

.INT: (22:00:20)Tell us.. Give us the short long story of how you became who you are today

MS: (22:00:28)I was born to a fairly typical Brooklyn 1950's Jewish mileu, which was vaguely culturally Jewish, but not religious in any sense of the term, we were Democrats politically, I rooted for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and celebrated Hannukah and Pesach and that was the extent of our jewishness. Um, as...life went on I suspect under the influence of a tremendous interest in Greek mythology which was kicked off by the rather uh, poorly made over dubbed Helen of Troy movie that came out in '54 or '55. Uh, interest in Greek mythology combined with a tremendous interest in Westerns - .the American Western mythos - Davey Crockett, Long Ranger and so forth

I was led to the belief or perhaps hope that life had meaning, that it wasn't just an absurd endeavor and this led (22:01:18) me throughout my childhood to always cast glances in the direction of my Judaism. I'd take out the World Book at night and look up under "J" for the entry of Judaism. Whenever my parents would take me to the eastside to eat out, we'd drive back through Williamsburg, I'd see the Hasidim there and I'd wonder what does this all mean to me? We stayed home from school Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur - in those days it wasn't yet a complete holiday in the New York City school system - and we'd play football all day and I'd always see people going to the synagogue and I wondered well, I'm playing football because I'm Jewish, they're going to the synagogue, what does it all mean? These questions kept gnawing at me and nagging and tugging at my heart and finally when my parents moved from Queens to Rockland County and we lived in very close proximity to the Orthodox community of Munsey, um, I decided together with two of my friends - we were in Kakiyat(sp?) Junior High School, which is the local junior high school here in Rockland County - that we could simply no longer discuss orthodoxy in a experiential vacuum, that we had to actually go out and practice .it

And for a month we decided we were going to become Orthodox Jews. And during that month we would (22:02:47) study the religion, practice it, and also visit communities where Orthodoxy was the norm. As part of that process we visited the New Square community and it must have been, uh, April of oh, April '64 and it was a Sunday afternoon, we had just gotten out of the Conservative hebrew school we were attending and I went along with one of my friends, one of those two who I had entered into this pact with, and we walked to the New Square community which was north of Spring Valley, and we just walked in, we're going to see what ultra Orthodox Hasidic Jews are like. And we're walking down the street and we're terrified because we had this impression that ultra Orthodox Jews - they'll, they'll stone you, they'll attack you - and we're sort of looking around, you know, what's going to happen next. And we get to the synagogue and we open the door and I remember my friend turned to me and he said - we heard noises which to us seemed to be the noise of prayer and he said they're praying let's not go in. Now, this was two o'clock in the afternoon and in retrospect obviously they weren't praying it was the noise of the Kolllel, of the, of the young men's seminary studying, but we didn't know the difference. So we can't go in they're praying and we turn to leave and uh, quite frankly if we had been able to leave at that point, I'd probably not be sitting here in front of you right now, but God works in in very strange and and powerful ways and as we're leaving a Hasidic Jew is coming. He meets us, shakes our hands, "Sholem aleichem boys, how are you? where you from?" and he asks us if we know the movie star Steven Hill. Now this is before Mission Impossible, this is before Steven Hill gets the lead in there on Mission Impossible, so I really didn't know him, uh, I found out later on that he actually had, had was, was a frequent guest star on many of the serials of that time - Dr. Kildare, Ben Casey, Route 66 - he once told me he was killed twice on the Untouchables as a as a bad guy. . "And he says, "come inside the synagogue you can meet Steven Hill

So we walk inside and um there's this man standing in, in a talis - the prayer shawl - wearing tefilin, he's (22:06:07) hunched over a prayerbook and uh, the Hasid who took us in walks over and he says, you know, gestures to him and the fellow turns around, a clean shaven American fellow who'd been praying till 2 in the afternoon, Steven Hill. He greets us and we begin to talk, and we say we're orthodox for a month, we're experimenting with this and a small group of Hasidim gathers around, we'er all talking to each other and at that moment a door to a room on the side of the synagogue opens and this old Rabbi walks out, Steven Hill turns to us very seriously and he says, "That's the Rebbe, he's a very, very holy man." And uh, you have to understand I was thirteen years old at the time in current public school and the

whole room, the whole room becomes hushed and the Rebbe walks out and he walks by, and that was it. And we stayed
.there a while longer and the conversation finished

We came back to public school the next day and the whole class knew of our trip and they're all crowding (22:06:14) around, they're saying, "What happened? what happened in New Square? What went on there in New Square?" And my friend Paul was relating the story and he got to that point where he says ya know the door opened and the Rebbe came out...And one of the girls yells out, she says, "Well what'd he look like? What'd he look like?" And Paul just paused and he said, "He looked like Moses coming down from the mountain." So, um, I think that was basically the way it hit me, it really did. The uh, the force of that moment and uh, afterwards I went back to visit New Square frequently and people there became friendly with me and shortly thereafter, I switched from public school to yeshiva and my goal always was that eventually my yeshiva education would lead me back to New Square, back to that Hasidic community that had so
...captured me. So after several years of attending other types of orthodoxy

...INT: ok lets take a beep here, we got it ok...so we're going back a step in way, but tell me about your

MS:(22:07:26) The uniquely Broklyn Jewish mileu that I grew up in was politically very liberal, my grandfather voted, I believe 4 or 5 times for Norman Thomas for president on the socialist line, we were vaguely Jewish in a cultural sense, I often say that uh, the generation that raised me was the generation that had not yet begun to morn the Holocaust, had long since forgotten to morn on the 9th of Av. But that the climactic apocalyptic Jewish tragedy that was given over to me as a boy was the Bobby Thompson homerun off Ralph Branca in the 1951 third playoff game between the Giants and the Dodgers which defeated the dodgers and in my mind the Dodgers were, the Brooklyn Dodgers were Jewish, were a
.Jewish cultural entity, you see

INT: Now can you just say that again, just say that the 9th of Av is the destruction of the temple, nobody's going to know
.what the 9th of Av is

MS: Do the whole thing again? Gosh, OK. Al right, um..(22:08:35)I would say that the generation that raised me was that Jewish generation which had not yet learned to mourn the Holocaust. Had long since forgotten to mourn on the 9th of Av, which is the anniversary of the Jersalem temple's destruction. But, for them the climactic Jewish tragedy was the Bobby Thompson homerun off Ralph Branca in the '51 playoffs because to us the Brooklyn Dodgers were definately Jewish, the Yankees were somehow republican and Protestant and the Giants were sort of non-descript, certainly not
.Jewish

INT: Great, ok now tell us of the other thing that Menachem wanted about the West Point connection. You can just go
...ahead into that, with your father

MS:(22:09:29)...I would say that during my childhood meaning haunted me and meaning haunted me from various sources. One of the most powerful was the fact that my father took me to every army home football game at West Point in the late '50's. And going to West Point and becoming enchanted by the traditions of honor and patriotism, and self-sacrifice, played out against this backdrop of what was then a very successful football team - this is Pete Dawkins, Bob Anderson, the running backs, Army as a nationally ranked team, you had the band, you had the cannon, and all of that seemed to beckon in the direction of higher things, that there is something more to life then just a,a bougeois pursuit of security, that life has something more, man has a higher calling. And looking back on it I think that was one of the
.things that awakened within me the notion that there might be a god who calls us to these higher things

INT: We have hit that 10 minute mark, oh, we're fine, we're clean, good. Ok, good. So if you want to tell me what the
...next step was and what happened from there

MS:(22:11:01) Well, obviously if you want to pursue orthodoxy you simply must leave public school, public school system, because its antithetical to serious religosity or to orthodox Jewish religiosity. So entered into a year long battle with my parents to leave public school and in 9th grade I entered yeshiva. Uh, the first yeshiva I went to was Yeshiva Rabbi Sanshreifield(?) Hircsh, which is German orthodox. German orthodoxy accepted, to an extent, outside culture

and the outside world and attempted to integrate it into a torah - orthodox framework, but my goal, of course, was all the while to get to the Hasidic yeshiva, and so I spent two years there

My next step was Bes Shraga which is located here in Munsey which is a typical Lithuanian yeshiva the (22:11:45) emphasis upon talmudic study and of course strict orthodoxy but it still didn't have the total Hasidic cultural milieu or experience. I spent a year and a half there and then I decided the time had finally come to go to New Square, to attend school there

Now mind you, the whole time that this is going on I'm visiting New Square, for shabbos, yontif, and so forth (22:12:15) and the community is being extraordinarily nice to me. Basically, they got me into yeshiva, they prepared me to attend yeshiva in terms of the texts I had to study beforehand, they uh, provided for all my religious needs, would buy me food at times if I needed food, anything I needed, they were completely receptive. By that point there was there's receptivity and there's receptivity. In other words, fine we will help you to become a frum Jew, an orthodox Jew, but to take that giant step into our school system, to become one of us - there they hesitated. And in a sense, well they should have. It really is an entirely different world and they were afraid that I just couldn't make that adjustment, I wouldn't be able to fit in. So..they hemmed and hawed and hawed and hemmed and uh, I just was absolutely relentless and finally uh, 19 uh, 6 uh,8 they finally accepted me into the uh, into the school system

INT: Now you were talking about some of the you know like, culturally what's it like to be walking in to this whole ...different kind of, kind of world, I mean ya know

MS:(22:13:33) Right..Right..Well, the spoken language is different, its Yiddish, but more than that...the rhythm of life is A. European, its much more differential, quiet, conduct is much more ritualized, much less open and spontaneous and loud as American conduct is. Now this might not seem like a lot but these are tremendous little aspects of cultural give and take that you've got to sort of relearn, learn how to walk again so to speak, learn when to be quiet, and when to get up, and when not to get up, you know if an older person walks in the room or a father walks in, you know give him your seat, go over to the side, you know, we didn't do that in Queens, so uh, these things were difficult

?INT: Were you wearing pais at the time? were you yarmulke, were you what

MS:(22:14:28)Right, well again, in each one of these steps you sort of heighten the level of Jewish dress, so uh...when I went to New Square I was ready for the next step I just, you know, put on the hat and the pais and the whole thing. But also, the the non-renting nature of the school system we were going to school - including morning prayers - from a quarter to seven in the morning till 10 o'clock at night..throughout the entire year with no vacations whatsoever except for the Passover and Succot holidays, and that's a tremendous adjustment, obviously

?INT: What did your mother think about this

MS:(22:15:05) Well my mother fortunately was uh, a parent who not only mouthed the cliché of if it makes you happy do it, but actually meant it. So um, she was afraid that I was perhaps burning my career bridges behind me by abandoning my formal secular education at a very early age, 'cause I stopped attending um secular classes when I was at Bes Shraga in Munsey and uh in 11th grade, I didn't... beginning of 11th grade I stopped going. So she was afraid of that, but besides that if it made me happy and I felt fulfilled in it she was happy

.INT: uh, uh, ok, lets cut for a second. Uh, yeah

MS:(22:15:49) I think one of the interesting things that took place in going into the New Square community was putting on Hasidic garb which for me was for me a very powerful religious experience. I think that you have to understand here that there is an almost rutinization of religious charisma that takes place if you live in and are brought up in a religious community. Whereas, Hasidic dress which seems so striking to outsiders is to people who are born and bred Hasidim not striking at all, its the way every normal person they know dresses - your dress is strikingly different and strange to them. But for me as an outsider it was a profoundly religious experience and uh, I think to this day

perhaps I still benefit from the fact that Judaism is not something that I was brought up with as a vital force in my life and therefore it still makes tremendous impact upon me in ways that it might not to some that are brought up in it, they say um, that a tremendous amount of uh, National Review's editorials staff in the '50's was made up of ex-communists, .so that it was the passion of the convert perhaps

.INT: Uh, uh

MS:(22:17:04) You know. Uh, you mentioned before that there's a difference -and it is indeed true, there is one, between the theme of individuality, which is so pronounced in America and the communal sense, which you have amongst Hasidim. But, I think this is a difference between the traditional world and the modern world in general, that the traditional world sees man as very, very importantly fulfilling himself as a member of a group. Whereas the modern world sees every individual as sort of a atomistic uh, entity cut off from the past or the future or any larger community that he finds himself in. I think that's a profound difference between a traditional world and uh, and the modern world. They, they say that uh, Flannery O'Connor who is the, the famous uh, Catholic Southern no-novelist was one-once invited to a cocktail party in New York City with the New York literary uh, intellectuals..and she came back home to Georgia and her mother said Flannery what were those people like up in New York, and Flannery said, "they're nice folks mama but they ain't from nowhere". And I think that sort of conjures up the difference between the, the modernist .notion of fulfillment and meaning and the traditional notion of fulfillment and meaning

INT: Well lets talk about that a little more. I mean, what is it about American society that bothered you so much that ?you wanted..and, and why, why don't more people become Hasidic

MS:(22:18:28) Ah, well, you'll get me going here politically and socially if you don't watch it. Um, more people don't become traditionalists because they're not offered that alternative. The, uh, the educational system, the media, the politicians shut it out, there's almost total, uh, mind control that envelopes the average American from the time that he's a very small child, which preaches to him and tells him that, uh, traditional religion, traditional norms of values are silly or evil, so they have no choice. So in answer to your question whether more American Jews can become Hasidim or become orthodox in general or whether more American non-Jews can become traditionalist Catholics or serious Calvinists or Anglicans or fundamentalists, the answer is they can't because being brought up in this educational system .or under the influence of this media, this entertainment industry, these politicians, its almost, almost impossible

?INT: What is it that Hasidim have that other Americans don't have

MS:(22:19:30) Well I'd say not just Hasidim, I'd say anybody pledged to a life of meaning has precisely that - he has a ...sense that his actions are not

INT: Start your sentence again because we didn't hear his question

MS:(22:19:44) Oh, oh, I'm sorry, you're right, I forgot. Ok, um, the average American being cut off from God, country, family, civilization and living merely as individual, uh will find it very difficult to realize lasting meaning. He'll be missing both meaning and a sense of belonging which are two very fundamental human needs - almost as basic as food clothing and shelter, and you see the American society recognizes the food, clothing and shelter, but it doesn't recognize ."what Victor Frankel called "man's quest for meaning

...INT: Yeah, you had brought up an Eric Fromm book that

MS:(22:20:26) Sure, E-Eric Fromm's famous work "To Have or to Be", I think illustrates this notion of the importance of meaning very well - that it is far more soul-consoling, soul-satisfying in the long run to be something than it is to have something. Because by being something that it you, that's intrinsic, that inheres in you, but having something is very outside of you. And, uh, America is, America is simply the symbol of what European man has unfortunately become today, that its a society based upon possessions, fleeting, sensations, shopping, noise, sound, lights, its a, a very sad .existence I think. Certainly uh, can not survive, I don't think

INT: You had said something very nice and if you can, you can make a point of looking at me but you're doing pretty much...about prayer, the - what prayer's all about and you talked about this man you had visited, when, in, in New ...Square, you went to Shabbos with...you were singing Shalom

MS: Right...Right...Right...Right

...INT: What is prayer, what is prayer to a uh, Hasidic Jew? And you said something about prayer being very hard work

...MS: Right...Right...uh, yeah, We're jumping around alot

.INT: Yeah, I know, I'm sorry that's uh...we're out, we're out ok, so if you want to tell us about Hasidism in relation to American, American society. I mean Hasidism came to uh,... ?came from Europe..in..after the war and what, what made it so strong and vital

MS:(22:30:28)...The Hasidim came to America primarily in the '50's at a time when the common wisdom was that you pretty much lost your particularistic cultural attributes after a brief period in America which is what had happened to other Jewish immigrations. And, Hasidim didn't do that, they maintained their old style, Eastern European approach and the fascinating question is why did they succeed, how did they succeed. I think there are two factors here, 1 was the tremendous strength of the Hasidic leaders that came over at that time who said, "Darn it, we are going to recreate our societies here in America, I don't care how fummy it looks, or how bizaar, or how many people laugh at us, or how difficult its going to be in any way, we are going to recreate it right here in America." And I think a second factor was that at that time when the Hasidic communities began to grow they had, so to speak, their baby boom, um, America was .beginning to unravel

You had the late '60's in which the notion of a shared communal faith of Americans was being destroyed by (22:31:36) uh, various poltical forces, primarily of the left. And, therefore Hasidim sort of grew up at this time when America was fragmenting, when there no longer was an American community, when there was simply communities of diverse peoples living in a geographical area called America. America fuctionally ceased to exist as, as a political slash cultural entity .uh, beginning in the, in the late '60's and then going in ever growing proportions afterwards

...INT: Yeah, just make sure, I know, are you glancing at the camera lense? or

...MS: What I do is when I try to find a thought sometimes I look up at the space to grab a thought

INT: As long as its a space but not the...ok

MS:(22:32:33) There is a tension, almost an ironic tension between the fact that on the one hand very insular communities prosper under a pluralist democracy or an incessantly pluralist democracy. Yet on the other hand, in order for them to survive they cannot practice that form of pluralist diversity within their own groups. So that Hasidim have benefited from the unraveling of America - an America which has long since forgotten about uh, its cultural traditions - Memorial Day, July 4th, uh, the night ride of Paul Revere and so forth can tolerate Hasidim far better then an America of lets say 1890 or 1840 or 1920 even, 1950...And, on the other hand, the Hasidic groups themselves do not believe in or .practice these forms of democratic pluralism which they take such advantage of in, in a practical relationship to America

...INT: Now let me just take a little left turn here and, ah, keep it rolling, we're ok

MS:(22:33:46) Democracy, at least the way its understood today is sort of this relativistic notion that we are forever debating questions and all questions are open questions and one can never have final answers. An orthodoxy of any kind can not accept that very relativist notion of truth, and therefore the idea that all questions are forever open and forever to be debated must be rejected by an orthodox community and Hasidim are just such an orthodox community. So you cannot have dissent an a Hasidic community or any uh...serious orthodox community about the basic assumptions of that

.community

Now America has no basic assumptions anymore so that you can have dissent about anything. But in a (22:34:23) religious community or as again - as I said before - America of the 1890's, you cannot have dissent about basic questions.

So, there is no democracy in the sense of a never ending debate, in the sense that the Supreme Court interprets the First Amendment today, that does not exist

This is particularly accentuated in the Hasidic community because of the tremendous authority vested in and (22:34:45) reverence given to the Rebbe - the Hasidic Rebbe, who is the final source of authority in the community. Not in quite the purest sense that an outsider might think there are, there is other constituencies that do have certain influences and power that jockey within the, uh, within the Rebbe's uh, uh, ultimate sphere of influence. But he is in many ways very .very powerful

?INT: Now tell me about your own personal connections to...did you have a personal connection to the Rebbe

MS:(22:35:25) The previous Squarer Rebbe, his whole person, left a profound impression upon me, his, uh, love for every person who came his way, the combination of an exalted extra-worldly saintliness together with a sense of empathy for the simplest concerns of every person that he encountered was breathtaking - breathtaking. He was this, this saint who when he would pray or study, or whatever you got a sense that he was elsewhere and yet he could turn around the next minute and speak to somebody whose business has, had failed or whose wife couldn't conceive or any number of problems and and was willing to bring himself down to the lowest of levels to communicate with any human being. So that to me was basically what I had been looking for. Uh, uh, saintliness combined with empathy and I found .that in the previous Squarer Rebbe

?INT: Are you part of a specific community now or do you want to get into that

...MS: Uh...alright

?INT: I mean the community because...that a community gets broken up. What happens when a Rebbe dies

MS:(22:36:43) Right, Right...ok...When a Hasidic Rebbe passes away, uh, by in large the Hasidim will turn to a son or some other relative and accept him as the Rebbe. Usually there is some falling off at that point and not everyone of the previous generation can accept the new Rebbe and I think that's happened to many of the American Hasidic groups today, but that's what happened in Europe today. The person who sat with the 70 year old venerated, aged saint is going to find it difficult to accept his 30, 35 year old son as, as his successor. But what happened in the Hasidic communities in America is that that succession has taken place and although there are some dissidents, the communities have all gone .on and continue to function

...INT: Is European Hasidim, was European Hasidim very different from American Hasidim?...Hasidism

MS:(22:37:45) There are several ways that the Hasidic community is different today in America then it was in Europe. Um, I just throw out a haphazard list, uh, 1. the relative affluence - and that might seem funny because the Hasidic communities are, by middle class American standards impoverished, but by Eastern European shtetl standards they're very well-to-do and therefore there's an abundance of material goods that uh, makes life smoother and easier in a physical sense. A fact that is much to be moaned in a lot of Hasidic circles. In other words, the older Hasidim will say, "oh in Europe we didn't have this, we didn't have that, we didn't have the other thing, now you've got all that, its drawing you away from a serious pursuit of study or prayer, or whatever." So many physical things, I mean just, you know, A poverty level America has an abundance of food and drink and comfort that in Europe was only dreamed of, so that has, .had a certain effect um

I would say a very interesting thing is that we probably today have the largest Hasidic families of all time (22:38:48) because of modern medicine, and that in Europe a large number of children and wives were dying either in childbirth or in diseases, in plagues, epi-epidemics. Today every Hasidic family is having 10, 12, 13, 14 kids, so you are having the

largest size Hasidic families of, of all times, which creates a tremendous economic problem for the community, now granted I said before, there is a comfort, such that has never been experienced. Yet on the other hand it is increasingly difficult for Hasidic communities, given the fact that they refuse to uh, have any form of secularized education to be able to find um, economic means to support these growing families, and it, it drags them into the whole government welfare .system in order to survive

?INT: What do you do to make money

MS:(22:40:01) You mean personally? Uh, I'm a, I'm a rebbe, what's known as a magidshir, a sayer of a lecture in .Yeshiva University High School for Boys, I teach Talmud there

...?INT: And is this Hasidic

MS:(22:40:26) Oh no, no, no. This uh, this school is what is known as a modern orthodox school. Which means that ...um

...INT: I'm a teacher that

.MS: You're right, you're right

...INT: Ok, go on, go on, I teach at...high school

MS:(22:40:26) Personally I teach in a modern orthodox high school. I'm a Talmud instructor there. The modern orthodox are vastly different then the Hasidim in that they live culturally in America, which means popular culture, in terms of the more sophisticated among them it means high culture, but its a vastly different uh, set of circumstances then .among Hasidim where any form of alien gentile influences are shunned so its a whole different situation

?INT: What do you think of that

?MS: You want to get my personal philosophy on that

INT: Yeah

...MS: Well that's

.INT: We...Ok so were talking about teaching at Yeshiva University

MS:(22:41:31) I think there are many things about Hasidic doctrine that help me as a yeshiva teacher on a daily basis. The Hasidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov emphasized the traditional Jewish teaching that every Jewish soul possesses value in the eyes of god. And that the relationship with god is fundamentally a joyous one, a fulfilling one. So when I go into the classroom every day and confront my students whose world view, whose very soul is shaped by America I carry with me very much this notion that every one of them is unique, every one of them is a person and I try as best I can to encourage them to enter into a personal relationship with god, and I think I would become disheartened if it wouldn't be for the tremendous sustenance that Hasidic books and Rebbes and stories and teachings gives me. I don't think I'd have the strength to confront the victims of shopping mall America without that fortification - spiritual .fortification beforehand

?INT: How does hockey work into all this

MS:(22:42:58) After I'd been a Yeshiva Rebbe for three years I was approached by a group of students to become a Yeshiva hockey league coach, and when I was a boy football and hockey were my two favorite sports and uh, I figured it would be a tremendous opportunity to deal with them in a pleasant, fulfilling, happy way and uh, also I think to fulfill my

own personal yearnings to create something in the realm of sports that I felt was part of me, so I happily accepted that
.uh, job and I've been doing it on and off ever since

...INT: Is there some sort of, ya know, people think of Hasidim as being not physical, and not ya know no sports

...MS: Right

INT: ..and its a different world. Is there something spiritual about playing hockey or is this something contrary to being
...a good Jew, or

MS:(22:43:59) Right. Among Hasidim there are no physical outlets in terms of organized sports or organized exercise that's certain true - they would view that as goyish, gentile things, but for myself I've always tried to adapt the teachings of the Hasidic movement to my own personal soul, personal inter-being, I felt that I couldn't do violence to that, that although I had to be pledged to god and loyal to his Torah and I had to be deriving spiritual sustenance from Hasidic doctrine, yet on the other hand I was not going to be completely subservient to it

...INT: Um

MS:(22:45:00) The key to any real relationship to Judaism is the study of Torah and therefore my primary goal in the classroom is to make Torah study a meaningful happy experience, joyous experience for the boys that I'm dealing with. So the Talmud, which is the basic component part of the Yeshiva curriculum, is what I'm trying to get them to to enjoy, to become, to have as we say in Yiddish - a geshmacht, gesnacht-geshmacht means almost a palpable sense of, of, of joy, you can almost taste it - its tasty - to make the Talmud tasty. And uh, Jews believe that uh, if Torah study is gone about .in a serious way, if its approached, approached with a sense of geshmacht that that can bring a person closer to god

?INT: And what about prayer? What role does prayer play

MS:(22:45:52) Well prayer is much more direct. There you're actually talking to god, and uh, certainly the Hasidic doctrine which is that god has a personal relationship to every individual Jew emphasizes prayer tremendously. So both my own life, hopefully, and also in relation to my students I'm trying to get them to approach prayer seriously, yet joyously. I think that Hasidism teaches that seriousness, reverence is no contradiction with joy. Serve god in...in joy tremble in song, that one can tremble in song, that's from the psalms, and that Hasidism emphasizes that, that we can stand in awe before god and yet be tremendously happy in his presence. So that tears of joy - fear of joy that uh, we .experience, I suppose, sometimes in our life and we try to get a little bit of that in prayer

?INT: You were talking about prayer being work. What did you mean by that or could you rephrase that

MS:(22:46:53) Prayer is work. It requires a disciplining of our sensibilities, it requires a shutting out of extraneous .thoughts and its something that's very, very, very difficult

?...INT: Do you sometime get to where you want to go with prayer? Or do you

MS:(chuckle)(22:47:07) Prayer is very hit and miss. There are going to be days when we will be performing the ritual of prayer, which in itself is very acceptable to god, and what he really wants from us is for us to perform the ritual of prayer. And there are days when we will go beyond ritual, and actually make conscious, conscious contact with him, .but that's up to you

INT: Can you, are there any memories you have of oh this was a moment when I really felt connected or this was a ?turning point

?MS: You mean in prayer or in life in general

INT: Yeah, prayer or in life in general if its connected to...vagueness(?) of the Hasidic concept...or if there's some
...moment

MS: mhm, mhm, I think any Husid or any religious Jew can point to certain peak moments in his religious life that he's
...always drawing sustenance from

...INT: I'm sorry, go ahead, start again

MS:(22:48:07) I think that any Husid or any religious Jew has certain peak moments in his religious life that he's
constantly drawing religious sustenance from whether it be a particularly complex talmudic passage which inspired him,
whether it be a moment of prayer, whether it be song on the shabbos or the yontif, whether it be a holiday - Passover,
Succos, Purim, any one of the Jewish holidays - that they make an impact on you in the sense you say (snap) that's it,
that's it this is, this is it, I've touched it and even though weeks and days can go by, afterwards when you might be in
what the Hasidic works call, "small mindedness", and, and the tedium of life overwhelms you, you know that you touched
it, you, you apprehended it for a brief moment what Rudolph Otto calls the "idea of the holy", and from that you can
.derive enough inspiration and meaning to go on

..INT: And you have those, I mean is there a specific time or moment that occurs to you, uh..uh

MS:(22:49:13)(takes his hat off his head and puts it back on) I, I could give you many, I mean I don't uh... For myself I
think that shabbos and yontif generally, if I put the proper effort into it do deliver religious, uh, religious exultation so to
speak. And I think back in particular to shabbos and yontif spent with the previous Squarer Rebbe, or to certain shabbos
and yontif today as well, in which um, whether it be sitting at the Seder on Pesach night or just coming out of the mikvah
.friday afternoon, attending services friday night in which um, god is in heaven and all is well with the world

?INT: It doesn't happen to many of us, ya know...how do you try to give that sense - that glimpse to your students

MS:(22:50:14) Uh, alright...I'll very often say to my students that uh, although they may find it hard to believe that would
I be given the choice of being the coolest athlete on the, in the most popular coed school on the yeshiva circuit on the one
hand, and being able to spend uh, a shabbos in, in Square together with the Rebbe in a serious Hasidic atmosphere I
would take the latter and uh, I think that uh, that's hard for them to understand because uh, their spiritual antenna have
been cut by modernity, so basically I'm trying to repair that antenna apparatus so that they can uh feel what it means and
.understand what it means to live a life of meaning

...?INT: Let me take a sharp left turn here. Are Hasidim American?, Good Americans? Are they

MS: Ok I have to start with a whole sentence here(22:51:51)...I think that the question of whether Hasidim are good
Americans is a tantalizing question, but I think its somewhat irrelevant to an era in which most Americans are not good
Americans. I don't think that the notion of patriotism as it was understood up to, lets say, some point in the '50's exists
today, um except in, in very uh small numbers in America. The old, ya know, General MacArthur, uh, Senator
McCarthy, uh patriotism is long since dead um duty on a country would be uh laughed at by the vast majority of
Americans today - especially young Americans, in terms of being part of a European cultural continuum which partakes
of certain, uh values and norms and certain cultural and racial consciousness and identity has long since been destroyed
here. So, no I don't think that Hasidim are are patriots in the traditional sense of the term, but then I don't think that
.Americans are by in large today anymore

INT: I think we're out of film, right on this roll...ok

...MS: I leaned back in between, that was the problem

INT: ...ok

...

MS:(23:00:18) The Talmud teaches that prayer is work of the heart a person has to work at praying well by trying to eliminate extraneous thoughts and also to awaken his own passionate attachment to the words and through them to god this is a very difficult task, and both as an individual and also with my students uh I try to give over this skill, of course .its very hard

...INT: Um, ok, uh tell me uh we're changing the subject

MS: Yeah, sure

?INT: What do Hasidim have to offer to the general culture at large or people in general

...MS:...Hasidic communities are very insular communities therefore they are not consc

...INT: I'm sorry

MS: yes

INT: I'm just bothered by the uh, ok good

..MS: Hasidic communities are

INT: Start again, sorry

MS:(23:01:17) Hasidic communities are insular communities and therefore they have little or no conscious interest in American society at large, but I think that American society at large can profit by looking at Hasidic communities and seeing what its like to have functioning communities rooted in faith, with families, with a sense of purpose and meaning, decency, orderliness, civility, modesty, and so on, so forth. So I think that for those Americans who are interested in so called traditional values Hasidic communities can be very very instructive and I think that for all Americans, those that are not in touch with traditional values they can perhaps offer a hint of what a world based upon traditional values would be like, um

again for those Americans that are already pledged to traditional values I think that hasidim offer a model of ...(23:02:12) cultural secessionism which would be particularly helpful. For anybody from traditionalist Catholics, serious Calvinists, uh Fundamentalists and so forth who um are trying to be pledged to a traditional world view in contemporary America, and you really can't do that until you have in the words of a southern friend of mine, "abdured the realm". You must first abdure the realm and I think that the Hasidim have abdured the realm effectively now obviously the non-jew abduring would be somewhat different, but I think any person who is serious about god or even serious about western civilization must abdure entertainment, education, politicians as they currently exist in America and realize they are not of us, they are something just so utterly and totally different uh, I think that Hasidim could teach religious Americans for example that uh there's no reason to get upset about Clinton because he's not President of anybody in America who takes .God seriously

INT: Let me change, uh let me ask you ok so tell me about your own experience, after you were in yeshiva or whatever, ?when did you get married or how did that come about

MS:(23:03:40)...I was married in the early '70's. Um, introduced to my wife through a third party, not in quite the limited sense that normally takes place in Hasidic society where its sort of a brief encounter or two at most. But, there was .more extensive uh, meeting before marriage in my case

...INT: Was your wife from a

MS: No, no she wasn't

...INT: Aha, now tell me what - a little about the role of women in Hasidic

MS:(23:04:12) The Hasidic world is hierarchal defferential, which means that there are clearly assigned roles for all peoples in it, there are adults, there are children; there are men, there are women; there are rabbis' there are laymen, and people have roles. And there is none of this contemporary yearning - this contemporary agony over being in role and really wanting to be someone else. You don't have children that want to be adults or women that want to be men or men that want to be women so that a...its a traditional society in that sense. Uh, as I would say as I think we said before very similar I think to traditional non-Jewish societies where roles are clearly defined. And there is a hierarchy of these roles clearly the runners of the community in, in the public sense clearly are men, whereas women are involved with the home, .the raising of children and creating a spiritual and familial atmosphere in the home

?INT: Are, are Hasidic women missing, missing out on opportunities, that are simply not open to them

MS:(23:05:14) There's no doubt that Hasidic are um, discouraged when it comes to pursuing public careers, there's no question about that, the view would be that public career, or even any sort of public career would be a contradiction with the role of a traditional mother rearing a large family, there's no question about that and that uh, they would see what's .happened in America in terms of women as a terrible thing

?INT: Are Hasidic women happy or unhappy or happier then others

MS:(23:05:43) I, I think that by in large Hasidic women are happy with the situation that they find themselves in, but that there is a sort of small seepage in terms of the uh, anger and resentment of sort of the uh, the Donahue Show type of women and um, unfortunately that uh, has come into a small extent, a mere extent that anger, that why can't we do this, why can't we do that, you do it, why can't we do it, a small hint of that in certain areas the women have accepted the joys .of hierarchy

?INT: How do you feel about that

MS:(23:06:21) I, myself personally feel that uh, feminism is a horrible thing that its uh, its divisive, its destructive of the uh, essence of wo-womanhood and uh, personally I think that uh, feminism is only taken seriously amongst uh, white europeans in the past twenty years of their utter decedance and once the white world dies this silliness of feminism will die with it and its not taken seriously amongst Arabs or Blacks or Hipanics or Asians and uh...its another form of decedance that as the white man performs auto-demolition on his religions, his, his armies, his schools, his parents, its another way of sort of destroying a civilization, and it it'll just, just be future, future uh historians will just look upon this .as another frenzy of the suicidal white men

.INT: You're gonna make a lot of enemies with that

.MS: Oh, I don't care

.INT: laughs, um ok your own views on Hasidism over the ... of Lubavitch

MS:(23:07:28) I think normative right wing Hasidim always viewed Lubavitch as a mixed blessing. That although on the one hand they uh brought Jews into Judaism so to speak, on the other hand they use methods which right wing Hasidim would view as very questionable. Uh, going out to coed environments and uh speaking to anybody, that was viewed as a dangerous thing...but on the other hand that was balanced against their bringing Jews in. Today, in the past uh, two or three years in which Lubavitch has been completely swept up by this messianic fervor, I think that that position has become much much more critical and that it has no longer become we can tolerate their excesses because of the good they do today the position is pretty much that they've gone, they've gone cookoo, I think and uh, its just strange and

terrible and uh god should protect us, protect them primarily from the effects of this and uh protect the rest of us from
.being dragged along with them

?INT: Now is that your perspective as well

MS:(23:08:43) Personally I like to always to keep my view of reality heavily nuanced and admit of multiple truths and strengths and weaknesses and I dont think you can discount all that Lubavitch has done and I think that their messianic fervor at least has reminded us, at least, that there is a concept of the messiah and belief in him and if they have gone somewhat overboard in the past few years I think that still must be viewed against the backdrop of uh a lot of wonderful
.things they've done

INT: Ok, now if you were to pick out a few Hasidic concepts, the particulars of what in Hasidism is really most important to you, what would those things be

MS:(23:09:29) mhm, Those Hasidic concepts that've most impacted upon me , I'd say would be a sense of humility, that you're no big deal, don't take yourself all that seriously, that uh you owe respect and uh, decency towards all men, get down off your high horse, humility. Uh, a sense that on the other hand even though we must be humble, that we are very valued by god and that he loves us and cares for us more than our wildest dreams and uh we have to enter into a personal relationship with him. I would also add the deep seeded faith and trust in god which is a very important Hasidic teaching to believe in him even in times that it seems he's not there, to believe in him in the darkest personal times - communal times, to know that he is there, everywhere, always, for us despite indications to the contrary perhaps

I think that uh, the sense of being happy with one's lot, that it doesn't matter whether we have a lot of money or(23:10:30) possessions, anything material about our existence doesn't matter all that much as long as we have him and a sense of meaning and we know that in the long run we're gonna be united with him and with our loved ones, so as long as we're here in this world we try to serve as best we can with a smile on our lips and a song im our throat and um let the chips of
...life fall where they may because they're really not all that relevant, um I think the um

INT: Get your framing, ok good

MS:(23:11:20) I think one of the problems you'll encounter in your research is that particularly the pious scholarly elite of the Hasidic community is not going to want to give the time of day, so that you're going to be dealing with people that tend to be more active in terms of the outside world and they're not going to be sort of that hard core person, first of all he's going to be almost all Yiddish speaking, that person, he won't be able to, he's going to view this whole enterprise as frivolous and that's a shame because the really pious, the really pious Husid the, the humble servant of god is not going to
.sit down and do an interview with you so I think that's going to be uh..uh.. something missing in, in your final research

...MS: And women

INT:(23:12:05) In addition, Hasidic women will probably be, due to the teachings of modesty, uh, ah.. humility..not that willing to open up inh many ways, particularly those kind of women that would serve as the best examples, partularly the
.ideal types that would illustrate what we're talking about are gonna be those that are not going to want to talk to you

..INT: Now tell me..what...I know..ok

MS:(23:12:42) What do Hasidim gain by being Hasidim, well primarily they get the gift of being believing and observant Jews, which is the greatest gift that any, any Jew can possibly have, a sense of serving god and fulfilling his will in this world, and the conselations and joys that that brings a person. What do they give up? Well I think that they
.uh..give up a a sense of...the world as a possible source of meaning

...INT: You spoke about going to Saturday afternoon games, that's something you had to give up

?MS: What is that thing crashing like that

?INT: Sorry, what

MS: What is that sound?...(23:13:40)What I personally gave up? Well for one I gave up college football which is played on Saturday, I used to love college football, Army games and so forth, uh I gave up soft ice cream because there wasn't any kosher soft ice cream at that time when I became orthodox, I gave away all my Beach Boys records, but uh in the .long run I think it was all worth it

INT: Tell me something about Yiddish as the predominant language, we didn't really discuss it and it seems like a very .important factor

MS:(23:14:11) Yes, yes, the Hasidim speak Yiddish uh, this has two primary effects, one it serves as a cultural barrier and enables them to sort of live in their own world within a larger world because they speak a different language, and secondly any language carries within it ways of apprehending the world, so when you speak a language you are viewing the world in a certain way. When you speak Yiddish you look at the world differently then when you speak English, its a..language of much more heavily textured sense of the complexities and burdens of existence than English. English is a much more straight forward, analytical language and say Yiddish is a much more uh lyrical, tragic, comic language, and it influences .the people that speak it

INT: Is that why the Hasidim maintain it...well, you've said it, you've said it. I don't personally have any more .questions, ok

MS:(23:15:22) I think the fundamental difference between my own upbringing and the upbringing that I tried to give my children was that my own upbringing was completely inspired by sort of a..Dr. Spock, Summerhill notion of love and encourage and let live. ..Whereas..if you do believe that certain things are true and certain things are right and wrong, you can't have that ultra-Summerhillian approach. And uh, that I'd say is the primary difference between the way I was raised, that I tried in terms of my own children to make them happy and encourage them and be happy with them, but on the other hand there had to be certain limitations imposed which my mother didn't impose, my father did not impose upon me because I believed that certain things were true and certain things were false, certain things were right and .certain things were wrong and that was not clear in my own upbringing

?INT: Did your wife grow up in the same kind of family that you did

.MS:(23:16:32) No, it was an orthodox family

...INT: Ok, is there anything else you'd like to add? Oh