

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Kaleidoscope: Optical toy producing changing patterns; any complex pattern.

This is how my dog-eared dictionary describes one of the most fascinating gifts I ever received as a child. I would gaze through it entranced and become almost mesmerized at the multitude of haphazard designs I encountered. They say that no two patterns are ever the same.

I got to thinking about kaleidoscopes. I find their ability to use the same bit of crystals to create so many different pictures very similar to how we humans act. There is no exactitude to our behavior; every moment the crystals of our minds shift and create new facets and new degrees of experience. You go along life's pathway and your mind flits about, taking untold diversions from where you think you want it to be. Shifting colors, different shapes it's all there, and you don't understand where it comes from.

In my role as a rav, I have seen so many different shapes of the human condition that I am no longer surprised by anything. People are so complicated that there is never any certainty in terms of human relations. A father can go off in the morning to his Daf Yomi shiur, daven with an early minyan, come home to help get the children get off to cheder, and truly feel an enormous uplift in his spirituality. Then he may well go to his business and find himself knee-deep in some very dubious dealings. A bit later he'll give a large donation to a kollel, and then he'll discuss someone else's private life with all the gusto such nefarious chats can engender.

This is the kaleidoscope of the mind, turning all those crystals into different shapes and different colors.

Who is the real you the warm davener, the crafty businessman or the loose-tongued neighbor? The answer is that we are all of these folk, and at any given moment the crystals can turn to take on yet another shape. It doesn't take much to change our mental landscape. A word, a sight, something heard each has the potential to distort our inner mind's view.

And as quick as we change, so we can change yet again. To me, this is the most instructive of all, and to be fair, I find it all a huge mystery. In my limited experience, I have found that the one certainty in this regard is that there is no certainty.

This doesn't mean that the human mind is so fragile that one must give up hope for its stability. In fact, the battle of our existence is to become the master over our fragile inner self. It's a difficult

challenge, but then again, we have an entire lifetime to work on it. The ability of self-deception only adds to the mystery and sometimes blinds us to who we are.

The Piaseczner Rebbe, zt"l, wrote of this many times. He challenged his readers to listen to the inner conversations that ramble about in their heads. He pointed out that they would be astounded at their own mad thoughts. This kaleidoscopic musing represents the war we wages with those sides of our personality not yet turned toward our Creator.

Yet understanding our natures is not meant to cause us despair. On the contrary, it is intended to give us hope. Knowing that all humans are locked in the same wrestling match gives heart to those who think they are uniquely bad or beyond the pale.

Our kapitel can be understood as speaking of this lifelong conflict. King David cries out, *Until when, Hashem, will You forget me forever? Until when will You hide Your face from me?* We often feel that all our promises to improve are for naught. Each day a person hopes to become a more positive human being, and then each day those internal crystals shift again, and he is no longer the mensch he aspired to be. With each prayer, we beg Hashem for help, yet we seem to be lost and not even noticed. *Until when must I devise plans within my soul to be free of sorrow in my heart by day? Until when will my enemy rise high above me?*

This chapter mentions the words "until when" four times. This may be indicative of the changing patterns of our minds. Each set of "crystals" cries out from its setting for Hashem's help. Even when we are swept up in actions that deep down we know are wrong, we acknowledge that Hashem is with us. Our souls cry out from the depths that are seemingly obscuring our vision of Hashem's will.

This cry is the beginning of our salvation. *Look [at my troubled life] and answer me, Hashem. Brighten my eyes, lest my slumber turn to death.* The worst circumstance is when one is oblivious to his weaknesses. If we're not even aware of where we are in life, we can't plead to Hashem to look at us. This self-delusion is the greatest of slumbers and can only lead to spiritual death. If we are aware that we are indeed vulnerable and capable of such wide fluctuations of desires, then we are on the path to redemption. We can ask Hashem to look at our troubles and bring light to our eyes.

Yes, the mind is a tricky place indeed. Like quicksand, it is full of weaknesses that seem to grab us at any wrong step. This is the tapestry of our existence, and it is there for a purpose. We can choose to give up and allow the facets set by the kaleidoscope within to create the agenda, or we can rage against our own weaknesses and seek Hashem's help.

This kapitel gives us hope and support. First, it allows us to recognize that we are not alone. Everyone wrestles, each within his own situation. Second, by inviting Hashem to look within our hearts, we are actualizing the realization that He is in fact the source of our salvation.

Thus the chapter concludes, *I trust in Your kindness. My heart will exult in Your deliverance.* There will be deliverance, because I have accepted that it is to be found in Hashem. Then *I will sing to Hashem,*

for He has dealt kindly with me."

Yidden, we need never despair. Inner struggles should be seen for what they are a stepping-stone to the soul's refinement. We can overcome our weaknesses and sing to Hashem. This song will tell about all the delusions and faults we have overcome with Hashem's help.

Yes, we may very well feel weary at times. The battles take so much of our energy, and sometimes it seems that our life force is ebbing away. This kapitel reminds us that King David knew a thing or two about such matters, and he has given us his words as eternal support. The song we will sing on emerging will be this "*Song by David*," whose words reach out to envelop us with hope and encouragement.

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