



Ask The Rabbi...

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This issue is sponsored in loving memory of Harry M. Iskowitz O.B.M. by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

לעיני ר' צבי מאיר ב"ד שמעון ברוך איצקוביץ ז"ל

This edition contains:

1. Now You See It, & Now You Don't...Prestidigitation in Halacha
2. Bracha Riddle Answer

Aba Kadabra from Orlando asked:

Dear Rabbi,

I recently hired a magician for my son's birthday party only to be told by a well-meaning friend that it's Halachically forbidden to do Magic.

Is this true?

Dear Aba,

First let's separate between two fundamentally different forms of Magic, that of the "Occult" and that of the "Birthday Party." Any conjuring or manipulation using occult practices is prohibited by the Torah and subject to the death penalty.

Although seemingly innocuous, pure sleight-of-hand is also Biblically prohibited. When listing forbidden practices associated with the seven Canaanite nations, the Torah mentions "*Me'onen*." Our Sages explain that "*Me'oner*" means "illusions performed by sleight-of-hand" (*Achizat Einaim*), and is codified by the *Shulchan Aruch* as being prohibited. The problem with sleight-of-hand seems to be that the magician leaves some people with the impression that he has supernatural powers.

I asked Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*, about magic tricks, and he began by saying that this is not a simple issue, but that there is a way to avoid any possible prohibition. The magician should:

- Show some people how he does one of his tricks. These people do not have to be the actual participants at the birthday party. It is just to make known publically that the "magic" tricks is sleight-of-hand.
- Tell each audience that *all* of the tricks are clever sleight-of-hand.

After following both of the above steps, the magician may perform the magic show in the normal way. I remember the professional magicians Penn & Teller did this during their *Refrigerator Tour* show on Broadway. They demonstrated a "magic box trick" with see-thru boxes so the audience knew how the "trick" was done. However, when David Copperfield "vanished" the Statue of Liberty, I don't

quite remember him stressing that his trick was "clever sleight-of-hand," which one must do to make the trick permissible.

Back to your birthday party. To add more "*Yiddishkeit*" to the show, the entertainer might consider adding another item: Explain what "*Abra K'dabra*" means. In fact, it is an Aramaic expression (the language of the Talmud, which has its roots in Biblical Hebrew) and means:

"I will create (A'bra) as I speak (k'Dabra)."

Coincidence of coincidences a friend called me up to tell me the following joke while I was writing this column: There was a magician that performed on a cruise ship. However, every time he did one of the shows, the captain's parrot would give away the tricks. As you could imagine, his shows weren't doing well. During one cruise (it should not happen to us) the ship hit an iceberg and sunk. The magician was one of the survivors. While he was in the life raft, the parrot landed next to him. It stared at him for several minutes, and finally said: "OK. I give up. Where did you put the ship?"

Sources:

- *Shemot* - 22:17.
- *Devarim* - 18:10.
- *Shulchan Aruch - Yoreh Deah* 179:15.
- Maimonides - Book of Mitzvot, neg. 32.

Last week we posed a *Bracha Riddle*:

"Which four *Berachot* are said exactly *once* every year?"

Jeremy L. Rose <jrose@comsys.demon.co.uk> from Communication Systems Limited sent us the correct answers:

1. Seeing the first blossoms in the spring (OC 226:1, AS 228).
2. *Bedikat chametz* (said the night before Passover) (OC 432:1, AS 654).
3. The special *bracha* of "*Nachem*" during the *Mincha Amida* of *Tisha B'Av* (OC 557:1, AS 240).
4. Lighting candles on *erev Yom Kippur* (OC 610:2, AS 296).

OC = Section in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*

AS = Page # in *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur* where *bracha* appears

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