

“And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I made a mockery of Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem.” (10:2)

Every generation has its despots, evildoers who prey on the weak, the insecure and the unprotected. The Jewish People have had to contend with villains of all stripes: religious demagogues; sociopaths; psychopaths; and felons of all persuasions. Eventually, they all have gone down in infamy, receiving their due punishment, which Hashem ultimately metes out at His discretion. However, the question still gnaws at us: Why are so many evildoers permitted to continue their corruption unabated? While this question can only be answered from a spiritual perspective, the following vignette does shed some light on the matter.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, once had occasion to spend the night at an inn that belonged to an observant Jew. While he was there, *Rav Yisrael* noticed that the innkeeper was actually quite lax in his *mitzvah* observance. When the innkeeper took note of *Rav Yisrael*’s displeasure, he felt the need to vindicate his slipshod observance: “*Rebbe*, there is an individual in our community who openly flaunts his disregard for Torah and *mitzvos*. Yet, nothing happens to him: no punishment; no hint of Divine retribution. Why? It is because he lives with impunity that I have decided, “Why bother?” *Rav Yisrael* did not respond.

Shortly thereafter, the innkeeper’s young daughter returned from a music lesson, proudly displaying the award she had received for her performance and proficiency on the violin. *Rav Yisrael* asked her to play something for him. The girl demurred, instead showing him her award. Her behavior seemed a bit standoffish, so her father explained the reason for his daughter’s reluctance to give a private rendition of her expertise. She had worked hard and this award was proof of her talent. She should not be expected to play the violin for every guest that visits her father’s inn.

Rav Yisrael looked hard and long at the innkeeper: “Do you hear what you just said? Are you paying attention to your own words? Once the award has been granted, it is not necessary to prove one’s self daily every time someone wants to hear her play. You wonder why Hashem does not punish that fellow? Do you think that Hashem is obligated to provide miracles for the benefit of every sinner? Hashem proved Himself in Egypt. Every Jew since the Egyptian exodus is acutely aware of the Almighty’s powers. He received His “award” in Egypt when He clearly defined who was evil and meted out their punishment.”