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Awed by the presence and insight of the Mahara"l, Emperor Rudolph announced, "I promise you no harm will befall the Jews of Prague." He immediately tore up the papers containing the cruel decree. "You spared my brethren much suffering," the Mahara"l said, "but you have spared yourself even greater pain."

TORAH GEMS

(àě-áě) 'âââ âðâ î ç úà ùáçéâ ø÷áá íòíá í÷éâ

When Bilaam went to curse the Jewish people, he woke up early in the morning *"and saddled his donkey."* Bilaam was a very important personage, and was accompanied by an entourage of Moabite princes and leaders. Why, then, did Bilaam perform such a menial task himself? Rashi explains: *"From this we see that hatred causes disregard of proper conduct. Hashem declared: Wicked one! Avrohom, their father, has already preceded you, as it states, 'And Avrohom arose early in the morning and saddled his donkey.'"* When Avrohom set out to sacrifice his son Yitzchok, he too *"arose early and saddled his donkey."* Avrohom's actions thus "canceled out" Bilaam's evil intent and protected the Jewish people. What was Bilaam trying to accomplish?

Denotes **R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson**
ZT"L, Lubavitcher Rebbe, Bilaam hoped to somehow provoke G-d's anger against His people and damage His love for them. Bilaam was a master of incitement. When he saw that it would be impossible to curse the Jews within the natural order, he attempted to "disregard proper conduct" and circumvent convention. Bilaam figured that after the Jewish people had sinned in the desert, G-d would also "disregard proper conduct" and stop showing them His attribute of loving-kindness. Bilaam's faulty logic was derived from blind hatred. However, *Hashem* said to Bilaam, "*Wicked one! Avrohom, their father, has already preceded you.*" In the merit of *Avrohom Avinu*, the Jewish people are deserving of blessing within or without the natural order. For Avrohom's actions also transcended the "usual" way of doing things.

(âĖ-âĖ) 'ăăă ìàøùéá í ñ÷ àìă á÷òéá ùçď àì éĖ

The *gemara* (גמרא) learns from this *posuk* an unusual lesson: *"Any person who does not practice sorcery (שִׁדְּוָה), is drawn into an inner sanctum that even the Heavenly Angels are not permitted to enter into, as it says, 'Because there is no sorcery in Yaakov, nor witchcraft in Yisroel....'"* We must understand: what is the basis for this tremendous merit, whereby keeping ourselves away from sorcery, we elevate ourselves to a level that is greater even than that of the angels?

Explains **R' Yosef Sorotzkin Shlit"á**, sorcery is a spiritual endeavor and any human being, if properly instructed and versed in the ways of witchcraft, can perform feats of "magic" without much effort. This, however, is in direct contrast to the spiritual ways of our holy prophets, righteous *tzaddikim* and *Torah* scholars. Their towering spiritual capacity is attained through tremendous toil and effort, hours upon hours of intense *Torah* study and *Úâ-éáã* to *Hashem*. There is no shortcut to achieve true *yiras shomayim* - fear of Heaven, and even *Úãã-ä çãø* - *Holy spirit*. The difference between Moshe and the sorcerers of Egypt was that they knew the secret, a "magic trick," that allowed one to throw down his stick and watch it turn into a live snake. Moshe, on the other hand, through his incredible spiritual prowess, accomplished this same thing, with the toil and effort of a *tzaddik*.

Thus, one who shies away from sorcery - the easy way out, through spiritual shortcuts - is greater than even the angels who never need to exert themselves nor expend any spiritual effort. *Hashem* wants to see our toil and effort in *Torah* and then He will draw us in to His inner sanctum.

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מעשה אבות... סימן לבנים

(é-ãë) 'äëä êøá úëøá äðää êéúà÷- éáéää á÷ì í òìá ìà ÷ìá ø îäëä

In the winter of the year 1592, in the court of Emperor Rudolph II, there were some ministers who were envious of the great respect and honor that the famed **Mahara"l M'Prague, R' Yehudah Loewy ZT"L** was enjoying. Although the Emperor had never actually met the Mahara"l, both Jews and non-Jews knew that he was a holy man and they respected him greatly. As a result, the benevolent Emperor was predisposed to deal kindly with the Jews. The courtiers of the Emperor planned to drive the Rabbi out of Prague and send him and all his flock into exile. Knowing that the Emperor would not immediately agree to anything of the sort, they enlisted the help of the Empress, who promised to induce the Emperor to carry out the plan. That evening, the Empress handed papers containing the harsh decree to her husband and demanded that he sign them at once. At first, the Emperor hesitated, but when his wife persisted, he told her that he would "sleep on it," and deal with the papers in the morning.

That night, the Emperor had a strange dream. He was waging war, but was captured and placed in prison. For many years the Emperor remained in prison, living on bread and water, no one taking any interest in him. One day an old Jew passed the prison. The Emperor called out to him. The old man stopped and looked at the prisoner behind the bars. "I am the Emperor," the prisoner exclaimed. "Don't you recognize me?"

"You have changed, Sire," the old man replied. "I swear to you that I am the Emperor Rudolph. Please get me out of here," the prisoner begged desperately.

The old man knocked at the prison wall with his cane, and immediately there appeared a passage in the wall. The Emperor walked out and went with the old man to his home. "You cannot return to the palace in this state," the old man told him, "for no one will recognize you. I will send for a barber and a tailor to groom you and to prepare royal robes for you. In the meantime, lie down and rest." With tears of gratitude rolling down his cheeks, the Emperor asked, "How can I ever thank you?"

The Emperor awoke and felt the hot tears on his cheeks. His thoughts turned to his strange dream. "Only the great Rabbi Loewy, could explain the meaning of my dream," the Emperor thought. "Request Chief Rabbi Loewy for an audience immediately!" the Emperor called to his Royal Chamberlain.

As soon as the Mahara"l entered, the Emperor recognized him as the old Jew he had seen in his dream. "Please tell me about my dream," the Emperor said, challenging the Mahara"l. Instead, the Mahara"l replied, "What do you have under your pillow?" The Emperor now remembered that the Empress had placed the decree under his pillow, to be ready for his signature first thing in the morning.