



Steffan Soule

The magic of the Golden Rule

What the World Needs Now: A conversation with magician Steffan Soule

Jennifer Rose

Mitákuye Oyás'ín
We are All Related
—Lakota

THE LIGHTS DIM and a hush descends. The magician steps onto the stage. Soon, a gasp of wonder unites the audience in one breath. Heads turn, and strangers' eyes meet. Did you see that?

You are in the audience of the Golden Rule Magician. You are back at school and it's a fun activity. You forget all about tensions or anxiety in the competitive environment of school. Your attention splits between the marvel you perceive through your eyes and the emotion ready to lift you from your seat.

Here is the magic. Someone has spent his life working to elevate you with this sense of awe. He has exercised his fingers, studied the masters, looked at special effects from every angle, so that you can suspend your disbelief. The Golden Rule Magician is Steffan Soule. In this performance he will hand you this wonder for keeps. Not the technical secrets, but the secret behind working a lifetime to share wonder and awe. The wisdom that your awe is my awe. Our wonder is one.

Soule debuted his work "Attention, Magic and the Golden Rule" at an anti-bullying conference for youth in 2013. He was already well known for his show "The Magic of Recycling," which kicked off the first curbside recycling program in the country and led to his environmentally themed magic assemblies on subjects from hazardous waste to water conservation. His new presentation, which was commissioned by the Golden Rule Project, was initially aimed at teenagers, middle- to high-school students. I had a conversation with him regarding this project, and he spoke about how it began and where it is going now after seven years of touring schools.

—Jennifer Rose

Jennifer Rose: How did "Attention, Magic and the Golden Rule" get started?
Steffan Soule: When Bonnie Phillips, from the Golden Rule Project, saw me perform a theme show on process improvement at the All and Everything Conference in 2012, she invited me to discuss demonstrating the Golden Rule to school-age students through my magic show. After meeting with Bonnie and Jean Tokuda Irwin, Arts Education Manager for Utah Arts & Museums, I began my research and study of which effects might convey the Golden Rule. This took longer to develop than I expected. The abstract nature of the principle made my creation process take longer than normal, and I needed the dialogue during the development phase.

JR: Why did you include "Attention" in the title?

SS: The title Attention, Magic, and the Golden Rule stems from the idea that when you focus on something you love to do, for me it was magic, your attention develops, and it's easier to apply the Golden Rule—even when it comes to bullying. Developing attention with something you love builds happiness and self-confidence, which leads to being resilient and making intentional choices during times of stress. The title also relates to the idea that when we have attention for both our self and each other, simultaneously, we can utilize the Golden Rule. From the beginning of the show I demonstrate to the students that their attention is powerful. I invite them to use their attention to produce an effect. Then we proceed to tie this power of attention to the possibility of making a bully-free school by using the Golden Rule.

JR: How do teens respond to magic?

SS: They are the toughest audience, and they love it! I begin the show using my Tesla Coil effects, which appear to be dangerous and spark their attention almost immediately. This was proven during the first presentation at a middle school troubled by gang activity. The principal was nervous to have the full student body in the theater at one time, but he quickly relaxed when he saw the students become one wide-eyed audience laughing and applauding together.

JR: How do they like hearing about the message of the Golden Rule?

SS: I am continuously amazed at how teens gravitate toward it. They recognize they need the Golden Rule. To help them apply the Golden Rule we talk about bullying, including being mean and cruel and unkind. In the end, they see bullying from several perspectives, as a bystander, a victim, and a bully. They see they can use the Golden Rule right away—which is partly what makes this powerful. So for an hour, I actually get their undivided attention.

JR: How do you connect the message to an effect?

SS: We go over what bullies want, which is attention. And we show how they sometimes do mean things to get it. To elucidate this, I take a dollar bill from a volunteer and tear it in half. This always gets attention. When I repeat this with a second volunteer, I say, "Bullies repeat their aggression," a phrase from text books on the subject. In the end, the two bills are fully restored by magic, but not without a bit of comic-byplay. I act as if everyone is happy because the other half of the bills vanish and reappear inside a sealed envelope held by a faculty member.

By learning the magic effect with the body, with the feelings, and with the mind, the performer can integrate the many-layered process of presenting these effects with ease and with a sense of wonder.

JR: Do they get their bills back?

SS: Because the other halves have been returned, I declare that everyone is happy. But no, the audience insists that the two standing there with their torn bills, though amazed, are certainly not happy. So I magically restore them with the flick of my wrist; poof, two single one-dollar bills with no tears. Back in the classroom, teachers have messages to share from the magic envelopes. One says, "As a bystander, recognize the bully wants attention. Give them your attention and kindly tell them they are not allowed to inflict harm on others. We will not permit it. Challenge their actions."

After the dollar bills are restored, Soule builds the message through a sequence of effects with water. Three volunteers hold containers of clear water at the beginning of the effect. Two hold bear-shaped bottles, and Soule says, "These two bears are having fun." The water in their bottles becomes dark blue when a volunteer in the role of the "bully" exhibits "wrecking behavior" (a phrase for bullying). The magician shows this third volunteer how to empathize with the two bears, which turns his or her water a matching dark blue. Next, the bears' water magically becomes crystal clear when the audience exhibits "helping or building behavior." There's a quiet hush



in the audience followed by a positive sigh and then applause when the water inside the “bully’s” water-bottle also turns from dark to clear. Restoration is an important part of the healing process and community justice, and Soule visually demonstrates it. Seeing the visuals along with the ideas accompanied by a sense of awe and a feeling of wonder leads students to develop their own lasting images for these important themes.

The magic demonstrates messages visually: when Soule talks about our need for balance both within ourselves and between ourselves and others, he does that while he balances an unrehearsed spectator in midair. When he talks about human rights, he shows the audience that everyone deserves to be treated with kindness at all times while magically linking separate and solid rings together. The idea that we are all connected is reinforced visually while he is speaking about it. The Golden Rule is represented as the last of six rings with which he forms a chain. And then all of the magical rings are suddenly linked to one ring, the first ring which was shown at the start of his routine and is “the ring of you which links to others.”



He concludes with, “Thank you. You are the most important link in this chain; and thank you for helping me.”

JR: I see you’ve presented the show to younger audiences too. Did you have to adapt the message or your magic to help them understand the ideas?

SS: Yes, teens are intrigued by the sophisticated mind-reading portion of the show but that’s not interesting to first-graders. We changed a few things to make it work equally for all ages. For example, we added my specially trained butterflies effect as a practical demonstration of the Golden Rule. Two paper butterflies float mysteriously in the air, each one wanting the other to have just as much fun as they are having. It’s attention-getting, colorful, and poetic.

After restructuring the show to include younger audiences and after presenting the live program for over 150,000 students of all ages, Covid put a temporary stop to all tours. During this time, Soule turned to video. In a series of instructional videos he calls “The Golden Rule Magician” magicians learn how to perform the

original assembly program—or portions of it—for their own presentations.

JR: Isn’t there a magician’s oath that you had to take so you will not reveal the secrets?

SS: Yes, actually we only reveal the magic effects to serious students. Worldwide, magicians agree that the secrets are to be restricted to practicing performers or students, and because it takes study and practice, curiosity seekers are generally not attracted. Keeping the secrets is a self-regulating process. But keep in mind, anyone is allowed to learn magic, and unpacking magic effects always includes educational experiences. People learn a lot by studying the arts, crafts, and sciences associated with magic. And remember, attention is developed by repeating things we love to do. When I was a boy, I practiced magic and loved it. It was so much fun that I developed a positive attitude toward applying my concentrated, focused attention. One can approach the performance of a magic effect with multiple levels of attention. By learning the magic effect with the body, with the feelings, and with the mind, the performer can integrate the many-layered process of presenting these effects with ease and with a sense of wonder.

JR: So now there are two programs, one for individuals learning how to present magic effects with the message of the Golden Rule, and one live presentation, a magic show for school assemblies.

SS: Yes and the show delivers images containing values as the prime focus of the event. Those values, which are possible to reference when looking at or presenting about the Golden Rule, are tools with which young people need

help, practice, and time for pondering. They need the principle of the Golden Rule to help them become better people and have positive relationships in a world in which they can use their capacities for cooperation and synergy. The students pay attention because we offer something within their own power of attention to both defend against the terror of bullying and to make friends in positive ways. Our presentation demonstrates this, and it works for some students to help them later to choose the Golden Rule as a way to move, feel, and think through their interactions with one another in real time.

Many schools that use the Golden Rule Magician assembly also plan curricula and events for the entire school year which are themed around acts of kindness and the Golden Rule.

To make this presentation more available, the Golden Rule Magician says, “Contact local performers. Ask if they can use the Golden Rule Magician series to put on an assembly at their school.”

Performers and any presenters of effects with stories can go to GoldenRuleMagician.com to access the learning series.

Ask performers how long it would take them to create an assembly or classroom event. Some will be able to do it right away, and some will take six months to prepare. Soule predicts that a high-school drama or science teacher can lead a group of students to master the effects and present the assembly for an elementary school within a semester of working collaboratively.

For more information about Steffan Soule and magic and the Golden Rule, please visit GoldenRuleMagician.com or SteffanSoule.com. ♦

A ready-to-assemble magic device!

The Golden Rule Tetraflexagon

Steffan Soule

The Golden Rule Tetraflexagon is a magic device created by Steffan Soule in order to teach the Golden Rule. It has myriad applications including in schools, where Soule and others have used it to combat bullying.

The Tetraflexagon is easy to assemble and features several tricks, or effects. The following two pages in this issue present the two sides of the Tetraflexagon ready to assemble.

Simply cut them out with care, follow the instructions in the videos mentioned below, and presto! the magic of the Tetraflexagon is yours to wield. If you would like additional Tetraflexagon templates, they can be downloaded on our website at parabola.org.

*For more information about the Tetraflexagon, including videos on how to print it, fold it, and use it, please visit <https://steffansoule.com/golden-rule-tetra-flexagon>, or visit the homepage of **Parabola**, where you will find a video made specifically for **Parabola** readers. In addition, on page 63 we have included Steffan Soule's written instructions on how to perform with the Tetraflexagon.*

—The Editors

Rule



Golden



HOW TO USE THE TETRAFLEXAGON

Once you have folded the Golden Rule Tetraflexagon properly, you will have a smile face on one side and a black & white or a golden mystery person on the other side. The smile face represents “you” and the mystery person represents “others.”

Show the smile face to your audience. You are going to talk about splitting your attention to put part of your attention on “you” and part of your attention on “others.”

Fold the left side of the smile face behind and to the right. This means that while you see the mystery person, you fold your left side of the smile face back toward you and to your right. Then you open the left side edge toward you and to the right.

Now the audience sees the smile face split in half, and you see the green and white mystery man.

After you talk about splitting your attention, you turn the Tetraflexagon around to show your audience the green and white mystery person which represents “seeing others in a new way.”

Now rotate the Tetraflexagon one quarter turn to your left and then close the Tetraflexagon toward you at which point, you see the green head on your left and the green shoulders on your right.

You open the Tetraflexagon toward the audience to reveal the four “others.” This means that you open the front edge out toward the audience.

Now you will flip the top down toward you and rotate it to the bottom. To do this, you fold the top toward you and down which folds the Tetraflexagon in half. Open it from the top down toward you and show the numbers on the four “others” have changed.

Fold the Tetraflexagon in half toward you and open it from the front fold, toward your audience, to show the Golden Rule. Turn it one quarter turn to the left as you fold it closed toward you and open it toward the audience again to show the heart.

You have completed the basic moves. Of course, you will need to rehearse these moves over and over to become a Tetraflexagon expert. Once you are ready to show the moves to your friends, it will be time to work on the story that you tell while you perform your moves. The basic story is easy to remember because of the images on the paper. You can add to the story by telling stories from your experience. You can be creative. It’s fun.

At the very end of the moves, you may want to set the Tetraflexagon back to the beginning. To return to the starting point, you fold the heart closed by folding the left and the right toward your audience. The word Golden will be on your left the word Rule will be on your right. Now open the center from the edge closest to you and you will see the four others on the back. Turn the 4 others one quarter turn to your right so that if someone were watching from the front, they would see “Golden Rule” on the front. Now fold the Golden Rule closed toward your audience (by folding the left and the right sides together toward your audience), and then open up the center from the edge closest to you. Do this again, which means that you close by folding the left and the right toward your audience and open from the side closest to you. By doing that two times, you will see the smile face return, and you are ready to begin again. ♦

The Golden Rule

PARABOLA

The Search for Meaning

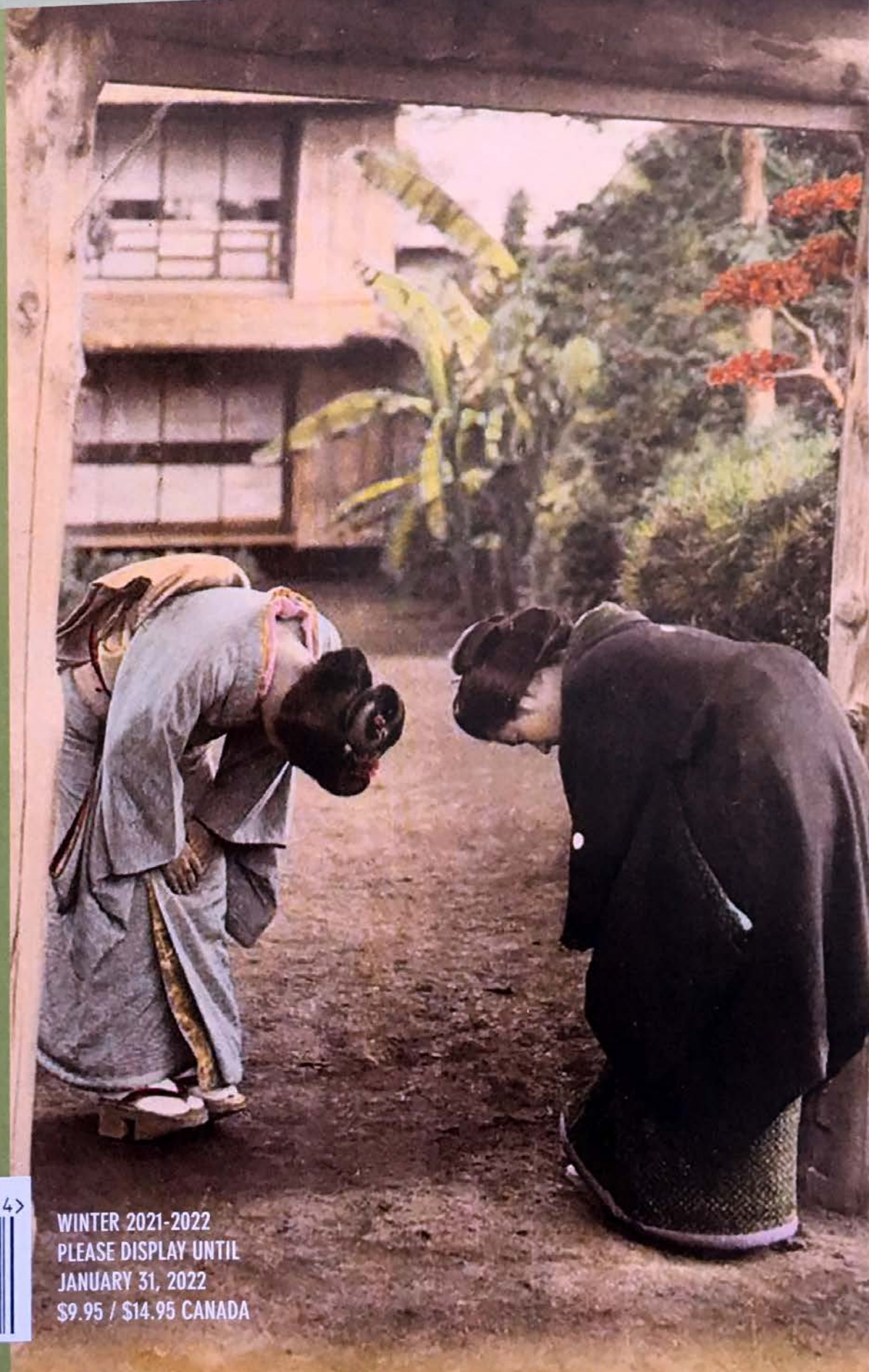
THE PATH
TO PEACE

AWAKENING
CONSCIENCE

POETRY OF
THE SACRED

THE RUNAWAY
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MAGIC
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\$9.95US \$14.95CAN

24>



WINTER 2021-2022
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