



## THE ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

by Zach Morrow

### Mistaken Perceptions: Changing Sensitivities



I want to open with a story; some way of letting you know how I got to be thinking this certain set of thoughts. I want you to understand how I got here, because I think the best way to understand, at least this concept, is by a slightly embarrassing self-examination, in which the only result is a self-propulsion into the ability of the *neshama* to protect you from assuming such things again.

That said; let me tell you how my dog broke his leg. It was Sunday morning, not more than a few weeks ago, about 9:30 am. I was talking to my pillow, telling it that I would like nothing better than to stay with it all day. This was not to be so. About 5 minutes later I received a call that my dog (who was at the dog-park) had taken flight and landed on his leg; no audible snap had been heard but he seemed to be in pain. I jumped out of bed, dressed, and got in the car with my younger brother and my dad. When we arrived at the location of the injury, we saw 5-6 people crowded around, many of which were saying things like: "you should call an ambulance," or "this doctors` the best."

After we assessed the situation and figured out exactly how to move him, we loaded the dog into the car. There was a fellow there who kept saying "take an ambulance, just call the doggy ambulance, maybe they can put him out with something." He just kept hanging around from the time we got there until we moved him into the car, and left to go to the vet. The last thing he did was give us his business card and told us to call when we knew what was wrong. This struck me, because I had never experienced something like this in Los Angeles. Never had we met such a caring person offer to help, who wanted to know what happened after we left their life.

I have thought much about this - and it has become more prevalent as I ride the bus everyday to work. How much do we take for granted how a person got to the point they are in their life, when their life intersected with yours? When you meet the guy standing next to you in the coffee shop, the *makolet*, or the bus station, do you know how they got to be standing there? We tend to experience people in our own lives, but never peek behind the

curtain as to how they got there. When I got on the bus the other day there was a guy who looked about 60 years old, who had spent *waayyyy* too much time in the gym, used too much body oil, and was way too intrigued with his Iphone. In fact, when I pulled out my phone, he informed me that it was nowhere near as good as his Iphone and that I should trade up. To me this was pretty weird. What shocked me however, was that a woman who looked more like a mouse than Stuart Little leaned over as he was exiting the bus (he was within earshot) and said, "what a freak!" I could just see the entirety of this situation: from my judgment of the Iphone guy, to the judgment of Ms. Little, to the condemnation of her comment. I realized that this person had somehow been lead into a life where he loved the Iphone and it's wonderful applications and texting abilities, and that given a lifetime in his shoes I would have turned out much the same way. Now I get on the bus and understand when the person sitting next to me has a bad day. I could be having that same bad day! Something this guy in the park did in his life led him to be this incredibly nice person, who was genuinely concerned with our dogs` health.

To continue the story: we took the dog to the vet, and sat for hours until they told us that that Charlie had broken his bone in 3 places, dislocated something, and one of the bones was sticking through. My parents were talking with the nurse, when all of a sudden a look of shock appeared on their faces. Apparently the amount of money to fix the dogs` leg is roughly the cost of a year of yeshiva. The other option, as we were told by the nurse, is to cut the leg off. My parents decided to talk to other doctors. They spent the next day trying to find the best doctor who could fix Charlie's leg, and came across a great doctor. He kindly sat with my parents, calmed them down, and helped them understand every facet of the surgery. This was two instances where people had been irrationally kind to us. Maybe especially in *Elul* this kind of thing happens; it was nonetheless new for me in Los Angeles. The guy from the park called multiple times to check on Charlie and make sure he was okay. We get these mistaken perceptions of people, don't understand how they got to the place they did, and therefore in a mistaken attempt to quantify such actions, we sectionalize them as "Weird."

And heeeerrreeeee'sss the Segway: In this week's *parsha* we have the song of *Ha'azinu*, followed shortly thereafter by the death of Moshe on *Har Nevo*. He is told to look at *Cana'an*, and then the reasons why he will not be let into *Eretz Yisrael*. My first thought was: that's nice to tell Moshe to go die on a mountain, after taking 40+ years of his life and having to watch it walk away after all that! This seems like God is kicking Moshe when he is down. Moshes` Magnum Opus is about to complete itself, and he won't even be able to see it, let alone be a part of it. Furthermore, there is no mention of Moshe killing the *Mitzri*. For some reason hitting a rock is cause for not being allowed into *Eretz Yisrael*, but not murder? Something else must be going on here. Rav Kehana once said that 40 is the number of change. It's evident from the story of Noach: after 40 days and 40 nights, a great change had occurred. It's no secret that Moshe was a person of great change, but I think that Moshe himself is supposed to be the example of change that we see in the *Torah*. When someone lives one hundred and twenty years, it stands to reason that they have seen much change in their lifetime. In this day and age that is roughly the equivalent of having seen the Battle of the Yalu River, the largest Naval conflict in the first Sino-Japanese War. (Thank you Wikipedia). I'm sure that if you were alive then, that you would remember it. Moshe seems to have had a number of lifetimes. First he is the Prince of Egypt, then the Leader of the children of Jacob, and finally the Shepherd. Three drastically different

titles and yet someone fills all of them in one lifetime. I think in some way this is our job for the next few weeks. In many ways we have to become very different people, or at least be able to see as these people. We need to understand exactly what our brothers and sisters in this world are going through and realize that they could be us, and we could be them, not to feel sorry for them, but to see that we are very much the same.

We have this image stuck in our heads (or at least I do) of how we are supposed to observe *Rosh Hoshana*. Let's change that a little bit - instead of thinking that we are prostrating ourselves and reconnecting to God, let's realize that *Hashem's Shechina* is in the field, all the pieces are there for us to become complete, all we have to do is drop the differences. Let's not drop what defines us; there is no jigsaw puzzle without the jigsaw, but just what makes one person want to hurt another. I wish all of you an amazing *Rosh Hoshana*. To all of the Orayta boys of this year, you are in the most amazing place for this week, enjoy it, and take advantage of it. To all of last year's Orayta guys (Deh Best Guys!) I miss you and can't wait to learn with you all once again, hopefully in the old city, if not somewhere in Israel....

Shabbat Shazam!

(Kosher Captain Marvel)

Zach Morrow