

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

We are living in environmentally scary times. Once upon an age ago, people didn't understand the connection between what they did and what happened in the natural world around them. Even if they did, there was little they could do about it. If you were cold, you lit a fire. If the sun was too hot, you went into the shade. It grew dark outside, so you went to sleep or peered at a page under flickering candlelight. Very basic, very safe! Safe because there was nothing one could change, so you lived with limited expectations.

Then the industrial age started its relentless march forward. In the past 100 years alone, mankind has learned to fly, harvested the power of the atom and developed small hand-held tools that connect us anywhere in the world.

It hasn't been a free ride. Every new innovation has brought new problems. The delicate balance between the many facets that make up the creation we call nature has become out of synch, causing untold complications we are only now realizing. The world's leaders call meetings to tackle these unforeseen circumstances, but the meetings are just as fractious as the environment they seek to save. Just as we have developed incongruence in the natural world, so too those involved in decision-making are at odds with each other.

The only way mankind can save itself from its own selfishness is by realizing that all of nature is a finely woven tapestry made according to our Creator's divine plan. Every time mankind decides to play G-d and forgets who the real Creator is, the results are catastrophic.

One would suppose that with all the brainpower we have harnessed in the last few decades, someone would have figured all this out. The problem is that those involved are too involved. They can't see the wider picture because they are too entwined in its making.

Certainly, one of life's greatest challenges is to be able to see above one's own interests. The inability to do so leads to the frightening predicament in which the world finds itself today. When we lift ourselves above our own ego, we can perceive the Oneness of Hashem and accept that this creation is all His doing.

Historically, such obtuse behavior is nothing new. It's only that today we have the means to wreak havoc, whereas in times past, mankind's ability to cause damage was more limited.

King David speaks of these concerns in this kapitel. He describes the differences between the

worldview of the righteous and that of the egocentric leaders of the materialistic realm.

Joyfully exult in Hashem, O righteous ones! For the upright, praise is fitting. When seeing the glories of the world, the righteous person will feel prompted to sing praises to Hashem. Such praise will be fitting, because it will come from those who truly understand the magnitude of Hashem's gifts.

In our times, there is no lack of G-dly talk from those in positions of power. It sounds good in its place. Two-minute sound bites pitched to the "Holy Squad." But they don't mean it deeply, not where it counts, not in their hearts. They are blinded by their own agenda and feel no compunction about using Hashem's name for their own purposes.

Sing Him a new song. Play well, with jubilation. Every generation has its own particular song of praise to give to Hashem. Each epoch sees the world from its own vantage point and should praise Hashem with the skills He has granted it.

For Hashem's word is straight, and all His deeds are done in faithfulness. Unlike the temporal powers here on earth, Hashem's word is upright, standing on its own, beyond all mankind's pettiness.

He loves righteousness and justice. Hashem's kindness fills the earth. Humans tend to view justice and truth through the tinted lenses of self- admiration. Clear vision, though, comes only from Hashem. Only He, for Whom each human heart is an open book, can measure righteousness and justice. His kindness is far beyond our puny self-interest, and its magnitude can thus fill the whole world.

By the word of Hashem, the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth, all their host. David now makes a strong declaration: "Hashem created all you see above you!" With one word it all came, and it can all be taken away.

He gathers together, like a mound, the waters of the sea. He places the deep waters in treasure houses. The world was created with borders. At first, the waters covered everything. Then Hashem gathered up the waters and created boundaries for the land and the sea. This is a vital lesson for mankind. Initially, Hashem created the world without such borders and then devised them. From this we learn that living without borders is chaos. It leads us to drowning in our own anarchy. Rather, look and find your borders. Know where you should delve and where not to. Then the life- giving waters of knowledge will be stored up in treasure houses, ever ready to give us their worth when needed.

Fear Hashem, all the earth! Be in awe of Him, all inhabitants of the world! The holy Alshich explains that Hashem created the world in such a way that man will never be completely at ease or complacent. There must be some tension, a frisson that humbles him. Therefore, He created forces of nature that can never be controlled and are kept in place only through His will.

For He spoke, and it became. He commanded, and it stood. Hashem annuls the council of nations. He foils the thoughts of peoples. Hashem created something from nothingness. This is beyond human understanding, as is the concept that by His command, He continuously allows for matter to exist. Should Hashem withhold His energy for one moment, all would dissolve. With this realization of

Hashem's enormity, we can understand how all the councils, meetings and thoughts of man mean nothing. There is an old Yiddish saying, "Mench tracht und Gut lacht, man plans and G-d laughs!" We live in a shadow land we think we can control, but even this is Hashem's will.

Hashem's council will stand forever the thoughts of His heart for all generations. The greatest challenge for any man is to totally accept that Hashem's guidance will stand the test of all times and circumstances. It is easy enough to say we believe this, but deep down within our hearts there is a bit of ego that rebels. It often takes the lifelong test of living to overcome this and learn to give over to Hashem our entirety. When we come to this level then we know, really know, that the Torah, Hashem's heart, is for all generations.

From His dwelling place, He supervises all the inhabitants of the earth. There is a Kotzker vort; "Where is G-d? Wherever you let Him in." Hashem seems to be far only to those who really aren't ready to let Him into their reality. Hashem's dwelling place is in our essence. We deny this when our ego obstructs our view.

This entire psalm is saturated with hope. If mankind would only accept what it so deeply wants in its soul the borders drawn by Hashem then we could use all that is positive to the greatest advantage. For us as Yidden, the challenge is obvious; we must work within ourselves to actualize these beliefs on a constant basis. It takes time and work to do this in real terms.

But that's why we are alive.

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