conditioner?? I can't afford that luxury!" Uri thought

to himself. But as the months passed and breathing became tougher, Uri caved in and ordered a simple, cheap unit.

Two days later, Uri heard a ring on the doorbell – the air-conditioner had arrived! The delivery men began to unpack the unit and were about to install it when Uri cried out, "Stop!! I never ordered this unit!! This is the most expensive unit in the country! I know exactly what I ordered and exactly what you are installing!! You want to get me to pay for this expensive model!!".

The Installer was just as confused as Uri. He was sure that his instructions were to install the new Electra Platinum III – and his boss never made mistakes on orders!! A call was put through to the boss, who told everyone to hold tight while he came down to see the unit in question.

Ten tense minutes later, the boss pressed the doorbell. "Mr. Uri Levine? This unit has already been fully paid for!"... Uri looked back, puzzled. "Paid by whom?" "This unit has been fully paid for by the Iriya!"... "What do you mean?? The Iriya doesn't pay for air conditioners!!"

"I don't know if you remember me," continued Levi, "but 25 years ago, you did some work in our apartment. Our life was in shambles, and the boiler had broken. My mother couldn't handle more frustration and heartache, and you saw that. When you bought us a new boiler, you told her the Iriya paid for it.

"That act of kindness was the turning point of our lives. I have thought about repaying you for 25 years, but I didn't have your address or number. When the order for the air conditioner came in, I was overjoyed. I recognized your name, and now I can finally keep the promise I made to myself.

"Would you believe it" continued Levi, his face beaming, "the Iriya has arranged for all citizens with asthma to be given top-of-the-range a/c units for free!"

What a fantastic story!! In fact, this is exactly what happens in Parashas Shemos.





Let's look back for a moment at Parshas Vayechi, beginning with the first Rashi: נסתמו עינינו, נסתמו עינינו, נסתמו עינינו. The eyes and Hearts of Klal Yisrael become blocked.

"Paid by whom?" "This unit has been fully paid for by the Iriya!" ... "What do you mean?? The Iriya doesn't pay for air conditioners!!"

What happens in Shemos? Moshe Rabbeinu leaves the comfort of the palace: "ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם" Rashi explains: "נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם," meaning that Moshe Rabbeinu opened his eyes and heart to the pain of others.

What was the response? Rashi explains: "ויידע אלוקים - נתן" "ויידע אלוקים - נתן" Hashem opened His heart and eyes to care for His People.

May we always be zoche to noticing and feeling the pain of others.

Navigating the Shidduchim Minefield: A Kehillah-Likrat Kallah Event Leora Gruen

What an exquisite evening we were treated to last week.

The theme was navigating shidduchim as Anglos in Israel, and we came home with a wealth of inspiration and practical tips.

The evening started with a lavish dairy buffet including soup, a grand sushi bar, hot dishes, a salad bar, and dessert. Every woman received a beautiful gift bag with chocolates, a lovely notebook and pen, and a magnificent booklet of Tefillos.

It was a treat to meet up with so many like-minded friends and acquaintances. We even got in some shidduch networking as we enjoyed the magnificent spread. Then we were ushered into the lecture hall for the main event.

MC Shaindy Babad welcomed us and let us know that we were in the right place at the right time. Her timely stories sprinkled throughout the evening enhanced each speaker's message.

Rebbetzin Rena Tarshish, always an inspiration, reminded us that we are part of a greater whole so much stronger and more eternal than any of the enemies who have tried to destroy us. With her dramatic explanation of the chessed Hashem did for Yosef by providing pleasant-smelling perfume to accompany him when he was sold, we understood how Hashem sends us kisses throughout any hardships.

She strengthened our *bitachon*, reminding us that every person is given everything she needs to complete her *tafkid* and that we should never compromise on *ruchniyus* but let go of at least some of the trappings.

Next, Rifka Lebowitz provided lucid financial advice regarding saving for weddings. She spoke about short-term management of our finances and long-term savings, risk management and the importance of staying true to our family's values whatever our income. She stressed the need for separating, compounding, and automating our finances.

Merissa Gross, a dynamic, personable shadchan was the next to regale us with her viewpoint from the inside. She enjoined each of us to eat humble PIE as we navigate our children's shidduchim — being realistic about the Practicalities, Intellect, and Emotional needs of both our child and our family. Her stories were humorous and entertaining, while validating the challenge of dealing with shidduchim in a world very different than the one we grew up in. Alongside practical advice and a sense of awareness, we were left sensing viscerally how much shadchanim truly care and want to help.

Finally, the Act Out Change troupe dramatized several typical shidduch occurrences and had us laughing heartily. After each scenario, we were asked a question which we had to answer by raising one of four colored cards that were prepared in our bag.

Any woman who volunteered to help was entered into a raffle which ended the memorable evening.

Deep thanks to Likras Kallah and Kehillah for the information, the inspiration, and most of all for the sense of community and camaraderie.

From a Satisfied Participant

Making Magic Happen Josh and Tammy Kruger

Once upon a time:

Aaron rushed into the house, “Dad, Mom, you have to see this! I won this amazing 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 tricks, 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 him performing the trick

with big eyes and an open jaw.

“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 a 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 that power.”

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 *parasha*?

A: In this week’s *parasha*, 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 sorcery.

Q: Rabbis of many generations 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” (or “mind”). 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 writes that performing hand tricks or sorcery transgresses the law of *geneivas da’as* and 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, they would watch magic tricks and truly believe that miracles or sorcery were being performed! Nowadays, 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 an *aveira* (*Iggros Moshe*, *Yoreh De’ah* 4:13). He gives examples of people in Tanach who used G-d-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 performances are ‘natural’ (*Iggros Moshe*, *Yoreh De’ah* 4:13).

Written in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer; le’ilui neshama of Frumit Bat Yosef, Edith Nusbaum a”h

