

Jewish Counterculture Oral History Project

MICHAEL PALEY

Interviewed by Jayne K. Guberman

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**A Project of the Jewish Studies Program
at the University of Pennsylvania**

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Jayne Guberman (JG): My name is Jayne Guberman, and today is Tuesday, February 14, 2017. And I'm here with Michael Paley at his home in New York City. We're going to record an interview for the Jewish Counterculture Oral History Project. Michael do I have your permission to record this interview?

Michael Paley (MP): Indeed.

JG: As you know, today we're going to explore your experiences in the late sixties and early seventies, and particularly your experience in connection with Havurat Shalom and also the impact the *havurah* has had on your own life and on the Jewish world and beyond. I'd like to start by talking about your personal and family background, and to flesh out a bit who you were at the time that you got involved with the *havurah*. Let's begin with your family, when you were growing up. So you were born in 1952, in Boston?

MP: In Brookline. Chestnut Hill, in fact.

JG: Chestnut Hill? You were born in a hospital?

MP: I was born at the Children's Hospital, and then right back to Chestnut Hill. (00:01:01) Nantasket, actually.

JG: So tell us a little bit about your family, about your parents and your family when you were growing up.

MP: I had by all accounts a wonderful, supportive and cultured family growing up. We lived on a beautiful, leafy, suburban street, and all of the kids on the street — many of them I still know — turned out to be extremely high achieving people.

JG: In Chestnut Hill?

MP: In Chestnut Hill. I went to the Baker School. It was, I think — I don't know the real numbers — it felt ninety-eight-percent Jewish. Only Martha O'Brien and Timothy Stuart were the non-Jews in my entire three separate grades, baby-boomer, you know, fifties class. Of course, nothing Jewish about going to the Baker School, except only Jews. I went — we belonged to Mishkan Tefila, Temple Mishkan Tefila. (00:02:01)

JG: Tell me about your parents first, though.

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MP: My parents were from Lowell. His parents were immigrants. He had a sparkle in his eye, and whenever he came in the room, everything felt better. His whole life, he was an incredible Jewish activist. He was not learned, he used to make fun of me studying, but he was a committed member of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, he was on committees. There was no place too far for him to go to make a little fundraising speech. There was no crowd too small for him to walk through the snow —

JG: On behalf of CJP?

MP: On behalf of CJP, and on behalf of Jewish communities. It was the fifties. And there was a lot to get done in the post-Holocaust years, and he was very much involved with that.

JG: Was he involved with Zionist activism?

MP: In 1956, he went to Israel. I was four years old, (00:03:01) but I remember. And he went with a guy named Herb Friedman, who would later play a role in my life. But from that time, he was part of what was going to become the first Young Leadership Cabinet, and they went to go meet Ben Gurion, who was going to swim on the beach. And he took a 16mm film of it, which we saw hundreds of times — of Ben Gurion. And at a certain moment, Ben Gurion stands on his head, which I later found out was part of the Feldenkrais method. And so my father was smitten by Israel in the middle fifties when Israel was just nothing, you know, it was just struggling —

JG: But symbolically incredibly important.

MP: Very important. And then he never really engaged himself in shul again. Because — I once asked him, I said, "I thought you'd be the president of synagogue." He said, "No, no, (00:04:00) one meeting with Ben Gurion is worth like thousands of times of going to shul." It was so exciting to him. He was not just a lifelong Zionist, but an incredible supporter of fundraiser, cultivator of Israel. I think he went to Israel seventy times in his life. My brother moved there, so his grandchildren are there, but even before my brother moved there, he was a real traveler. J.D.C. Board [Joint Distribution Committee], he was the president of New England HIAS, he was a real — community engaged Jewish leader.

JG: What about your mother, though?

MP: So my mother was a bird watcher, garden club, United Way — nothing Jewish. Nothing Jewish, really. She became head of the young women's division at CJP, and she even started a Jewish education program, and at the end of the life she took the Me-ah

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program in Boston. And she called me once, and she said, "You know Michael, Judaism, it's unusually interesting." (00:05:00) Which I thought was — I said, "Oh yes." And she said, "By the way, a lot of the books we read in class were written by your friends." And I said, "Oh, thank you, that's right, I knew that."

JG: Say what the Me-ah program is.

MP: The Me-ah program is — I think it's based on a hundred hours of Jewish education. It's modeled after Wexner Heritage Foundation, which I worked for for some time. It was Jewish education classes, in her case at the Hebrew College, with a raft of very fine teachers.

JG: For adults?

MP: For adults. She was in her seventies, and it was the first time that she'd ever studied Judaism, except for the activist parts. But she was on the JDC board also, on the board really — being mentored by these people. She traveled around the world to go to JDC meetings. Very active, but very anti-religious. My mother was anti-religious. My mother's great-great-grandfather came to America in 1830, moved to Cincinnati (00:06:03) from Alsace-Lorraine, near Strasbourg. They were anti-religious then, they were anti-religious at the very end of her life. My grandmother, my mother's mother, whom I was not so close to but was very engaged with — unlike my grandfather, who was Lithuanian — used to tell me how disappointingly ethnic I looked. "Michael, you look so Jewish. I mean, why, what's with the Jewish? This is America. We can get rid of the Jewish." My grandmother was really an assimilationist in some kind of serious way. I want to tell you, she was part of the Reform movement in Cincinnati, but she wasn't really. She was an assimilated American Jew who, all of a sudden, had gotten sucked into this large clan.

JG: So what was the Jewish environment like in your home when you were growing up?

MP: So, my father said kiddush on Friday nights, (00:07:00) but even as I awoke as a Jew, eight or nine years old, so quite early. I started to walk to synagogue sometimes myself when I was nine or ten or eleven years old. They wouldn't go with me. It was just a rapid, Torah-less, Jewish suburban environment — which produced a fantastic number of highly engaged, highly literate, and highly active Jewish leaders in the twenty-first century. Go figure. It's hard to understand. Really hard to understand. My friend growing up, my closest friend growing up, was a guy called John Shapiro. And John Shapiro was the WASPiest kid we'd ever met. We didn't even know he was Jewish. Shapiro, it should

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have been a tip-off, but really, he went to Ohabei Shalom in Brookline, Reform. (00:08:00) Reform was like, not even Temple Israel. It was totally off the —

JG: High Reform?

MP: I went to his bar mitzvah, I didn't recognize it as a bar mitzvah, or as a service. I just had never seen anything like it. So, you know — and yet, John Shapiro became the president of UJF Federation of New York, and now he's the president of the American Jewish Committee. The late president. So how did that happen? I don't know. Steven Pearlstein, he never went to shul or anything else like that. They were, I don't know, they owned Louis Boston. They were — their Jewish identity was the clothing business. And yet he won the Pulitzer prize and he writes on Israel, and he's highly literate. I don't know, Joey Banner, up the street, a little runty kid, he became the president of the Philadelphia Eagles and the Cleveland Browns, and now he's like a big wheel in the Jewish Federation. I don't know, it was a kind of a (00:09:01) totally Jewish environment —

JG: But devoid of religion.

MP: Devoid of religion. More than devoid of religion. Anti-religion. Religion was — it was the Jewish identity that we rejected. And my mother was certainly part of that. The more religious I became, the more she feared I would be lost, right? To her, and maybe permanently. It was a cult. My mother always thought of Judaism as a cult, and it was coming to get me. I mean, even benign Jewish life.

JG: You mentioned that your family belonged to Temple Mishkan Tefila, which was the oldest Conservative synagogue in New England.

MP: That's right.

JG: What are your early memories of *tefilah* and your involvement there as a child?

MP: My father was on the (00:10:01) building committee. That was the history of his family —

JG: The building, when they were moving to Chestnut Hill?

MP: That's right. He was one of the instigators of moving from Seaver Street in Roxbury to Chestnut Hill. My father came from a long line of people who were either treasurers in the Jewish community or on the building committee. So they could build

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synagogues so they would then not go to them. My grandfather, his father, who was an immigrant but lived in Lowell, had built the synagogue in Lowell but then didn't go to it — thought it was silly; we're in America, we don't have to go to shul anymore. I think my father liked going to shul when he went. When my grandfather suddenly died when I was eight years old, my father went to shul every morning. And I would go with him. He loved to lead the *davening*. He had a beautiful bass voice. And things like that. But as soon as my grandfather — saying kaddish was done, he was done. I think my mother resented that he did (00:11:02) that, you know. In the morning, my father would get up early and go to shul and sometimes take me. But she was left with the other kids, and, you know — I think she just resented it. My mother often didn't go to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur.

JG: What was it like for you, going to shul with your father and saying kaddish?

MP: Oh, I loved it, I loved it. I love shul. I always loved shul. I used to walk from our house through the back way, near the Brookline incinerator. It was a really beautiful, romantic walk for a ten-year-old in the fifties, now early sixties. And I would go to Junior Congregation, and I loved the whole thing. I liked the singing, I liked the girls, I liked the chopped liver. I liked everything about it really — that's the fact. And my parents just fought me about that. And then the rabbi, Rabbi Kazis, would drive me back home, at the end of shul. I would walk there, but he would drive me back home.

JG: At the end of Shabbat, you mean?

MP: No, the end of the service. During Shabbat. (00:12:00)

JG: He would drive you back home?

MP: Yeah. It was the fifties. We didn't know anything. So Mishkan Tefila was just a terrible synagogue in almost every way. The services were boring, and they were — I loved it, there was nothing else. But it was Conservative, and I learned some things. I loved the *Aleinu*, because of the fact that it was set to the lilting tune of the Farmer in the Dell — for some reason, the whole thing worked for me, and I was quite dedicated to going. The great thing about Mishkan Tefila was that, intellectually, it was among the finer synagogues in the country.

JG: In terms of your education, you're talking about. What was your Jewish education?

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MP: When I was a kid I went to Hebrew school, I learned absolutely nothing. It was mostly in the fifties — (00:13:00) the wives of Israeli graduate students who held us in very low esteem.

JG: Why did your parents send you? Why was it you wanted to go?

MP: Everybody went. All the kids in my neighborhood went, and that's what you did. Although I don't know why; it's a harder question, I think about it sometimes. Because my aunt, my mother's older sister, did not send her kids to Hebrew school or anything else. And hoped that they would marry non-Jews. And my oldest cousin did — and then finally my younger cousin also — my age — but she was committed to the Jewish thing. But there's another story in all this, if I might, which is that my grandfather, my mother's father, was one of thirteen children. And so — and many of them lived in my street. So we grew up in a clan, and the clan was Jewish. And it just (00:14:00) had a Jewish feel to it.

JG: What do you mean by that?

MP: It was — we were the Jews. My great-grandparents had moved from the North End of Boston to Malden. And it was just filled with some kind of distilled American Judaism that was hard to say what it was, but it was quite surrounding.

JG: Sounds like it was palpable.

MP: Palpable, palpable. Delightful. Really, for me, delightful. It was supportive and enthusiastic.

JG: Not terribly demanding.

MP: It was demanding in the terms of personal relations, not in terms of anything else. Nothing. But it was a clan. So in terms of a sense of Eastern European shtetl, I grew up in the clan. (00:15:00) I grew up in the American edition of the shtetl, which was the Cohen family. And we had Hanukah parties and seders together. Two hundred people came to our seder — they were all my cousins. You know, we did skits and all these kinds of things. So it was really quite — it was very Jewish, even though there's no content that you could have pointed to.

JG: And in Hebrew school, at Sunday school, did you learn anything that stuck with you?

MP: I remember when I was eight years old, the cantor at Mishkan Tefila — his name was Gregor Shelkin. Lovely man; he used to sing in a falsetto voice, as it was the custom in Europe. Nothing could have been more humorous for young children than a man getting up and singing in a falsetto voice. Which was very moving, probably, but we thought it was just (00:16:00) — couldn't believe it. So, and then, they did a TV program called *This Is Your Life*, and he was on *This is Your Life*. So they brought us all into an assembly at Mishkan Tefila, and with a big screen, I think it was like a sheet. They were going to project with some kind of fancy projection from the fifties. And we watched the show *This is Your Life*, and *This is Your Life* was about Gregor Shelkin's surviving the Holocaust. So they had pictures of the Holocaust, and they had his sisters who had tattoos on their arms, and then he showed us his tattoo, and he brought in his Holocaust jacket, his striped jacket. I remember going home to my mother and saying, "Do you know about this?" You know, I was eight years old. What were they thinking? What was the educational mission? That's how I found out about the Holocaust, was that Gregor Shelkin was on *This Is Your Life*. Really. I'm pretty sure it was 1959, 1960, something like that. (00:17:00) I talked to my friend Joel Kazis, who grew up with me — same thing, that's when he learned about the Holocaust. We were, of course, in tears.

JG: What did your mother say?

MP: She said, "Yeah, I know about it. It's really terrible." She tried to mitigate it. But it was searing. It was a life-shaping experience for me. And, you know, I think he got a washing machine because he was on the show. I think he got presents or gifts because he was on the show, *This is Your Life*. And he got to see his sisters who were in Israel. He hadn't seen them for ten years. The whole thing was horrendous. So if I think about my entire Hebrew school experience, that was the searing moment of it — it really was. The images because the TV then was black and white, I can remember, black and white Holocaust. Crazy right? You have to think that Judaism in the 1950s, in the suburbs, was just as — was just stupid in every way.

JG: What about your bar mitzvah? (00:18:00)

MP: So, I — one of the critical aspects of my life is that I had a really sad learning disability. I had it then. I have it now. It was very hard for me to read either in Hebrew or in English. Thankfully my bar mitzvah was in the parashah which I now know is called *Kitetzei*. And it has the shortest haftarah. And I only had to do half of it, because Michael Tickner, who is now president of the New England Region Conservative movement or something like that — his father became like the national president of United Synagogue — he was my bar mitzvah partner. So I did half and he

did half. And we had three rabbis speak. Rabinowitz, who was the old rabbi. He knew my grandparents. My grandparents were wealthy so, you know, everybody had to kiss up to them in some ways. We played “Sound of Silence” at my bar mitzvah party. (00:19:00) The most important moment of my bar mitzvah, which has a significant impact on my life, is that I was awakening. I was a very involved Jewish kid. I was going to shul on Shabbos morning. So I go to Rabbi Kazis, who really was a lovely man. He was a student of Hasidism. He was a graduate student of Harry Austryn Wolfson, a serious intellectual, but I think just hated being a rabbi in the suburbs. That's my thought; may not be true. So I went to meet with him before my bar mitzvah because I requested it. Otherwise kids didn't meet with him. And I said, "Well, what's my portion about?" And he said, "You know, Michael, it's not really one of the important ones." So I said, “What do you mean it's not one of the important ones? It's my bar mitzvah!” So I learned nothing. We didn't get to give a *d'var torah*. It was the fifties. Now, sixties. My bar mitzvah was on September eleventh (00:20:00) becomes a day that lives in infamy. And I got to say nothing. I got to say by memory the first five — one of the little things — I have a really strong connection to Hungary and lived there, but I have a really funny Hebrew accent. And one of the reasons for that is that Michael Domba, who was the *shammes* and taught you how to do the haftarah, was Hungarian. So only a few years ago when I went to Hungary and started to speak Hebrew to the people in Hungary — which, I now speak Hebrew — I realized that he was Hungarian and that's why I talk that way! So my early Hebrew was with a Hungarian accent.

JG: What does that mean? What's an example?

MP: It's all Ashkenazi, so —

JG: So your bar mitzvah was Ashkenazi —

MP: Ashkenazis, with a Hungarian accent. [*speaking Hebrew with a Hungarian accent*] (00:21:00) Like that.

JG: Sixty-five?

MP: Sixty-five. We had lots of Hungarians in the community because they came in '56 and '57, after the Hungarian Revolution. I will say that if I'm known for anything in the Jewish community, it's that every Shabbos I start off the *d'var torah* with, “This, as it happens, is my favorite parashah.” And I believe that every Shabbos, and I do that primarily because Rabbi Kazis told me that my parashah wasn't important. So, every parashah is important. And by the time Wednesday rolls around, every parashah is

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my favorite parashah.

JG: Did you ever get to talk to him about that later?

MP: I didn't get to talk to him about that, I don't think, because I didn't think of it until later. But I did get to talk to him when he was old. His son, Richard Kazis, was my friend. I think I went to visit him in Israel, and it was a real — he was wonderful, but he did something remarkable, Rabbi Kazis. So, Mishkan Tefila was a very intellectually (00:22:00) stimulating place. When you were nine or ten or eleven that went over your head. It didn't matter that it was intellectually stimulating. But by fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, he put together the finest Hebrew high school program, I'm sure, maybe the world has ever known. Buzzy Fishbane taught at it, and Larry Silverstein, and Yaron Ezrahi, Sidra Ezrahi, Eric Meyers, Carol Meyers, Jeremy Zweling, Cal Bland, and then later Richie Siegel, and George Savran. And Art came; Art Green came to give talks there. It was — you kind of couldn't go back to high school after Hebrew high school, because the Hebrew high school was so stimulating. I think I said in the intro — that I took a class from Sidra Ezrahi on American Jewish Literature. Sounds like a boring class. What would that be about? So what did we read (00:23:02) Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, and Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*. This isn't high school; this was after high school. You couldn't sit still! Isaac Bashevis Singer — we read *The Slave* — I remember, Isaac Bashevis Singer, which is filled with sexual fantasy and things like that. I said, "Whoa!" I couldn't sleep from half of these things. And then Larry Silverstein, who later went on — I worked for him at Akiba — taught us Buber and *I and Thou*. That primed me for the *havurah*, you know. I mean it was about relationship. It was — texts were about relationship. All of life was meeting. I mean, I tried to memorize *I and Thou* by the time I was fifteen. That was amazing! We learned about Franz Rosenzweig, and Glatzer, from Brandeis came in — we were high school kids, to give us a talk on Rosenzweig and his relationship with Rosenzweig. Oh, my God! I mean, we had (00:24:02) tears in our eyes.

JG: This sounds remarkable.

MP: It was remarkable. You couldn't wait to go! Patty Saris, who is a federal judge in Boston, once said to me — she went to Harvard, Harvard Law School, she's an intellectual — she said the most intellectual experience of her life was Mishkan Tefila Hebrew school. It was just, I mean, Carol Meyers was teaching us *Genesis*. We had learned *Genesis* five thousand times as kids. Nothing could be more boring to us than *Genesis*. She starts talking to us about Eve as a feminist tale, and the rejection of women, and I said, "Whoa." This is different. She said, chapter six of *Genesis*, the daughters of

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men, being impregnated by the godlings, I said, “Whoa, I'd missed that one! What was that?” We only learned about the women in the *Book of Genesis*, we didn't learn about the men. We learned about silence and voices. (00:25:00) You know, that was revolutionary in my head, it was so exciting.

JG: Sounds like it was a real awakening for you.

MP: Absolutely. Brookline High School was just not like that at all.

JG: Meanwhile, the Six Day War happened while you were in high school. What kind of an impact did that have on you and others?

MP: It had the greatest impact of any event in the history of my life, without question. I'm sure I wouldn't be sitting here with you — maybe neither of us would be here, but I surely would not be here — without the Six Day War. In 1966, I went on the UJA bar mitzvah pilgrimage to Israel. My parents were Zionists, after all. So, got on a plane, a bunch of guys and women. It was 1966. It was a really amazing trip and it engaged me with Israel.

JG: Yeah, so how would you describe the impact of the war on you? (00:26:02) How did you feel?

MP: So I knew Israel before. I'd been. So to have a war in a place I'd been was much different from kids who were just were kind of learning about Israel. But the decisive impact of the Six Day War was that it was a victory. And there had been nothing positive about my Jewish identity up until that moment. It was all post-Holocaust, boring Hebrew schools, bad cooking — that turned out to be only my grandmother. I don't know, what was the good part of Judaism? It was like, nothing. Nothing good about Judaism except that we were all Jews.

JG: Even though you'd been — well, I guess, this was early on. You hadn't quite hit the Hebrew high school yet.

MP: I hadn't hit the Hebrew high school. Sixty-seven, I'm only fifteen. I'm just getting to it, but not yet, really, cause —

JG: But by the time the Six Day War happened, you were engaged —

MP: Yes, I am awakening as a Jew. But I'm not talking personally here, I'm talking about historically. Even though I thought Judaism was (00:27:00) now engaging, and I liked

going to shul and things like that, what was Judaism in suburban Boston? In Chestnut Hill, of all places? It was — there was no content to it. I was getting some content, but the environment of Judaism had no success in it. And then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, a miracle. All right, I can give you my demurrer on it now, but there's no doubt in nineteen — at fifteen years old, that all of a sudden — I remember, Halloween in October 1967. John Shapiro and I dressed up as Moshe Dayan. We had, some years earlier, dressed up as Castro. So we had army fatigues and a cigar and a beard. So now we used army fatigues and a patch. It was the first Jews we'd ever dressed up as.

JG: And felt proud of.

MP: Yeah. We felt — the Six Day War was just filled (00:28:00) with miracle and pride. And we were the winners. We had come from the Holocaust, and there were Holocaust survivors on our street, and it was devastating. I mean, since the *This is Your Life* show of Gregor Shelkin — that's my images of Judaism. And all of a sudden, we were the winners. It was revolutionary, absolutely revolutionary. And people were talking about Israel, and talking about Jews, and Jews were now strong. And even — I went to Brookline High School during those years, and it was a totally Jewish existence for me in high school. But all of a sudden, the conversations changed. Everything changed. Everything changed in the Six Day War.

JG: These were also years of tremendous political activism in general in society. There was the counterculture, Civil Rights Movement, et cetera. To what extent had you been really influenced by all of that — and involved?

MP: Tremendously. Tremendously involved (00:29:02) with it. Civil Rights because of my parents. My father was the head of the Temple Forum, which was a very fecund place for Civil Rights leaders, like Martin Luther King, and Thurgood Marshall, and Medgar Evers, James Meredith, and all these people to come and fundraise. And Kivie Kaplan came, and all these people — they all came, and my father was the person that organized this. And so Thurgood Marshall came to our house, and we all met Medgar Evers. I have pictures, you know, of those moments. And then Martin Luther King came to Mishkan Tefila and I went and saw him. So it was really — I'm young. I'm too young — it's '63-'64, I'm ten, eleven, twelve years old — but I'm watching my father, and my identity is being formed by my parents' activism. They're not Freedom Riders, but they're very much engaged. They're on the older side (00:30:00) of that.

JG: Did they go to —?

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MP: That was their religion, in some ways. That — I would say, Civil Rights movement was their Jewish identity, and they did it with all other Jews. That was it.

JG: Did they go to some of the demonstrations?

MP: They did, they did go to demonstrations, but they didn't go to the big ones, not that I know of at least. I don't remember. But because of the money aspect of it, Civil Rights leaders came to us. I mean, my father — when Thurgood Marshall was the head of the NAACP, civil defense — legal defense fund, he came to our house, Thurgood Marshall, and my father underlined how important of a deal that was. That was really significant in every way. So then when Vietnam came around, my father was for the war in Vietnam — kind of a John F. Kennedy, anti-Communist, Cold warrior, for the beginning of it. But I was totally (00:31:06) radicalized by it.

JG: By?

MP: By the Vietnam War. So the Vietnam War comes just as I'm in later high school. And then —

JG: And by then anti-war activism was ramping up.

MP: My friend, who's a *Globe* columnist now and a really brilliant guy, named Stephen Kinzer — he and I started the underground newspaper at Brookline High School called *The Rapper*. And I become part of the counterculture, which is also the drug culture. Both of those things were true. So by fifteen, when I'm fifteen in '67, the Vietnam War is all of a sudden becoming more and more in the news. And by '68, the Summer of Love, I'm the perfect age.

JG: Yeah. And because of your parents' activism, did you connect that with your Judaism, with your Jewish identity, (00:32:02) in any way at that point?

MP: There was no connection. No Jewish part of the anti-war movement, and there was no anti-war movement part of the Jewish existence. But in 1967, 1968 — 1968, I think — Larry Silverstein, who was then the assistant rabbi at Mishkan Tefila and a graduate student at Brandeis, gave a talk against the war at my cousin Lisa Miller's bat mitzvah. And her grandfather, who was a “Gold Star,” lost his leg in the war, I don't know — maybe he didn't lose it in the war, whatever the story is — just, they were — they went ballistic about that.

JG: Negative?

MP: Negative. And I went — I was euphoric that finally someone was mentioning the Vietnam War in shul. And so all of a sudden those things came together. And then my Jewish (00:33:00) side, and my activist side, which had been totally separate, all of a sudden started to visit each other a little bit. And then in '69, I went to a draft resistance demonstration, in the Chelsea Naval Yard, and I met Michael Brooks, and Art Green, people that were all there.

JG: How did you happen to meet them in the crowd?

MP: They had, they had tallisim on. They were wearing — then and even now, I noticed — I went to the demonstration where the rabbis got arrested, last week. All the rabbis that got arrested all wore tallisim, you know, and I wore a tallis. And in 1968 I just had never seen anybody wearing a tallis at a demonstration before. And that's how I got myself invited to the *havurah*.

JG: So you got in a conversation with Michael Brooks?

MP: Yes, and he said, "Why don't you come for dinner?" He was — what was he twenty-one? We were kids, (00:34:04) we were all kids But that was dramatic.

JG: What did he tell you about what he was inviting you to?

MP: Shabbos dinner. Just Shabbos dinner. But he said, "Come first — we're going to have *davening*." So I said I didn't know what *davening* meant. So, what does *davening* mean? He says, "We're going to pray; we're going to pray on Friday night and then we'll have dinner." I said, cool. I was up for anything, I was like, being a hippie. If they said, And we're going to drop acid after that — Cool, you know, cool. Then we're going to overthrow the government. Cool. I don't know, I was up for it! [*laughs*] So we go to the —

JG: Please do, please tell the story. So you went —

MP: On Franklin street in Cambridge.

JG: The very beginning of the *havurah*.

MP: Very beginning, very beginning. I don't know what month it was, but very beginning.

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JG: It started in September, I think, of '68.

MP: I know but —

JG: What month this was?

MP: (00:35:00) February? Shortly after. I think it was in the late winter. February, something like that. Not right in the beginning.

JG: So '69.

MP: It might have been the beginning of '69. Yes. Sounds right to me. Chronology's a little hazy. That makes sense to me, because I'm a junior in high school. That's right — '69. So — we took ourselves so seriously, you know. I'm sixteen years old, for crying out loud. So we go to the *davening*.

JG: You and Michael?

MP: Me and — right. The people coming for dinner that night are Larry Laufman, and, I mean, you know — all these *havurah*, I think Barry Holtz. For me, I'm younger, but I'm not — I'm precocious, let's say that. And so we walk into the *davening*, and (00:36:00) Zalman — first of all, it's in the living room of an apartment in Cambridge, as opposed to Mishkan Tefila.

JG: What did the room look like, do you remember?

MP: I do. It's an apartment, so it has cushions on the floor. You know, and a little table, and Zalman, I think, is wearing a *kapote* — you know, a long silk coat — this is all, pfew.

JG: Did he have a head covering?

MP: I think he was wearing a *shtreimel*, but not all the time. And I think he has his kid on his knee. I mean, this is not Mishkan Tefila. This is through the looking glass. This is the Beatles. This is the Moody Blues. This is totally different experience of Jewish life. He starts off with a *niggun*. So, can I remember the room more than that? I can't. You know, it's — (00:37:00) I don't know, what is this, fifty years?

JG: Had you ever experienced a *niggun* like that?

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MP: No, no. Never. I didn't know what a *niggun* was. I only had Junior Congregation. I had done some chanting with Hare Krishna. So, maybe I'd experienced that, you know. And then there was a group called the Electric Prunes. And they did masses, rock masses. So I had gone to a place called "The Damaged Angel," on Arlington Street, and they would do chanting there. So I knew something about chanting. I didn't know that it existed in Judaism. And then Zalman just did this *niggun*, for like an hour.

JG: An hour?

MP: An hour. Like an hour.

JG: People joined in with him?

MP: [*starts singing*] (00:38:00) On and on, like an hour. And I think we had — there was some amount of illegal drug use just before that. So the *niggun* and the drugs, and sitting on the cushions, and I mean this was —

JG: Low light?

MP: Low light — candles, I think we had. I can't remember what the lighting was. Later on, we had a candelabrum with real candles. It was —

JG: Was there a Kabbalat Shabbat service or any kind of service?

MP: [*nods*] If I remember correctly. I may have put this in, so I can't give a historical witness to this. But I remember going to Zalman — this time or the next time or the time after — "Will you do — " I started to go off and say, "How about the *davening*? How about the service?" (00:38:57) And he said, "This is the service." And I said, "Are we allowed to do that?" He said, "We're in charge." And that was a really important moment. We are in charge. We can do anything we want. My mother had assaulted my grandmother for eating lobster out and being kosher at home. Like, you know, it was black or white, and religion was black, and the rest of the enlightenment world was white. And all of a sudden we were in charge, we could do anything we want. We can fix it. We can make it spiritual, I don't know.

JG: Was it spiritual? Had you ever experienced anything like it?

MP: Oh, oh. It was spiritual in a foreign way. I had done Hare Krishna chanting that had had an impact on me. I had done some meditation. I'm sixteen, during that time. I'm, like, into religion. I wanted to know, I had gone to the Vedanta center.

JG: So sort of Eastern —

MP: Almost all Alan Watts. All Eastern, nothing Western whatsoever. Islam, for sure not. We hadn't heard of Islam. (00:40:00) I think they were out there, but we just had never heard of them. And Mishkan Tefila was totally not spiritual. It was — anything spiritual had been beaten out. Falsetto, that was probably the most spiritual part of it, you know.

JG: Right, who knew that.

MP: Yeah. We thought it was — he sang like a girl. I don't know, the whole thing. We didn't know anything. We didn't know there were gays. We didn't know — it was the sixties. We didn't know.

JG: What did you feel in these services?

MP: This was one hundred percent transporting. Transporting. If I thought that there was the realm of “I and Thou” and I was trapped in the I-It, this was the opening of the door. I was transported right through, right up. I've never been back since then. And my whole life changed then. It has never turned back. I've always been able to open the *davening* door. Since that time since that day. Zalman did something for me that was just (00:41:00) the great gift of my life. He opened the door to another realm of being. If there's a counterculture for me, it's the next realm of being. It was friendship. It was slow. Remember, in Mishkan Tefila, they were [*sings indistinctly*] I had dyslexia. I could barely keep up. I could barely read Hebrew. I could barely read English. Now all of a sudden, Zalman's going [*sings*] — he could go on for a minute, or two minutes, one word. Well, I said, by the end of the first minute, I could do the word, [*sings*], repeat it five times. By the fourth or fifth time, it was like — it was like, perfect.

JG: What was the dinner part? You went to the Brooks' for dinner.

MP: So Ruthie, *alav ha'shalom*, and Michael had this gang of the *havurah* people there, and they were just great. And it was intellectual, and it was spiritual. Someone told some hasidic *maysehs* and we talked about politics, (00:42:01) and about the movement. And it was sexy. I don't want to — I'm in the height of sexy at this time, and I never wanted to leave. And all the people I met that night are still my friends.

JG: You didn't leave.

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MP: I never left. I never left. I mean, the funny thing is, it was just one little quirk here. I went away in the end of '68, and I went back to the *havurah* from wherever I'd gone to, the mountains —

JG: Outward bound.

MP: Outward bound. I was gone.

JG: For the summer?

MP: No, I was gone all together. I had gone away for the summer. They had moved. My life was over. I had this great group I was a part of, and then I couldn't find them! I don't exactly remember how I found — maybe Richie Siegel showed up teaching at Mishkan Tefila. I actually don't remember how I found them, but then they were in (00:43:02) Somerville, so that was — then once I found them, it was a better place. Now they had a whole house. So that was — thank God! I was this close to probably becoming a Buddhist. [*laughs*]

JG: So —

MP: Which my mother would have thought was better!

JG: What did your mother think of all of this at that point?

MP: Losing me. Hiding my *tefillin*. She —

JG: You were putting on *tefillin*?

MP: I was putting on *tefillin*. We had big fights about not turning the lights on and off on Shabbos.

JG: Kashrut?

MP: Kashrut. I became kosher in one day. Like, I went to the *havurah*, and then I said, I think I should become kosher. And then I came home and I said to my mother, “I've become kosher.” And she said, “That's too bad because we have the ham with the pineapple circles.” You know, pinned onto it with cloves. (00:44:00) And she said, “I know you like that.” And I said, “Oh, I do like that. I'll be kosher starting tomorrow.” [*laughs*] But then I was — I was pretty kosher. I was completely kosher at home, had my own little set of utensils and dishes. But on Sunday, because my grandfather wasn't

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kosher and they served chicken, I would eat that because I didn't want to tell my grandfather. I was afraid; I was afraid to tell my grandfather I was becoming more and more medieval.

JG: What appealed to you about kashrut at that point?

MP: Well there's that — there was a woman at the *havurah* named Harriet Mann, Harriet Mann was a vegan, and then I also met Everett Gendler, who was a vegetarian. And during that summer of '69 to '70, I met a guy named Scott Nearing, who had written a book called *Living the Good Life*.

JG: He was a good friend of the Gendlers, by that point.

MP: I met him through the Gendlers, of course. I would even say that Everett was maybe a bit of a disciple of his. And they were living on Haggets Pond Road in (00:45:00) Andover, and I would go dig asparagus pits with them. I was going to be a “back to the earth” guy. And for me, Harriet taught a thing called the “food seminar” at the *havurah*. And to raise our consciousness. And Art, I think, even got quoted in the *New York Times* about how kashrut should change — you know, it should be eco-friendly. And my mother was an ornithologist. She was involved with the Audubon Society and conservation, environmental movements. So those kind of things fit together. The two experiences — I could just go on. So two experiences. The first experience was that Richie — not Richie; Michael Brooks, no — and Richie Siegel and me, we raised chickens. (00:46:00) We bought chickens, and we raised them in the back of the *havurah*.

JG: In the yard?

MP: In the yard, yeah.

JG: And slaughtered them?

MP: Yeah, Zalman showed us how to slaughter them. So we slaughtered them. I slaughtered one of them, and then we sacrificed them, on a hibachi. Hibachis were all the rage back then, you know, little Japanese hibachis.

JG: What do you mean, you sacrificed them?

MP: We sacrificed them because we were doing sacrifices, you know. It wasn't just slaughtering them. Zalman knew how to slaughter, because Zalman was a Chabad guy and he knew how to do everything. I don't think — Zalman wasn't there all year, that

year. I think he just kind of came in from Winnipeg. But he was there then. And Epi, Seymour Epstein, also, I think was involved with this. I have kind of a gauzy memory of it. But I don't have a gauzy memory of the moment of taking the life of a chicken, and (00:46:58) eating it, flicking it, all the things of it. Firing it up and things like that. That was a pivotal experience, and I never ate meat again after that.

JG: Did you become a vegetarian —

MP: Also meeting Barry Holtz — yes, I became a vegetarian. And not just a vegetarian, I became a *Kenii*, a zealot. So if you look in the front page of the *Jewish Catalog*, you'll see a person with a tallis over his head, looking out over some space or something like that. And it's me, and you can know that because I started wearing suspenders, because I wouldn't wear a leather belt anymore. And I wouldn't wear leather shoes. Only a baseball glove. My baseball glove, which was leather, was grandfathered in from the —

JG: Is that true to this day?

MP: No, now I wear leather shoes and a belt. But for years and years I wore only suspenders. And I wouldn't — oh, and then Everett got me *nevilus tefillin*. *Nevilus tefillin* are leather from cows that die by themselves from old age, as opposed to from (00:48:00) slaughtering them. That — I just want to give you that — we were thinking stuff through. We were not *frum*. We were in the counterculture. Everything had a rich symbolic meaning, and we'd talk about it for hours. And read about it and think about it. It was fantastic.

JG: How influential was Everett Gendler in thinking about your vegetarianism and the whole relationship of food to the earth, and all of that kind of thinking.

MP: Decisive. But more than that, he was influential in my understanding of love. He was influential of my understanding of politics. He was quite radical. He was living at Packard Manse in an ecumenical center. He was influential in my understanding of religion and why I became a university chaplain instead of just staying as a Hillel director. He was influential in almost (00:49:01) every part of my life. He was influential in my interest in Eastern religions and Tibet in particular — all those things. Just a couple years ago we were in Thailand together, you know. Everett was — he was a kid, he was young. But he had been in the movement. He had known Martin Luther King. He had marched in Selma. Everett was, for me — I wanted to be Everett Gendler. Also, he was also very beautiful; he had little kids, I'm on the board of the Everett Grapevine project. Of course, I love Everett. His anti-Zionism became very difficult for me. His insistence on universalism, so I'm on the other side of that.

JG: That was later.

MP: No, it wasn't. That was then.

JG: Then?

MP: Absolutely. Give back all the territories. (00:49:58) Everett thought we shouldn't only give back the West Bank and Gaza and Sinai, which we had during that time, but maybe also part of Tel Aviv and Haifa. I mean, he was really — he was very left, and he was an anti-Zionist. He's still an anti-Zionist. And you know, that had — because he influenced me in all the other stuff. But we studied *Shir ha-Shirim Raba*, the *Song of Songs* midrash on *Song of Songs*, which was all about love. And that was — I would go home and cry.

JG: You had an unusual arrangement during your senior year in high school. So you went, you started going — you were a junior when you first started going to the *havurah*?

MP: Junior, yeah.

JG: So what happened by the time you became a senior? What were you doing and how did you come to that place in Brookline High?

MP: So two things. First thing Brookline High was — I was the head of the student forum and we were striking against the school regularly. So, (00:51:01) you know, some artifacts that I have are newspapers that say "Student strike!" I was getting myself arrested on the Boston Commons. I was willing to do anything, really. I was a heavy activist at the time. So the school was more than happy to get rid of me, to tell you the truth. And I needed to do two things. Number one, I needed to learn about Judaism, in a way that I had not learned about Judaism, so I started to go to Maimonides and take classes, including Rav Soloveitchik's *gemara shiur*, and I made lots of progress during that period of time. It was an incredibly "whoa!" movement in my head towards Judaism. I'd learned — I was learning. In that year or two, I was a *masmid*. I was one hundred percent sitting and learning.

JG: Sounds like you were a sponge for everything you hadn't had access to before.

MP: I was — and, you know, on the kindness of strangers (00:51:02) and then friends, I had the people that turned out to be the very best teachers on the face of the earth. How

did that happen, I have no idea! I'm starting to learn stuff from Zalman Schachter — not many sixteen-year-olds have access to him on a daily basis. And Arthur Green, who turns out to be quite a significant fellow. He was only twenty-seven, but he's actually done quite a nice job! And Joel Rosenberg is not only teaching us, but he's writing poetry about the group. It's unbelievable. And Michael Swersky — he's kind of keeping the whole thing disciplined and together. And Joey Reimer's teaching us. One day we can — and Bert Jacobson. You know, that's not a bad lineup!

JG: Not at all.

MP: And I'm studying with these people, so I'm going to Maimonides in the afternoon and studying Gemara, and I'm going to Brookline High to study chemistry, (00:53:02) and I'm turning in projects, so still enrolled at Brookline High, but I'm going to Maimonides and I'm having just an eye-opening experience for me. These books on the shelf are all of a sudden turning into words and ideas. It was magic! And then I'm going to the *havurah* every morning to study at Dorton with this guy, Jim Kugel, who's I don't know, twenty-two.

JG: How did you connect with the Dorton people?

MP: So when I — I really need to learn, I'm just desperate, really. So I don't know, I go to Art, maybe, or Swersky. I don't remember actually who. I don't know exactly. But they were kids, I was a kid. I was really — I was a baby, they were kids. And they said, You want to take a class on Thursday night? So I said, Yes I do. So I came to the class. And that class was taught by Hillel Levine (00:54:01) and it was on Jacob Neusner's book, *Fellowship and Ancient Judaism*, or something. On the Qumran. Fantastic! I don't know if the book was fantastic, but Hillel was very smart, and all the *havurah* guys went. And the conversations were just like, whoa. Politics, fellowship. And I said to — I think to Green, I think, I said, "I just have to do this every day, I have to drop out of high school and come and study." So he said, "Well, we don't have an every day program." So I said, "I need to just come sit here and study every day." He says, "Well, there is a group that's getting together to study every day. But they are the radical communitarians." "Well," I said, "I'm a radical communitarian." So they said, "All right, see if they say yes." So I went to them and it was Stef and Jim Kugel and Charles Cohen and Steve Ginden and Jeff Sokel (00:55:00) and I think that's it.

JG: And associated with them?

MP: Yeah, they said, just come to study, just come study every day. So I went to study every day. Every day. I would get up in the morning, I would drive to Somerville, and I

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would study with them all morning long, and the late afternoon I would go back and take a class at high school.

JG: They spent their mornings studying every day?

MP: Every day. Humash and Rashi, and finally Mishnah and Gemara every day. With these people. Art on Monday — I'm making up the days. But Art on Monday, and Swersky on Tuesday, Rosenberg on Wednesday, Reimer on Thursday, and Jacobson on Friday. And then sometimes somebody else would come in. It was the only — we were like the Qumran. We thought that we were going to be the *ner tamid*. We felt that constant study would save the world, along with activism. And so that's who we were. That's really who we were. We were the Qumran cult. And then, no one else (00:56:06) in the *havurah* wanted to be the Qumran cult. They wanted to go to graduate school, learn like that. We left, and we moved.

JG: The *havurah* began as an alternative seminary, in fact.

MP: Well, because Barry needed to get out of the army — that's basically why, I think.

JG: What about Art's ideas of starting an alternative seminary?

MP: Yeah, I think he really wanted to do it, you know. Axelrad and Art Green —

JG: Al Axelrad at Brandeis.

MP: At Brandeis, and at —

JG: Joe Lukinsky.

MP: But it never really — I didn't experience it that way, and it wasn't that way. Not only did I not experience it, it wasn't that way. There were classes, but the classes were very different than seminary rabbinical school, coming to class every day. There were teachers, Eddie Feld was a teacher, you know, and (00:57:02) Hillel Levine was a teacher in the beginning. But it was absolutely an egalitarian committed place.

JG: Wasn't that part of the idea?

MP: It was part of the idea. I mean, it's a complicated idea. We didn't want to do models of the *tzadik*, you know. So Art was probably less the guru than he thought and more than we admitted. But he was the brilliant figure. You know, I mean, if you went to the

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havurah on Shabbos morning — I used to sometimes, because I was in high school, I'd stay in Brookline — I'd walk from South Brookline to Somerville to come to the *havurah* and spend the day in the *havurah*. And I was not driving. I was already becoming *frumer* and *frumer*. And the *d'var torahs* that he would give — just his reading the Torah and then translate, all of a sudden breaking into English during the middle of the *leyning*. (00:58:01) Women *davening*, Sharon Strassfeld by the second or third year. It was revolutionary. It was never going to be — I don't think that the seminary idea really ever happened. It was a *havurah* and not a seminary.

JG: Where did the idea of members essentially graduating as *haver* as opposed to rabbi begin?

MP: Well, Zalman thought that Judaism was in some ways too narrow in its leadership designations. So first he wanted some people to be rabbis, and some people to be *maggidim*, so you could be a rabbi or a *maggid*.

JG: And what did he mean by *maggid*?

MP: You would go around and be like a *mashgiach ruchani*. You would be like a —

JG: Itinerant —

MP: — itinerant spiritual, spiritualist, and you know — I remember studying with Zalman once, (00:59:04) "*Iklah Ika d'bei rav huna*," I think is the phrase that we studied, which means, "Ula went to visit a Rav Huna," and why did he do that? He wanted to see what Rav Huna did so he could go then to, you know, and teach him what Rav Huna did and they would figure out — so we were re-developing, we were rethinking — we were going to write a new *Shulchan Aruch*. We were going to — this was post-Holocaust. We needed to redo things. The counterculture wasn't — the general culture only, it was Jewish culture. So *haver*, *Rav Haver* is a phrase you can see in the Gemara, and we were going to be a *haver*. And it had the Qumran parts to it as well. That class, on Neusner's *Fellowship in Judaism*, I think it's called, it was a significant book for me. (01:00:01) Jacob Neusner did not invent the *havurah* as he often said that he did, but he did have an influence on it, you know.

JG: Can you talk about that a little bit? In what way?

MP: In a way that Yitz Greenberg would articulate slightly later, right. So this is earlier than that. There was a certain sense that we were in the next cycle of Judaism. What Zalman would come to call the "Third Age." I think Zalman then finally called it the

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"fourth turning of Hasidism." There's all these kinds of articles and things like that. But what we knew was that American Judaism was much more significant than anyone was giving it credit for, so that when I was growing up all the teachers were either Israelis or Europeans. And we were Americans. It wasn't all going to end up in Israel, so the *shelilat ha'golah*, (01:00:58) the negation of the Diaspora, was a significant thing to push against. We were going to live in America. Aliyah, Israel was going to be important to us. It wasn't going to be everything.

JG: Was that clear? During this time? Post '67.

MP: It was a huge fight — not clear, but dominant.

JG: Within the *havurah*?

MP: Within the *havurah*. Bill Novak left the *havurah* over it.

JG: And there were others who were clearly Israel-oriented, like Bella and George.

MP: Like Bella and George. But Bella and George were aliyah oriented, but I don't know. I talked — it's weird that I don't know, because I remember talking to Bella, and particularly George about it for hours and hours. The role of Israel — but when Bella and George moved to Israel, and I went, and you know, we were — the year before they moved, I was living in Israel. They came and stayed with me. They were like moving to California. It was like — it wasn't like, the move to Israel was like (01:01:59) to live in a Jewish housing project, Yishai Leibowitz's understanding of it. It wasn't a big Zionist expression. Bella was a Zionist, but George was a Bible guy. He was going to encounter God there. Write a book called *Encountering God*. He was in Bloomington, Indiana, you know — it wasn't such a — I don't know. I'll let them speak for themselves, I don't have to comment on that. But that's my understanding of it. It's not that we were against going to Israel, or aliyah. Because some people wanted to go. The Roskies went, Roskies being not Shayna but Dina. People would come back with their Israel tales, and I came back with mine.

JG: The Reimers went.

MP: And the Reimers went. And I went! If you look in the *Jewish Catalog*, you'll see my extremely embarrassing article called "How to Travel Cheaply in Israel." Two things are embarrassing about that article. Number one, that I wrote it, and it's (01:02:58) written by a nineteen-year-old and edited poorly by the editors of the *Jewish Catalog*, so it's a complete embarrassment and almost everybody — sounds like how to rip off the Israelis.

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And the second thing, more embarrassing, I think — it's the only thing about Israel in the *Jewish Catalog*.

JG: Well, there were other things that were left out that came in the *Jewish Catalog Two* and *Three*.

MP: Okay, but this is the first *Jewish Catalog*. We were rewriting the *Shulchan Aruch* and we forget to put in Israel, except how to visit and rip off the Israelis. Come on — it's a statement, it's a thing. We had gone there. We had significant times there, I'd gone to Ulpan Akiva. I'd started learning Arabic, all these things. But where was Israel?

JG: It's a good question.

MP: It was a significant question. Why didn't we all just move to Israel? You want to start an urban kibbutz, move to Israel. It's the home of the urban kibbutz. We were Americans. That's a significant piece of all this. We were Americans that weren't moving to Israel and remembered (01:04:00) Europe, even though we had never been there. We only learned it through Ruth Rubin records. You know. We were fake Europeans. A lot of this was fake European, fake shtetl. We were rebuilding the shtetl.

JG: A lot of nostalgia for that world.

MP: Nostalgia for a world that none of us grew up in.

JG: Exactly. But —

MP: Zalman. Zalman and Epi.

JG: But had some contact with, through grandparents or through other —

MP: And through mysticism. Not grandparents, mysticism. So Larry Fine and Danny Matt and Art Green and Gershon Hundert from the history perspective, and Epi from kind of a *kishkes* perspective. You can go on and on, that the mystical world that we were interested in transplanting was from this bloody soil of Europe, and we're going to build it again in Somerville, in America, without pogroms.

JG: Right.

MP: And when I went to Dartmouth College, years later, I built a thing called the Conference on Judaism in Rural New England where I got farmers and gardeners and

things like that (01:04:59) to come together in this fantastic kind of Limud — now what we would call Limud, but there was no Limud then — experience. And I talked about building Judaism from the margin. Because Judaism had always been created as a marginal experience. So what could be more marginal than central New Hampshire/Vermont? And the first speaker at that conference was Everett Gendler, who talked about not only Jewish rebalancing of the natural and the intellectual, but also what kind of seeds to buy for red peppers, you know. And how to harvest alfalfa and God knows what else. I remember alfalfa, I don't know why — what was he using alfalfa for? But doesn't matter. I just maybe like the world alfalfa. So all of that was redoing the shtetl in America, and there was an article in the *New York Times*, and in the *Boston Globe* about it, and they asked Art to comment on it, and he said, "He wants to rebuild Poland. Where are the pogroms?" You know! Which was, like, a little *schtuch* at me. Could you rebuild (01:06:01) the shtetl without the pogroms — because it's America? That was the question that hung over the whole experience. It was a very deliberate experience.

JG: Very intentional community.

MP: Very intentional. Everything meant something. We bought Yiddish records. We didn't find old Yiddish people to come and sing to us so we'd learn their *niggunim*. We got records!

JG: Why was that?

MP: Because it was America! You learned songs on records. It was — well, I should interpret it. I understand what I'm saying in my own head; now I'm telling you. It was a disruptive experience. We were not trying to reignite the shtetl. It was disruption in the middle of it. So we were not getting survivors to come in and live with us so we could once again be Poland, or central Ukraine. We're studying Bratislaver texts but with Art — in translation, with psychology, with history, with modern methodology, (01:07:01) with literary criticism. We were not hasidim of the Bratislaver Rebbe. We were study partners of Arthur Green. And that is a disruptive experience. It was not in a continuity.

JG: It was a step removed.

MP: And it was — I think it was intentionally a step removed. It was thankfully a step removed. There are many bad things that happened back there. We were not trying to revive them. We were trying to do this whole thing. We were also positive Jews. We had all grown up as negative Jews, before the Six Day War. We were positive Jews there.

JG: Why not, though, find people who had had direct experience and were carriers of the tradition, *niggunim* for instance, and learn from them? Down the street you had Ben-Zion Gold, who had grown up in a world surrounded by *niggunim*. (01:08:01)

MP: Yeah, right? I learnt his *niggunim* from him. In Hillel, when I was a Hillel director. I used to sit and study *niggunim* with Ben-Zion Gold. You know, David Roskies wrote this fascinating article called "Creative Betrayal." And that's what we were doing. It was creative betrayal. Ben Zion Gold came from the Slabodka Yeshiva. He remembers the *niggunim* of his youth. We were not interested in restarting the Slabodka Yeshiva. We weren't that disciplined. We weren't — we just weren't those people.

JG: But the *niggunim* were intimately connected to that spiritual experience. You couldn't separate that in a sense — or didn't want to?

MP: It was inauthentic to separate them. We didn't want to. We were egalitarian, I mean, trying our hardest — in the beginning maybe not. It was a little halting, I admit that. You know, in the beginning it was a bunch of guys and their wives and girlfriends, but we didn't know the stuff, you know. We didn't know about homosexuality. (01:09:00) Only later in my — this is my introduction to it. Like, in the second year, all of a sudden, homosexuality came into the *havurah*, and it was like, whoa. Every day was like — whoa, intense thing.

JG: Well let's go back into your *havurah* experience —

MP: But all those things were important because we did not, we were not continuing in that world. We were recreating a world that was — I think as David correctly points out — a betrayal of the world of Ben-Zion Gold.

JG: You just used the words, "recreating a world."

MP: Yes. So I think that is the right word.

JG: Recreating as opposed to creating?

MP: As opposed to creating — yes, a renaissance in that way. Renaissance. It's a rebirth experience. We were in a rebirth experience. We were not doing something that had no precedent or was radically new. It was just — we were not replicating. It was not new wine in old casks, or old wine in new casks. It was something different.

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JG: Something different.

MP: Something new. That's what we thought. Yeah. And I think we were right. (01:10:01)

JG: So I want to delve into all of this a little bit more. To start with, I want to ask you —

MP: I'm sorry for exhausting you with all these stories.

JG: No, hardly. Did your *havurah* experience and your involvement in Havurat Shalom at that point affect where you decided to go to college?

MP: Of course, of course. I had deep intentions of going away for college and I couldn't leave. I couldn't leave. This was my world. And my girlfriend, then wife, was going to Tufts, so I didn't want to leave her, maybe. But it wasn't that — I wanted to go to, I wanted to be part of the *havurah*, so I was. I went to Brandeis because that's where the *haverim* went.

JG: Many of them were graduate students there.

MP: Yes, there was a program called "Contemporary Jewish Studies", you know.

JG: CJS.

MP: CJS, right. So Bill Novak (01:11:00) and Larry Laufman —

JG: George Savran.

MP: George Savran. So we would drive back and forth from Somerville. And it was — yes, of course. And I studied with Glatzer. I studied with Altmann. I did all that stuff, you know, because of the *havurah*. I was building myself to be —

JG: So did you major in NEJS?

MP: I majored in NEJS and in Physics.

JG: And in Physics? Why Physics?

MP: I wanted to study something real. I wanted to study — because Alexander Altman asked me, on my first day of college, what questions I would like to answer while I was

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at Brandeis. Very nice introductory —

JG: Introduction to college.

MP: I always — I spent a lot of time being in colleges, in universities, and I took that point. What questions would you like to answer, as opposed to what do you want to learn. Really different.

JG: Did you know?

MP: I did. The universe (01:12:03) and, you know, creation.

JG: So he said, "You want to study physics?"

MP: I said, "No, mysticism." [*laughs*]

JG: He said, "Oh, I thought you were serious."

MP: I said, "Oh." This is my first day of college. And I said, "Well, I want to be serious. Should I study Physics?" He said, "Yes, by all means, that's what you should study. Are you good at math?" I said "I'm good at math." He said, "Yes, you should study physics." So I studied Physics.

JG: Was he right?

MP: Absolutely. It was the best thing I ever did. Are you kidding, I still think like a physicist. I still — I was never going to be a physicist. I — something amazing happened to me in my freshman year of college, and then in my fourth year of graduate school.

JG: Which was?

MP: I start to study Physics with Stephan Berko and Hugh Pendleton. They were the professors at Brandeis. And Stephan Berko was from Siget — (01:13:03) like where Wiesel is from in the Subcarpathian Mountains. And he started to tell me about Jews and physics.

JG: He was a refugee?

MP: He was a refugee. He was a survivor.

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JG: As were many at Brandeis at the time.

MP: Absolutely. Not Hugh Pendleton, as it happens. He was just a fantastic physics professor. And I was just — I just wanted to learn everything about everything. I couldn't have been more awake. I'm always a little awake, but really awake. No, now I'm also really awake.

JG: With the fervor of youth.

MP: Fervor, that's exactly the right word. Passion and fervor. So Berko started to tell me stuff. It was a lecture class, but for some reason he would like — he had a friend named David Weiss Halivni, (01:13:59) you know, who was to play a role in my later life. And he would ask me if I knew things — he was getting involved with his own, he was in his own search. He was a marvelous person. He developed a theory of the polarization of light. Fantastic thing. It's a commentary on Einstein's Brownian motions. Just to show you that I haven't —

JG: Forgotten everything.

MP: I haven't lost it. I think actually I haven't forgotten very much at all, you know. I still teach science a lot, so — here it comes. So he started to give me books to read, *Science and Civilization in China* by Joseph Needham, and then he gave me this one book, called *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

JG: By who?

MP: Seyyed Hossein Nasr. This was like pure elixir to me. I was just like — I'm studying religion and science. Religion and science, (01:15:01) right there in the page. How the Hakim for example, Abu Nasr al-Farabi and Muhammed Ibn al-Tusi, Al-Beruni are developing these things, and they're giving the theological impact of them. So I start writing this guy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, letters. During my short period of time where I actually could write letters. He started writing me back postcards — thank you very much for the letter — like that. And he is then the chancellor of the University of Tehran, and he's like the advisor to the Shah. And I have my life work — I'm going to write "Science and Civilization and Judaism" — this is going to be my field. I still —

JG: What gave you the chutzpah to write to this guy who was the advisor to the Shah of Iran as an undergraduate?

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MP: Yeah, God only knows. My whole life is that. Why did I go talk to Bill Clinton? I don't know. I really don't know. I'd like to know. Why'd I go up to Zalman? (01:16:01) Why'd I go in the *havurah* in the first place I'm sixteen years old! You're not impressed by that?

JG: I was impressed.

MP: Lying to my mother that I'm going someplace, and in fact I'm going to the *havurah* to study Judaism on the sly. Really? I don't know the answer to that question. I'd like to know. I don't know why I have so many stories. I might just — it might be that everybody has them, I just notice mine. I don't know. I'm unusually lucky. How do I know all these fantastic people all these years? Decades? I don't know. I mean, there's a phrase in Maimonides called *hashgacha pratit*, individual divine providence — which, of course, I don't believe in but I can't help but notice.

JG: Yes.

MP: How did a kid that can barely read — I mean, this is a nice place to live in New York City. I don't know any of this stuff. I don't know.

JG: All right, back to your story.

MP: Years later. I'm writing (01:17:00) to this guy who never writes back really most of the time, and I'm writing, I'm reading book after book that he's writing, the different lectures. And then I go to Israel in graduate school and I come back, and I'm at Temple University. And in the office next to me is this beautiful looking man, and on the door it says Seyyed Hossein Nasr. So I knock on the door, and I say, "Have you ever heard of the famous Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the academic, the scholar?" And he said, "It's me." And I said, "No, it's not you. This is a serious guy, chancellor of Iran." And he says, "No, it's me." This is 1979. And I say, "Let me tell you, man, it's not you. But I have his books if you'd like to look at them. They're absolutely fantastic." And he says, "You know, we had in Iran kind of a bad summer. (01:18:00) It's me. I had to run for my life. And this is the first job so I could get in America as a permanent resident. And that's why I'm sitting next to you." He became my graduate advisor. So this whole loop of sciences, religion, and mysticism — because he writes on Sufism and things like that — it all came together, and this was my deeper introduction to Islam. So my career has often been based on my knowledge of Islam. And it came from —

JG: And its connection to science.

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MP: Its connection science. It came from Altmann in physics. And Altman had also of course written about Ibn Rushd. He had written a number of things as part of the people who wrote on Maimonides and medieval Jewish philosophy, based on Islamic antecedents. So this was the world that I was in. I remember my father saying, “You going to make a living from this?” As it happens, Islam has kind of caught our attention.

JG: Yes, it has. (01:19:00) Were you involved with Hillel while you were at Brandeis?

MP: I was. Al Axelrad was the Hillel director, and we built a *havurah* suite, so Charlie Dobrusin and Jack Gilberg, now Gilron, Danny Cohen, and we *davened*, Rob Androphy, all those people, and we lived together, and we were the Brandeis snif.

JG: The branch.

MP: The branch. And we lived together, we used to play football. Danny Matt was part of our group for a while. Then he was part of the *havurah* group.

JG: Did you really see yourselves as a snif, so to speak?

MP: Absolutely.

JG: Did any of them get involved in the *havurah* itself later?

MP: Not as much as me, but all involved. It was our college experience. That’s what we did. We *davened* in Perlman Lounge, in the kind of *havurah* style. We sat on the floor. It was kind of my first attempt at building it myself, you know, this kind of community. But all through college I went to the *havurah* almost every Shabbos, often every day.

JG: And was Al, Al Axelrad part of your —

MP: Of course, we were the kids he liked the best. We were his group. We were activists. We were political radicals. It was during the bombing of Haiphong Harbor, and the Plain of Jars, you know, in Laos and Cambodia.

JG: You started college in ’70 — ’70 to ’74.

MP: It was — I mean, one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life was my first day of college. My mother moved me in, but then just did not leave. You know, how mothers sometimes don’t leave, clean up the room. (01:21:00) She’d be mortified if she heard this story, but I’ve told it to her. She knows she didn’t leave. She like dropped me

off at ten — we only lived in Brookline; this was Waltham. This wasn't the years where your parents would rebuild your room for you. They'd drop you off outside of the gate of the college. This was different. So by the time three or four o'clock comes around, I am fit to be tied. I want to like murder her. I want to start the rest of my life and she's not leaving. She's dusting, and God knows what else she's doing. So, finally she leaves, and I walk across the quad. This short woman named Kathy Power comes over to me and says, "So you want to go to a meeting? You look angry." I say, "Absolutely." So I go to a meeting with this woman, Susan Saxe, and Kathy Power. It was my first day of college, you know. And the meeting goes on for a while. We're going to destroy America and overthrow the government. This is my group, you know. I can't wait. (01:22:00) Susan Saxe won't talk to men because men are inherently repressive. I didn't even know that. That was like a new —

JG: You didn't know that men were repressive?

MP: I didn't! I didn't feel that way myself. I was from the *havurah*. I was from the counterculture. We didn't know. Well, of course it's true, we just didn't know. And then we'd have to hear women's voices, and men's voices — I was in heaven. So about two weeks into the meetings, this guy comes over to me and says, "We're going to have a planning meeting tomorrow which will be life-changing. So you should know if you really want to come to a planning meeting." And I'm saying, "I'm there." And they said, "No, go talk to somebody. Make sure that you really want to come. This is like a serious moment. We're not having a cult here. We're overthrowing the government." So I call Art. Art says, "Are you crazy? Don't go to that meeting. You should call the police!" So I said, "I'm not going to do that! But I didn't know that you would feel so strongly about it!" He says, (01:23:00) "Do you need me to come get you to take you away from there? I'll come right now!" So I said, "Whoa!" I was totally surprised by that, we were the radicals. Stef Krieger would have done — if I called Stef, he would have said, "Of course you've got to go to the meeting. You've got to overthrow the government!" So about three days later, they knocked over the Newton Wellesley Bank.

JG: And what happened to them? Just give a —

MP: Well, in the long run they went into the underground, on the lam. About six years later, I saw Susan Saxe on the streets of Philadelphia. I have an unusually sticky memory. So I'm walking to the University of Pennsylvania Hillel building to go to shul on Shabbos morning, and I see Susan and I say, "Hi Susan," because I recognize her; I just recognize people, then and now. Thousands of people, I recognize. I remember their names. But I don't remember who she is. I only met her weeks, in the beginning, I just happen to remember. Quirk of fate. (01:24:00) And then she's gone. This is a nothing

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experience. And then I realize, this is Susan Saxe, that the last time I saw her picture was like in the post office, and six weeks —

JG: Wanted?

MP: Wanted, yeah. And she turns herself in six or seven weeks later. So that's the end of her underground experience. Not Kathy Power. She was in the underground for twenty-five years, I think. But I'm much more —

JG: Did Susan Saxe respond when you said, hi Susan?

MP: She nods, and then she disappears. I remember the whole thing as if it was like a movie. I remember the whole thing. Then, years later, I'm at Dartmouth, and I get this phone call from Susan Saxe. And she says, "I'm in Leavenworth." And first I don't answer the phone, and she says, "Tell Michael I spell my name S-A-X-E." So I said, "Oh, that Susan is calling me." So again the phone. She says, "Michael, I remember you from when I went into the underground, and then before jail that you've been involved with Judaism. And I've become very Jewish. (01:25:00) And if I can get a job, I can get out of here." So I said, "Let me see what I can do." And I connected her to Waskow, and she became the administrator of Aleph.

JG: I didn't know that.

MP: And even after that, when I was the university chaplain at Columbia, I did this whole big kind of sixties meaning renewal — she came to that and spoke. Tom Hayden was like a jackass, and she reprimanded him for pissing off the young policemen. I mean, the story like rippled along for a long time.

JG: You had another spiritual experience — not connected to the *havurah* it sounded like — when you were an undergrad also, with Zalman, that involved the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Is that right?

MP: Oh yeah, Lubavitcher Rebbe. Yes, my senior year, just before I wanted to go to rabbinical school. This involved physics also — physics plays a role, come to think of it. (01:26:00) So I had *sefikot b'emunah* as we call them, you know, doubts in my faith — which is, you know, in the long run of my life, good, you know. And I haven't had them that often, to tell you the truth. I don't know, I've had a lot of consistency. So Zalman said, "We're going to go to Brooklyn and we'll see the Rebbe."

JG: Where was Zalman at that point?

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MP: Zalman was in Manitoba. But he was coming. We knew Zalman back then, you know, we knew him pretty often. I don't know why I knew Zalman during that time so well. Someone else would know that better than me.

JG: Through the *havurah*?

MP: I know it's through the *havurah*, for sure, but someone else would be able to — Green or somebody would be able to talk about the influence of Zalman on the *havurah* as opposed to on me.

JG: Right.

MP: You know —

JG: People have. (01:26:59)

MP: On me it was great. But he's a constant figure, right?

JG: In the first few years.

MP: I don't know why, though.

JG: He was in Boston.

MP: He was in Boston for only a year, I think. Maybe two.

JG: Year two. But he was a pretty constant figure in that period, and I think he would come periodically after that. He had a tremendous impact on people's relationship to *davening*, to spirituality, to mysticism, to all the things that you're talking about.

MP: There was no one like Zalman. He was just a unique figure. I mean - And I don't even mention the acid aspect of it which was also a part of my spiritual —

JG: Quest.

MP: Quest. Dropping acid with Zalman, that was like a big —

JG: In the *havurah* context?

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MP: In the *havurah*, on the turret, on two occasions.

JG: Say that again, on the what?

MP: In the turret. You know, it was a three-story building and there was a conical turret (01:27:59) at the top of it, in Richie Siegel's room, I think, or somebody's room. And we used to go in the turret and smoke and also, in these cases, drop acid.

JG: More than you with him, or was it a small group of people?

MP: I think it was a lot of people. But I mean, not a lot a lot of people, but it was a segment of the *havurah* that was experimenting. And I think it was Green, surely. He wrote that "Psychedelics and Kabbalah," Itzik Lodzer. So we —

JG: That was published in *Response*.

MP: Yeah. So I go to Brooklyn with a guy called Corey Fisher, who's like an actor, and Charlie Roth. I remember all this really well. It was just this time of year because it was *Shabbos Shira*. And Zalman's walking — I'm going through Brooklyn with Zalman, and Zalman knows like everybody. He's greeting them. He's giving them hugs. "Meshullam Zalman" they call him — you know, we didn't call him Meshullam Zalman, like that. It's not going to — I walked out of the (01:29:00) world, you know, into like a whole different thing. And then we stayed in someone's apartment — I can't remember, you don't need to know the details. But then we get to the *davening Shacharis* on Sunday morning, I think.

JG: Where?

MP: On 770. You know, if you walk on 770, there's like a big *beit midrash* behind, it's right there — in the anti-room. And there's the Rebbe. He's coming in. I think he gives Zalman a hug. That's my recollection. Zalman says no. It's an important detail. I think he does, maybe he doesn't. I feel Zalman is welcome there, tremendously. Zalman thinks he's being rejected, so it's — it's not a light moment for Zalman either. He's not doing it just for me. He's doing it, you know — he's going back to Lubavitch.

JG: What's the background on this that you're referring to?

MP: He's been separated. He was one of the first two shlichim for the Rebbe — (01:29:59) he and Shlomo. He'd gone — Shlomo Carlebach — he'd gone to Far River. He had continued to do what he thought was the work of the Rebbe. He felt that the rebbe —

he was the chassid of what we call the Frierdiker Rebbe, Yosef Yitzchak. And when the Frierdiker Rebbe died, he said to the immediate late rebbe, that he should be the rebbe. "We need a rebbe. we need him now, we need him to be you!" That's the story that Sam Heilman puts in his book on the Rebbe, so I think it's — I feel sure that it's true. I kind of remember Zalman telling me the story, but not directly. But the more Zalman gets involved with sex, drugs, and rock n' roll, the less Lubavitch he is. But he doesn't think that about himself. He thinks that he is — he even said it when David Ingber interviewed him once at Romemu, he said, "I'm still Lubavitch, if Lubavitch kept on changing. But Lubavitch stopped changing. But if they had kept on changing, I'd be in the middle of Lubavitch." (01:31:02) I felt that was one-hundred percent true. That was almost a creed for me. So then he says something to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe comes over to me, and he wants to know about neutrino spin. Do neutrinos spin and do they spin clockwise or counterclockwise? He asked me a comment on proton decay. And then he starts asking me questions on ionization issues. I knew all the answers to all the questions. They're not hard questions. They're questions that a first or second year student would know. He asked them like a thunder. They're coming like waves crashing against my head. It's like *whoo* — question after question. I know all the answers. I only say a word or a fragment of a word and then *whoo!*, another question comes. And all of a sudden, I am — I'm in a different space. (01:32:04) My head is — I don't know. The world is collapsing on my head, you know. And then he said, "Don't become a hasid. Go back to the university." And he walks off, like that. The whole thing takes about four or five minutes. And I — I just have to sit there for an hour or whatever it is. It feels like a day. I don't know exactly how long it is — and just kind of recover from that. And I never recovered from that. That was for me a kind of a — the velocity of time changed. That's what I felt. And I was just more awake and more aware, and more engaged. It was just a transformative moment for me.

JG: Why?

MP: I think it would have been for anybody. Because it was — it was kind of Buber again. It was (01:33:00) seeing that there were realms. We all live in the world of *Asiya*, the world of activity, and then sometimes we get into the world of *Yetzira* the world of forms, and I'm part of a form, and I can see that. But every once in a while, you can get into the world of *briya*, you know, the world of creation, and creativity, and where everything interlocks. And I just got a glimpse of that, and it was only a second, it was enough. There's a moment when Moshe Rabbeinu asks to see the face of God, the *kavod* of God, and God says this weird thing. Just after he says, you know, I know Moshe Rabbeinu, God says, *panim el panim k'ish el re'ehu*, "face to face like a person knows their friend." And all of a sudden, Moshe says, "Well, if that's true, I'd like to see your *kavod*." And God says, "You can't. You'll die." And I figure, Moshe says, "Okay, I'll

die, big deal. You're a God. What's dying? Dying is easy. I just want to see the *kavod*, and if that's it, that's it." (01:34:03) And he'd already seen the *kavod* in *kaf daled*, in twenty-four of Exodus, he'd already gone on, seen the throne. So Moshe Rabbeinu says, "God, I want to see your *kavod*." And God says, "You can see my back." And in the *havurah*, early on, one of the people in the *d'var torah* on that parashah, *Ki Tisa*, said, "It's so that Moshe Rabbeinu could wear the face of God like a mask." It's not face-to-face, it's face-in-face. It's Moshe Rabbeinu not thinking what he thought God looked like but being able to see through the eyes of God what God saw. And I felt that that moment, that the Rebbe, like he had done to many other people — Susan Handelman, who wrote a book called *Slaves of Moses*, something like that — she said she had the same exact experience I had, just standing in line to get a dollar! She said, she said — the experience, years later, after me — years after me — she said she felt the same way. She said, "I felt time elongating and then contracting." (01:34:59) And I figured, that was the world of *B'riyah*, that was the physics world. And that he did that through the velocity of his questions. Now, I'm sorry —

JG: Because of who he was?

MP: You know, in Islam there's the world "aya." An aya is a manifestation point. Sometimes they're physical, sometimes they're personal. So people go and do circumambulations around the graves of saints, because they're ayas — it's a place in which the realms open up. You know, underneath all this, I'm a bit of a mystic, you know. I'm a philosopher in some ways, but I'm a bit of a mystic. And I — I have felt that in many places, you know. In Assisi I felt it. I felt it in Varanasi, India, and I felt it with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Maybe I even felt it with Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

JG: What is it that creates that space for you, do you think? (01:36:00)

MP: You know — in the image of *tsimtsum*, often translated the "withdrawal of God," but I prefer the word "concentration of God," God withdraws and concentrates God into Godself. So at a certain level of concentration, because it has to be a lot of concentration, all the things I'm saying now are recollections. The real moments of my life are the ones I'm not recollecting, but I'm in that moment, right? The more in that moment I am, the more I can concentrate, so concentration — not just, you know, get my mind focused, but concentrate taking all the other stimuli in my life and forcing them into a small, espresso-like moment. You know, forcing the coffee through the filter that they all come in together, and then you have all the worlds together. It's —

JG: Is it a moment of almost perfect *kavanah*, is that what you mean?

MP: The *kavanah* comes before. *Kavanah* is intentionality, (01:37:07) so you have to have a *kavanah*. Zalman walking through the streets of Brooklyn, getting up early and things like that. That's the *kavanah*. The encounter is the encounter. It's not the *kavanah*. The encounter is the — Rav Kook has a beautiful poem called the “*Shir Meruba*” — “The Fourfold Song,” sometimes it's translated as. And in the fourth level, that's when all the other songs — the song of the self, the song of the people, the song of the world, the song of reality — align, and then you sing the *shir el*, you sing the song of God, and I feel sometimes I've been privileged to at least — at least notice that. I don't know if I've been able to sing it, but I've been able to at least notice it. I've been lucky. I'm not Zalman, I'm not even Ingber maybe, but I'm Paley. And that's what I got, you know, that was enough.

JG: Was there a connection for you between your experience (01:38:01) with the Rebbe, this very spiritual experience with the Rebbe, and what was going on in your life in the *havurah* and beyond?

MP: So the — the connection is in two sections. Number one, I had met a person, a man, with a big beard and piercing eyes, and I'd had an incredible transformative deepening, you know, experience of kind of what I understand to be Keatsian reverie. So when I came back to the *havurah* after that, I was much more alert to my experience of experiencing *tzadikim*, and central figures in the *havurah* as powerful men. And before that, I had put almost everything into the community, and into the transformative nature of the learning. But now I began to deal (01:39:00) with rebbes. And there were a number of rebbes in the *havurah*, and that was — that was, at very least, destabilizing to me.

JG: Destabilizing?

MP: Destabilizing. Because I just hadn't prepared myself. I'd had this — I was a kid, you know, and I was part of the *hevrah*. The *hevrah* was everything. We talked about the *hevrah*. And I'm a good *hevrahman*. Now all of a sudden I had, you know, big figures — Art and Zalman and to a certain degree Eddie and Hillel. They were people that weighed in. And then it seems to me — after the Rebbe, I kind of felt, whoa, who am I to be here? I hadn't known that before. I was naive. And so for me as a sixteen and seventeen year old, to walk into this heavy group of people, you know — it's unnatural that it could have happened. It's not (01:40:00) obvious. I should have been intimidated or silenced or I don't know! Certainly not part of it, and I was part of it because I didn't know. When I come back from the Rebbe, I do know. And Buzzy is probably a piece of that. He was my Hebrew teacher at Brandeis, and I took Bible class from him for a grade. No grades at the *havurah*, so now all of a sudden I'm writing papers and things like that. No papers at the *havurah*. *Havurah* is a dyslexic dream. You know, it's all oral, and it's slow, and it's deep, and it's abiding. And all of a sudden it's people telling me I'm right

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about this and wrong about that. It was very — it did change it, because the Lubavitch has so much rebbe center.

JG: The *havurah*, though, was — at least in terms of its expressed ideal — was non-hierarchical and egalitarian. And yet there was this question of leadership, authority of all kinds that was somehow (01:41:04) at the, also at the center.

MP: So it had not been at the center for me, and then it was at the center for me. It was at the center because Art and Michael Birnbaum, you know, from the Holocaust Memorial and things like that, took me for a three hour walk to tell me I wasn't allowed to go to JTS. It's not allowed — of course, if I wanted to go, I could have gone. But they dissuaded me, you know — all of a sudden they were *rebbe* figures telling me things. Yes, that's right.

JG: So this was while you were at Brandeis, you were still thinking about wanting to be a rabbi, you wanted to be a rabbi.

MP: I was one hundred percent directed to being a rabbi.

JG: And why were they telling you not to go to JTS?

MP: Because they didn't like it, it was going to hurt my soul, it would damage me. It wasn't an egalitarian experience. It was a bunch of heavy figures. And to a certain degree they, at that moment, became also heavy figures. (01:42:01) Not that I didn't still love them. I did love them, and I felt loved by them. And I still feel loved by them.

JG: Did you want to go to JTS?

MP: I had thought that I would, yes.

JG: What about RRC [Reconstructionist Rabbinical College]?

MP: So I went to RRC because Art told me that I shouldn't go to JTS, particularly after Heschel died. Heschel died in '72, right in the middle of my move towards JTS, and I wanted to study with him, so now I couldn't.

JG: And HUC [Hebrew Union College] was not in the —

MP: No, I wasn't Reform, I was — if anything, I would have gone to YU [Yeshiva University]. And RRC was — so interesting that the RRC odyssey for me, and I think

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about it in that way — it's not the RRC of today. It was RRC in North Philadelphia. It was in a terrible area. It was — it was just a terrible place.

JG: It was also new!

MP: It was relatively new. It started in '68, same as the *havurah*. And I was a *havurah* guy, and Allan Lehmann, (01:43:00) my friend from the *havurah*, we went together. We almost missed the plane to get there — lots of stories, but you know, we were slothful, and we were not — we weren't serious in the way that people are kind of serious about things. But we were imbued with Torah, you know. We thought that that might make up for it. I think in some ways it did. In many ways it didn't. But, you know, Kaplan — Mordecai Kaplan — had understood Judaism as an evolving religious civilization, the famous catchline of his. So we said, Well, if it's evolving, it should have spirituality in it because spirituality is the tune of the late twentieth century. And they said, No, no. We meant evolving until the middle of the twentieth century, that's it. We're just going to stop. And so that was — that was devastating, you know, in some ways. And the Talmud guy held us in low esteem, and the Bible guy was pedantic, and — it was a very painful experience. In the meantime, (01:43:59) I was right, of course. If it's an evolving religious civilization, then it should have been more and more like the *havurah*. And ultimately, Art becomes the president, and Zalman teaches there, and Waskow teaches there, and Mordechai Liebling, and Jacob Staub is my very good friend, and all that stuff. The gay issues, and things like that. So I'm completely vindicated by what happened.

JG: Not in your time.

MP: Just not in my time. I was ahead of the curve. But completely, completely vindicated by it.

JG: Let's go back to the *havurah* though. And the issue that we were just talking about —

MP: Of rebbes.

JG: Of rebbes. Many people have said that what distinguished Havurat Shalom from other intentional communities and of Jewish Renewal in particular — what became Jewish Renewal — was (01:45:01) that there were no rebbes, there was no rebbe, intentionally. So can you just talk a little bit though about that issue, how it actually felt on the ground as the community grappled with it, and as Art grappled with it, and other people who were sort of esteemed, charismatic figures within, and teachers.

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MP: Well, you had a number of charismatic figures, right. Not just Art, but others as well. And some kind of — I don't know, they were charismatic in some weird way, but just low level. Steve Zweibaum or I don't know, there were lots of charismatic people. And then charming figures, you know. Barry Holtz, he was charming, you know. And it was a huge tension. It was just a huge tension. Now, one of the real leaders of the no-charismatic, no-leadership people was Kugel, who was a charismatic leader himself. So the Dorton crowd was really leaderless. And intentionally so. And radical communitarians. No leaders. It would come out of the fabric of the interactions of the people.

JG: Did Dorton exist at the time that you first became involved?

MP: Well, I first met people on Franklin Street. Dorton means, literally, "over there," and it was — the *havurah* was on College Ave, and I think Dorton was also on College Ave.

JG: On the other side —

MP: The green house on the other side of Powderhouse Boulevard. It was maybe a four or five-minute walk. But it was a long walk, you know, psychically. Weirdly, the day I got married, we went back to Dorton, which was being lent to some *haverim* for the summer, and it burned down.

JG: It burned down?

MP: Maybe not down to the ground, but the whole like top of the floors, all burned up, yeah. Electrical fire. And Dorton was a horrible place. (01:47:05) The *havurah* had its own problems, but it was charming. Prayer rooms and macramé, things like that. Dorton had Steve Genden's cats in it, so it smelled like cat shit, and it was horrible. But it was the radical sixties, you know. It was Stef resisting the draft, and it was Kugel being a part of the Harvard Fellows but being one of us. And it was like — it was a place of deep intentionality and deep leaderless society. And in a leaderless society, seventeen-year-olds could say whatever the hell they wanted, and that was cherished, because, after all — leaderless. We're not going to be leaders with you here! Even if what I said was stupid most of the time — who knows, it might have been stupid most of the time — they were at least committed to it, and maybe I was cute enough, or whatever. But the *havurah* — (01:47:59) if you got invited to Art and Kathy's for Friday night, you were going to the rebbe's house, you know. It was dark and you ate artichokes — I'd never eaten artichokes before; I didn't even know how to eat them — in the dark. You could die! They — and the habits of the *havurah* were started by some of those people.

JG: What do you mean by the habits?

MP: The way we do the *Birkat*, the way we — we wouldn't do this song; we did others. It was *havurai n'vorech* instead of *rabotai n'vorech*. These are little changes but it was — I can say it better. We sat in a circle, right? And even at the dinner table, we sat in a circle, around the dinner table. And it was different than a guy at the *bimah* leading the *davening*. If you have a guy standing up, leading the *davening*, and facing away from the community, you're leading it towards God. If you sit around in a circle, (01:49:02) both the prayer and at the dinner, you are *davening* to each other. And you're caring a lot about what other people are thinking about you, and what you're thinking about them. You are working through the interpersonal all the time. And the interpersonal has marshals and sheriffs. So, people who are going to come in and say, You're behaving badly here, or You're always late and we can't count on you, or You get to teach a class, and, you don't get to teach a class. And that was the tension of the *havurah*. The Dorton people felt betrayed by that. And in some ways, I felt betrayed by that also, but because I was part of the Dorton group, every morning, you know, we used to *daven*; we started to *daven* every morning. I used to cry — I used to literally break into tears in the *davening* in the morning.

JG: Because?

MP: I don't know, you know. Because I was moved by the whole thing. I felt my life being rescued before my very eyes. But then the *havurah* was filled with (01:50:03) wonderful people, you know. And so — but there was a hierarchy there. And the hierarchy was in an aristocracy, and we knew what the aristocracy was. Learning, you know. Somewhat age. If you were there in the first year. Memory. And Jewish skills.

JG: Memory, as in institutional memory?

MP: Memory in general — memory of the old country, memory of — I don't know, memory. Memory was very important. You know, Yerushalmi's *Zakhor*. He wrote it after the *havurah*, but it's a good book. If you had this kind of communal sense of memory that you could access the fragmented past — Zalman wrote a book. I think it's called *Future of a Fragmented Scroll*. This is all part of this, you know. (01:51:01) Zalman came in and he was — whatever Zalman did, we, wow! And Everett also. Everett was older. He was part of the aristocracy of age.

JG: Somebody mentioned a feeling of what he called “religious intimidation” with worship services, kind of worship, and that's what he was referring to at the time. But I

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think it was a broader comment as well. That it wasn't until Art actually left that some people felt able or free or willing to put themselves forward as leaders of *davening* or anything else. Is that ringing right to you?

MP: It rings a hundred percent true, but I have to say the loss of Green's creativity, mind, linguistic ability, (01:52:02) everything, was — it was priceless.

JG: Profound.

MP: Profound. So as much as other leaders could emerge, the loss was profound. That's what I came to understand, and that's what, I think, even then I understood. I was in Philadelphia because I wanted to be near him again.

JG: One of the ways in which the community came together regularly was for communal meals, followed by meetings, often. Not always meetings, but often.

MP: Always.

JG: Excuse me?

MP: I think always, right?

JG: I think sometimes there were talks or lectures or something like that. Not always a meeting.

MP: Right. But always move from the eating. I remember, Barry was in charge of moving us into the next room.

JG: But there were different purposes. And often these meetings — and many people have commented that these were quite fraught, emotionally fraught meetings. And tremendous tension between what some people have called individuality (01:53:06) and communality.

MP: Well, we had agenda-less meetings. Did anybody else mention that? We had a thing called the agenda-less meeting, and that was when we attacked each other. In a kind of Musar way, you know. “You're really pissing me off!” “You're taking up too much air time!” It was a criticism circle.

JG: In the name of openness.

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MP: In the name of community. Not just openness. Openness would just be, "I'm telling you what I really think." That would be honesty. Honesty and openness often go together. This was very much, "We are the group of people. We have a special spiritual mission. We need to — and we need to be together in it." And therefore we are going to criticize each other to be together.

JG: Did you —

MP: And you could get hurt in those meetings!

JG: Yeah.

MP: Yeah. And you could hurt people in the meetings! I think (01:54:02) I did a little bit of both. Yeah. I regret them, a little bit. But it was like, a little Communist, you know. Not commune-ist. Communist. Re-education circles.

JG: Another thing about these meetings and the community was it was largely a male community.

MP: Yeah, it was largely.

JG: I mean, the women who were there in the beginning were girlfriends and sometimes wives.

MP: Right.

JG: But they weren't members in the same sense; they weren't formal members.

MP: And no women that weren't connected to men, in the beginning.

JG: There was one, people said. I don't know her —

MP: Barbara Mankow?

JG: I don't know.

MP: Harriett Mann? Maybe Harriett Mann, Alex Orr —

JG: Maybe Harriett. There was one person. But basically —

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MP: Ruby — (01:55:02) But she was connected to Noam.

JG: How do you think this affected male to male kinds of relationships in the community? The fact of its maleness.

MP: Well — I think that — I used to have this theory in the *havurah*, which is that there were four things you would do all out, right? *Daven* — if you *daven* less than with your whole heart, you weren't really *davening*. Learn — if you didn't really engage in the learning, you weren't really learning. Something else, and baseball. Because baseball, if you're having a catch and you don't throw the ball hard, you know — it's a toss, nothing. But I knew that baseball was a (01:56:02) placeholder for erotic connections. And so one of the things that I learned in the *havurah*, and which I think about and affects me a lot, is the male nature of this community engaging in highly intense relationships and trying to deny the eros of them — when the eros is going to come for sure. And I was a tender boy at the time, and that was the first time that I was ever exposed to that. So remember, at the end of every *davening* we would hug each other hard. Hard. Not just like, little clamshell hugs. Bearhugs, you know! We touched each other a lot, and we ran, and (01:56:59) we — we were of that age, and there were some people that were quite open to that experience. And I wasn't one of them, but I was swept up in it to a degree that I would not have expected in the rest of my regular life.

JG: Sounds in some ways to me the ways in which young girls and women have crushes, in a sense, on other women — on older women, charismatic and strong women.

MP: We had crushes on each other, we did. But we had more than crushes, you know. We were highly engaged with each other. The Gemara is written by people who are highly engaged with each other. It's written; those are the stories. And you don't have very much of erotica in there, but you have a little bit. But we were, you know — Joey was studying the stuff with Kolberg, and you know, it was — the eros of it. We're in a post-Freudian world. We (01:58:02) know about eros. There was eros. And Shabbos — I learned this about Romemu. I learned it about BJ [B'nai Jeshurun] at a certain time, I learned about Lincoln Square another time. These are good pickup joints, as well. And if you really wanted to get laid, you could probably do it at the *havurah*, you know. On a Friday night. I was — I responded to that in a very clear way. I got married.

JG: At age nineteen.

MP: At age nineteen.

JG: To your high school girlfriend.

MP: To my high school girlfriend. I just wasn't — I mean, and after long reflection on that, I think that was really a part of it. If you learn with a person the way we learned with each other, for long enough, and it's not that long, you fall in love. That's the facts. It happened at Brovenders, it happened at Dartmouth when I was at Dartmouth. It happens all the time. You fall in love. And sometimes the person's appropriate, sometimes the person's not. I fell in love with these people. And I fell in love with them in a way that I had an activity that (01:59:01) could sustain it. And the erotic dimension of it was also there, and it made the whole thing much more fraught.

JG: Did the charismatic nature of the leaders also sort of contribute to that, or not?

MP: Of course it contributed to it an enormous amount. We just did want to tear down the walls between us. That's what the meetings were. You can read about it in the manual of discipline in the Qumran texts. They had it, too. You know? So if you sit and you have the meals — I can remember the meals. String beans with mushroom soup on it, the little crinkly onions, fried onions. I can remember who brought the bulgur wheat, and we all went to the co-op and things like that. But that was all a — that was all a staging area for very intense meetings that had intense results to them. (02:00:02) There's a lot I'm not saying here, you know, because I'm not going to say it. But I don't want to blink on it either. And by the way — Brook Farm, the Transcendentals of Brook Farm, they also had to talk about this. There is no communal experience — and we were a communal experience, more than Fabrangon, more than the New York Havurah — we were a communal experience, we were in each other's faces.

JG: What role did women have in these early years?

MP: So in the beginning, they were everybody's wives and girlfriends. And it was the — the post-birth control era.

JG: The beginning of sexual liberation.

MP: Sexual liberation. So, yeah, I always say this as a joke. But my theory of divine providence is that God comes to Adam and Eve and says, "Okay, you sinned. You have to be good now for 5,000 years." And God comes back to us in 1968 and says, "All right, for the next fifteen years, have a fantastic time." I use another word usually. And I was exactly the right age for the fantastic time. (02:01:01) [*blows kiss*] Thank you, God. You know, so — I mean, really! That was the — and people took full advantage of that. I think it was one of the only times in human history that you go to some woman at the end of *davening* and say, "Would you like to sleep with me?" And they'd say, "Okay!"

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[*laughs*] "It won't mean anything. I might not even remember your name." "Okay! You know, it's only rubbing. It's the afternoon. I'm happy. Sure, sure it's Shabbos, why not? Let's go, let's go!" Really, like that. But that also led to lots of other things, and people felt, you know, bruised up by that. In the third year of the *havurah*, Sharon Strassfeld came. That was a big change. She could really *daven*. We didn't have anybody that could really *daven* before that.

JG: A woman.

MP: A woman, yeah. We didn't have any women, sorry, I don't know why I said it that way. The women just — it became a thing of the *havurah*, that it should be (02:02:02) egalitarian. In the beginning, we just didn't have any liabilities. It wasn't like you couldn't get an aliyah if you were a woman. But remember, most of us are coming from suburban synagogues where women didn't have aliyot. Even in 1968. I'd never seen a woman have an aliyah. Not that I'd never seen people *daven* while sitting on a cushion on the floor. Everything was new. But that just didn't occur to me, that you could do that. And that people were changing the liturgy.

JG: Art, in an article that was published, I think in *Pakn Treger* of the Yiddish Book Center, in the past year, talked about this period, the beginnings of the *havurah*, Havurat Shalom, as a pre-feminist moment.

MP: It was a pre-feminist moment. It was — you know, Stonewall had been what, fifteen minutes before?

JG: Right.

MP: We didn't — we had a few people who were quite out — Maurie Pomerantz, and Burton Weiss — people like that. They weren't in the *havurah*, but they were around the *havurah* (02:03:00) a lot. And there were some people that were in the *havurah* that weren't. And I just never heard of that stuff. I really hadn't heard of it. You can't imagine. We didn't know that women were supposed to be equal. It just never occurred to people. He's right — it was pre-feminist. But it was then feminist.

JG: It then became feminist, you're saying.

MP: Absolutely. I do think that we tried. Both men and women tried as hard as they could to catch up to that. And we felt bad about it.

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JG: Yeah. We'll come back to that in a minute when we talk about *tefilah*. But I wanted to ask you, were you aware of the *b'rit*, the covenant that was circulated and proposed.

MP: I was, yeah.

JG: When was that? This happened in the first year?

MP: No. Second year. Second year. Yes, the first year in Somerville. (02:04:03)

JG: First year in Somerville.

MP: Since I remember first year on Franklin Street. I think of it as the second year. And it was the second year of the *havurah*, that's what we called it, the second year of the *havurah*.

JG: And why was there a *b'rit* written? What was that all about?

MP: I can't remember.

JG: Was that a response to tensions, these tensions around relationships within the *havurah*?

MP: That's a long time ago. I have to remember. I actually do think I have a copy — in my file, on the top of the — and I remember it well. Well, I'll respond to it in the following way. This is not a full response, because I can't remember. And when I can't remember something, it shocks me. But you know, the New York Havurah, with John Ruskay and people like that, they had no membership. (02:05:00) Right?

JG: They did have membership. Fabrangen had no membership.

MP: I think the New York Havurah, anybody who wanted to join could join. They had interviews and they could reject you?

JG: Yeah. Fabrangen had none.

MP: Hmm. I trust you on this one. Well, we did have membership, right. And you could get rejected.

JG: Did you actually have to apply for membership at some point?

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MP: One hundred percent. It wasn't me — I was a shoo-in to the *havurah*, you know.

JG: But you had to go through —

MP: It was my wife, my wife at the time, you know, she had never — she was my wife. That's the only connection that she really had. So, Ellen Cohen, you know, she didn't lead *davening*. She did cooking and things like that, but she wasn't like a — she wasn't coming to classes very much, and she wasn't a *hevrah* person. And yet, she wanted to be in the *havurah*. I didn't want to be in the *havurah* and her not, and she had to go through interviews. And people said, "Well, we don't really know you very well, and you're not really opening up yourself. And you're — (02:06:03) you have to invite us more." All these kind of things. It was like a real — it was somewhat traumatic. And the *b'rit* was somewhere around all that. There were conditions to being in the *havurah* because we wanted to make it an intentional community. But yes, I also had interviews with the *havurah* members. But I don't feel that they were tense for me. I was already very much part of the group.

JG: Was this at the point that you were at Brandeis?

MP: I was.

JG: So you'd already been part of the group.

MP: I was already part of the group.

JG: I imagine that it wasn't very tense for you.

MP: It wasn't tense for me. But we were rejecting people right and left. Just — we should be clear about that — it was a closed group. And lots of people got injured by not being admitted to the *havurah*. There's a famous case of a couple that now lives in Houston; I think he might have died, actually. They were in in the Wexner Program, and (02:07:06) he was going to Harvard Business School, you know. And so we said, "We're not going to have a guy from Harvard Business School in the *havurah*." So we just, "You're not our kind of guy. You're in Harvard Business School." And I remember Sharon was going to quit over that, "What does that mean? This guy does business school, that's enough of a reason not to have them?" And it was something like that. It was kind of a manifesto of ideology that if you didn't feel part of that, then you really weren't in the *havurah*. The *havurah* became pretty well known all of a sudden. We felt ourselves to be slightly famous, you know? Not famous like famous, but famous, like —

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JG: How did that happen, that people knew about what was going on?

MP: The *havurah* started having lots of people come on Shabbos morning. Friday night was only for the members and some fellow travelers. I always went on Friday night, I think even before I was a member. But it was small. And then everybody, everybody went to somebody's house for dinner (02:08:02) and if you didn't get invited to dinner, you could invite yourself to dinner. That was the rule. So, you know, "I'd like to come to your house for dinner." Okay, they couldn't say no. Everybody had to live within walking distance, except for Hillel Levine —

JG: And you, sort of.

MP: No, no, I — Annie, ugh Ellen. [*laughs*] Ellen lived at Tufts.

JG: So you were close.

MP: I was close. Easily within walking distance. And then I lived on Kenwood Street, so it was right across the street.

JG: Did you and Ellen become an inviting couple, in addition? Because this was — Havurat Shalom was known as a Shabbat inviting community.

MP: That's right. We were Shabbat inviters.

JG: You were?

MP: Absolutely. Every week.

JG: Every week?

MP: Every week.

JG: So you didn't actually end up going to other people's houses so much?

MP: We were very much more inviters. We were very settled. It was a big statement for us. We lived close, (02:09:01) Ellen was a really good cook, we lived in a nice place, I could afford it. I don't think that the affording it was a minor aspect, you know? People were graduate students. They didn't have any money.

JG: What about the style of Shabbos dinners?

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MP: Yeah. It was very stylized! Very.

JG: And people had somewhat different styles, ways of doing it, no?

MP: They did, but then we would complain about them. There was a certain —

JG: Such as what? Were there people — I guess part of my question is, you hadn't grown up with a rich Erev Shabbat dinner tradition.

MP: It's true. Right.

JG: So how did you learn, imbibe, how you wanted to be as an inviter?

MP: It's an excellent and (02:10:01) complex question. I'm just kind of calibrating the honesty and openness of my answer here.

JG: Please do.

MP: *[laughs]* It was all fake in some ways. No one really had grown up in this way. Green didn't grow up in this way. Zalman didn't grow up in this way. Epi was the repository of authentic dinners. When I was very young, Brooks and Feld, people like that, would invite me over. I learned a lot about it. To do it myself, was like, a real thing. And then people would come and criticize me. They would come and tell me, "You know, you don't say the *Birkat* right. These are not the tunes we use. You don't sing enough after. You don't sing enough before." I would ask, and people would, in no uncertain terms, tell me how to do it.

JG: If you hadn't asked, would people have told you? (02:11:01)

MP: I think yes. Yes, they would have. It was highly stylized.

JG: Was there a *havurah* style that was within bounds, or was there variability within that? It sounds to me that there were — people did it somewhat differently.

MP: People did it somewhat differently. So Sharon and Michael were *frum-er*, because he had gone to YU and she had gone to Stern. She wore a *tichel* on Friday night. You know, it was a — that was a *frum-er* experience. But no one used lights. Even the people who used lights on Shabbos didn't use lights at the dinner. It was always dark. It was always

candles. It was always grains. Everybody was always being a vegetarian because of sensitivity. We were trying to be sensitive to each other.

JG: Maybe cost, as you were just saying.

MP: Maybe cost. Green was long — right, he had long dinners. You would get there just after *davening*. You wouldn't get home until like eleven o'clock at night. It was very long and you would only understand about a third of what had gone on. And I didn't know what I was (02:12:02) eating all the time. He actually — they had chicken that they would start making before Shabbos and by the time we ate it, it had disintegrated into the pot. But it was all very — you went to, Green's house was, *whoo*, it was fantastic. Brooks ate meat regardless of who you were. He was in your face in that way. So there were lots of differences. And there were single guys, you know. Joel Rosenberg, and George, and Richie, and people like that. They didn't have wives. I had a wife, almost right from the beginning. So, we were the inviters because we had a family and they were the single guys; they would come.

JG: So the single guys would tend to be invited by the couples.

MP: Or they'd invite themselves. Often they'd invite themselves. But I set up my apartment so I could do all this stuff, you know? Long table, and more chairs than most people would have. We'd bake our own challahs. (02:13:03) You know, we were the do-it-yourself Jewish kit. So I was very much interested in the *niggunim*, and I — you would come to my house on a Friday night, and we'd sing a lot. A lot. Sometimes we'd have home and homes. You know, come to my house on Friday night, I'll come to your house Shabbos lunch.

JG: Was Shabbos lunch a thing?

MP: It was absolutely a thing. Absolutely, yes. Shabbos lunch was a thing. And we would gather. I mean, the whole thing — I remember the whole thing, now that you mention it. We would gather in the foyer of the *havurah* and we would gather into little groups that you were then going to escort home. Something very beautiful — Alfie Marcus and Judy, Alfie and Judy Marcus lived next to us. And we were *punkt*. We would light the Shabbos light at exactly the same moment. We could see each other through the windows in Somerville. It made you feel like you were in, I don't know, Podolya, I don't know, B'ri Brisk. [*laughs*] (02:14:02) It was like — and then there was the going around. So, that was highly stylized also. Some families that we went to — some couples, everyone would bring a story and a little talking point. And other people, they'd let the conversation go.

JG: Wherever it would go.

MP: Wherever it would go. But many people did not. You — parashah, we did; someone brought a text. You know, as I got more learned and things, I brought better texts, I think. Lehmann was my very good friend and we would pick texts out, study them in the afternoon. Hebrew was an issue.

JG: Hebrew was an issue?

MP: For me it was. My Hebrew wasn't very good. I couldn't just kind of sit and translate. But other people at the table could sit and translate. So —

JG: One of the first things you said about your *havurah* experience overall was the intensity of your first experience (02:15:05) of Kabbalat Shabbat and then Shabbos dinner at the Brookses.

MP: Right.

JG: Did — as time went on, and this was part of the fabric of the communal life, did those continue to be such spiritually intense —?

MP: Nothing like it. Nothing like *davening* on a Friday night with the *havurah*. Nothing like it. It was wonderful. Almost without failure, every week, it was great. The singing was great. We knew each other. I'll just say two things about it. I remember years later, like in the early eighties, Dovid and Shayna came to Hanover where I was the rabbi, and they come to Friday night dinner. Friday *davening*. And I had, based on the *havurah*, built a *davening* for the Dartmouth Hillel that was like the *davening* at the *havurah*. (02:16:02) We knew each other well. Many of the people became rabbis from that group. Nancy Flam became the head of the Spirituality Institute, and David Seidenberg just wrote a book on ecology and Kabbalah, and Shirley Idelson became the Dean of Students at Hebrew Union College. It was very talented group of people that went on. Rob Eshman is now the editor of the *Jewish Journal* in L.A. They were all at my table, in my little *davening* at Dartmouth Hillel. And David was in tears at the end of it. He says, "That's what it felt like." I did the whole thing — flickering candles, not electric lights. I let them burn out, the whole thing. That was amazing. That was a spiritual experience.

JG: So this formula that you're talking about, so to speak, almost a formula —

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MP: I can say it, yeah, formula.

JG: For Kabbalat Shabbat, followed by these small, intimate, intense dinners worked.

MP: Can you imagine? Wouldn't that be great? (02:17:09)

JG: Yeah.

MP: It's not that I'm that far. I still go to shul, and I still have dinners on Friday nights. Every Friday night.

JG: Are they the same?

MP: They're not as good. I'm older. We don't turn the lights down. Still good though. Better than most people's. I'd stack my Friday nights up against anybody else's. They were neo-hasidic. They were really neo-hasidic in that way. They were intense, and they were literate, and they were vibrant. Very fresh. Something very fresh about it.

JG: Did music play a role?

MP: So, Green used music and many people used music, and I didn't use music.

JG: At his Shabbat dinner?

MP: At Shabbat dinner. I think —

JG: You did not, you're saying?

MP: I did not. I was *frum-er*. I became *frum-er* and remained *frum-er* than most of the people.

JG: So why didn't you use music?

MP: Because it was electric — you mean, electric music?

JG: No, I mean singing.

MP: Oh, singing. Yes, I sang. (02:18:01) And sang and sang. Oh yeah, singing. But he — he put records on.

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JG: What kind of records?

MP: Bach's B-minor mass, Missa Luba once, *niggunim* from the Mojitz album. Recorded music. That's what I meant. But I didn't — I only sang. I sang my heart out! I love singing. I loved it then and I love it now. I still sing on Friday night. I still sing. Between when we wash our hands and before we sing the *Motzi*, I sing three or four *niggunim*. I am committed to it.

JG: And it works.

MP: Yeah, it's great. You know, Ebn Leader — my mother died eight years ago, and Ebn Leader came on Christmas morning. The Christmas part was not significant, but that's what it was. And he came to my mother's apartment, and the Reimers and Greens and (02:19:03) Lehmanns and Novaks and Polens — Nehemia and Lauri Polen, and all these people.

JG: What's your relation to Ebn?

MP: Nothing. The Leader Minyan in Israel. The Leader Minyan in some ways has a *havurah* part of it. And it was Hanukkah. And he led the *davening*, and my brother and sister and I just cried and cried and cried. And I really — my brother-in-law, who is not religious, he came over to me and said, "Well, I just didn't know that's what *davening* was. Who would know that? Anybody would want to do that every day. You would never not want to do that." And I said, "That's it." Because as soon as — forty years with all those people, forty-five, whatever it is — we were sitting on the floor again. The prayers mean something. Prayers don't mean anything in most shuls. You can't say what the prayers mean, and what they're about, how they work. (02:20:05) In the *havurah*, the prayers worked. We knew what they were about. It's remarkable. Almost no minyan does that.

JG: Was it something about knowing what they meant and what they were about, or was it also to do with really understanding the structure?

MP: They were one hundred percent mirrors. So what we looked like that day when we looked into the prayers is how we saw ourselves differently each time. They were — they were self-expression and also communal cohesion experiences. Not everybody — on Shabbos morning, a lot of people came to the *havurah* — they all enjoyed it. They sat on the couches, they sat on the cushions —

JG: The community.

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MP: We were having a different *davening*. There was no doubt. We were having a different *davening*.

JG: Different what?

MP: Different *davening*, we were experimenting, we were getting to know each other through the liturgy. (02:21:04) It was a ritual. It's different.

JG: Many people talk about the tension between innovation and tradition in *tefilah* and in the structure of the service, the liturgy at Havurat Shalom. How did you experience that — that tension, and the kinds of — what kinds of experimentation do you recall, that worked, or that didn't?

MP: You know — *Ein Kamocha* didn't work — no, not *Ein Kamocha*, but —

JG: *Adon Olam*?

MP: No, not *Adon Olam*, the one just before. *Ein Keloheinu*. Didn't work. Gone! We didn't even stand in *Minyan M'at* because we're the Boston *havurah*, we don't say it. (02:22:02) *Pseukei Dezimra*, silent often. Or maybe one of the *tehilim*, not all of the *tehilim*. Themes that people would pick up, so they would say a *pasuk* that would go all the way through. Maybe it was a snowy day, so we would do the snow sentences in it. Everything — it was dynamic, but we used the Birnbaum siddur, and we used *Nusach Sefard*, so it was different then. I don't know if that makes any —

JG: Say it for the —

MP: Yeah, so there are three kinds of liturgies. There's Ashkenazi liturgy, there's the Sefardic and *Edot ha'Mizrach*, the Eastern land Jewish liturgy, and then there's the liturgy that the hasidim used. And the hasidim used the *Sefardi* liturgy but for Ashkenazim. So it was a very small minority, you know. You kind of had to look (02:23:05) for the books. And we used that. We used *Nusach Sefard*, so it has more mystical elements, *keter yitnu* you know, crown of God, like that. So the mystical elements in our things were both innovative, because they weren't using that at Mishkan Tefila. They didn't even know what that was at Mishkan Tefila. And yet, there was this fidelity to a tradition. So the tradition was —

JG: About the traditional sensibility, that was at the heart.

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MP: It was. But I can't say that it was an easy negotiation. First of all, could be too long.

JG: The service?

MP: Yeah, it was too long. You know, if you do it intentionally, it's too long. It goes on for hours. You know. We didn't like that, so we cut a lot of stuff out. It's a kind of a — in Hungary there's a Jewish movement called Neolog, which is Orthodox but only doing the stuff that you do. A lot stuff you don't do! (02:24:06) Like to drive in on Shabbos, we don't care about that, so we drive on Shabbos. But when we go to shul, we expect *frum*. So we were *frum* about some things, and we were completely nothing about other stuff, you know.

JG: What were you *frum* about? And what were you nothing about, or just completely innovative and experimental about?

MP: So, we were mostly *frum* about from *Nishmat* until — you know, the centerpiece of the *davening*.

JG: What does that mean, that you were mostly *frum* about it, traditional about it?

MP: If you didn't do it, you had to really have a reason not to do it. If you innovated at all, taking out one of the blessings before the *Shema*, or not doing the *Barachu*, or, like that, you had to really — after Zalman, who was much more experimental than any of us, because he knew the liturgy so much better — *daven*-ology, as you can say — we had set things that we had kind of agreed on doing. (02:25:03) But all the other stuff, you were on your own. We prepared the *davening*, we really prepared. And most people don't prepare *davening*, they just *daven*. We prepared.

JG: You, on your own, meaning that each person who was leading —

MP: Yeah, I led a lot. I led the *davening* a lot. I've never led the *davening* as much — when I was at Dartmouth, I led all the *davening*. But in the *havurah* I led the *davening* a lot.

JG: At what point did you feel comfortable starting to lead *davening*?

MP: I was pretty young, I think I was maybe in the third year when I decided I'd do it. It may be that my *Aufruf* is the first time that I led it, so I was still nineteen. And I felt comfortable. I don't know why. I don't know why. But I *davened* a lot. I think I have a

good enough voice. So I think that was helpful to me. And I wasn't innovative in the beginning, but then I was innovative. I really worked hard on it.

JG: What can you — talk about some of the ways in which you decided to experiment and innovate? And what worked, what didn't work, from your perspective? (02:26:03)

MP: Well, you know, there's a phrase — “*Af tikon teivel, bal timot*” — “I set it in its course and will not let it shake,” and so I used that once as a — I don't know why this is coming to my mind; maybe the insecurity of saying all these things to you — but I used it as kind of a mantic element. So at the end of every one of the songs, and even the pieces of the *Baruchu* and the *Shema* and the *Amidah*, I used the phrase “*af tikon*” so that people — and I would yell it sometimes, and I would whisper it, and sometimes I would repeat it many times — “*af tikon*” — like thirty or forty times, like that. So it was — and it was at a time in which I felt that the whole *havurah* was particularly shaky and insecure. We had just, it was just after the '73 war, I think, and it was maybe about the '73 war. (02:27:06) So that would be like an example of something that I did. But of course it changed the whole *davening*, because it's a phrase that you're using in a repetitive way. I just kind of remember that being successful. I never did it after that.

JG: Can you translate it again?

MP: “He sets the world in his course and does not let it shake.” It's from Psalm twenty-nine, ninety-three — something, I don't know. You know where it's from. It's just after “*Tzadik Katamar*. And then “*Tzadik Katamar* we used to do, we did in big band — “*tza-dik ka-taa-mar yifrach — da na na na.*” Then we'd do trombones and things like that. We'd march around, you know, because it was — yeah, we'd march around. One time I came and there were tables in the basement. In the prayer room, you know, and everybody's wearing hats. So we affected Poland. It was very creative. You could do that. (02:28:04) Kazoos, people would bring kazoos. No musical instruments.

JG: No musical instruments?

MP: I don't know why. Rhythm blocks, things like that.

JG: No guitars?

MP: No guitars. I can't — maybe that's not right. Maybe Novak played the guitar. He's a really good guitar player. Yes, maybe there were musical instruments. Yes, I'm sure that there were, because Zalman had once said that the reason we don't do musical instruments is *zichron hurban ha-bayit*, the recollection of the destruction of the Temple.

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And he said, "If we keep on recollecting the destruction of the Temple, don't worry, we'll be destroyed completely." [*laughs*] We should stop mourning the past and start rebuilding the future.

JG: To what extent did people bring in materials that were sort of non-Jewish sources — just other sources?

MP: Yeah, yeah, they did. (02:29:04)

JG: Do you remember any songs —

MP: Patchen, and Marge Piercy, and Merle Feld wrote poems, you know — in a feminist voice. Then people translated the prayers to a feminist voice, sometimes.

JG: At what point was that?

MP: I think that was actually in the fourth year. We didn't do it until the fourth year. But I can't be sure. I can't remember the distinctions. But I remember doing it. I remember this was a whole translation workshop project, to do that.

JG: Let's go back for a second. When you first started, did women play any role in public worship that you recall?

MP: Not that I know of. They did — they had aliyot.

JG: They had aliyot?

MP: Absolutely. And maybe they even *leyned*.

JG: Before Sharon?

MP: I think so. They had aliyot for sure. We weren't trying to be sexist. We just didn't know.

JG: When were women counted in a minyan? (02:30:02)

MP: I think always. I think always, to tell you the truth. Did other people say that?

JG: I believe we were told that there was a retreat at which someone needed to say kaddish and there were nine guys.

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MP: Was it Mona?

JG: It might have been Mona.

MP: I remember that.

JG: And there was a decision made — "Why can't I be counted?" — and the decision was made.

MP: Because it's obvious.

JG: It was obvious to people in this community.

MP: We weren't bad about it. We just didn't know. No one had ever done it.

JG: Yeah.

MP: You know?

JG: When do you remember there being any conversation about women's roles in public worship?

MP: Well, the — in the position papers, there were already comments about it. Kathleen Cohen, didn't she draw — I think it says, "I'm the Kathleen monster," something like that. She drew a little picture of a monster. (02:31:01)

JG: Because of women's roles?

MP: That phrase — it was just a bunch of guys with their girlfriends and their wives — I remember that phrase. Don't worry. I repent! I'm sorry! It was stupid. We should have done it right away. We didn't know. I didn't know.

JG: Were you aware — you as a community — aware of the beginnings of Jewish feminism, of the founding of Ezrat Nashim, and the stirrings of — those conversations that were happening often in New York, and at retreats?

MP: Absolutely. One hundred percent.

JG: Yes?

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MP: We went to Weiss's Farm, in Somerville, New Jersey, I think, or someplace in New Jersey. How I remember all this crap is unbelievable to me. And Martha Ackelsberg and Judith Plaskow, who were both then married, one to Bob Goldberg and one to David Mendelson, if I remember correctly — and like a fight broke out, you know, about it. (02:32:04) And the Fabrangen was much more progressive.

JG: They were egalitarian completely from the start. But they didn't start until '71.

MP: I know, so this was — this was '70, '71. Because Fabrangen came to that retreat, and that was — we really got — we went back and talked about it on our own retreat. I think the one at Camp Ramah. And it was — we let a lot of women into the *havurah* because we thought we had to let a lot of women into the *havurah*, and some of the women were, you know — it wasn't such an easy process. I remember we let Alex Orr in, but she was — the difference between Alex Orr and Art Green was really big. They weren't like — some of the women that came in, even though we wanted to have more women members, they weren't the — they weren't studying; they weren't being the hasidim, they were (02:33:03) being women.

JG: What do you mean by that?

MP: They were like — they were feminists, and that was their agenda. That's what I mean. They were feminists. It turned out that that was —

JG: They were feminists.

MP: They were feminists, absolutely. All the women were feminists. After '70, '71, all the women were feminists, and most of the men were struggling to become more feminist. But we were still trying to preserve the neo-hasidic aspects of it. We didn't call it neo-hasidic of course. We just called it hasidic, or whatever, mystical. But we were doing it, you know. And not to put too fine a point on it, some of the texts of Rebbe Nachman and the Besht [Baal Shem Tov], they were sexist. And forget about that the *Zohar* is a deeply misogynist book, you know, with all of its God is the Shechinah and woman, women — it has all these horrible, anti-feminist, sexist pieces to it. Deeply. And yet we wanted to study the *Zohar*. So how did that make any sense? (02:34:06)

JG: When do you remember there being discussions about the gendered language of traditional liturgy, just standard metaphors of kingship, et cetera?

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MP: Well, I remember we did a seminar on feminism, I think. I want to say Sharon Shumack did it, but I can't quite remember — doesn't seem right to me. There were some people who were very much against it.

JG: Against what?

MP: Against feminization of the *havurah*. They felt that once it started to go in that direction, that would be it.

JG: What does that mean, “that would be it?”

MP: It would become a Women's Movement collective, and it would stop being the *havurah*. That would become the dominant issue. That would become the only issue (02:35:03) that we considered and that we would be able to address. It was a real fear. And the lesbian aspects of it also were a piece of that. We were challenged, a little bit.

JG: In the early seventies?

MP: In the early seventies. The Ezrat Nashim. I might have the chronology —

JG: Ezrat Nashim was founded in winter of '71, '72.

MP: B'not Esh?

JG: Later.

MP: A little later. I feel it was the time of the B'not Esh.

JG: That's right.

MP: You know my friend, Shifa Bronsnick, was part of that, and I keep on thinking she should be older than me, because I remember being young at the time, but turns out that she's younger than me. So I know that I have some kind of — and Vanessa, Vanessa Ochs, who was then Vanessa something else — she was part of it; she was my age. (02:36:10) You know, this is a complicated thing for me to say. Just complicated. So, number one, I was not part of this whole kind of erotic — because I got myself married and I had consistent and persistent fidelity to monogamy. I believe in it. It's me. I'm never changing that, right. So that was what it was. This was not widely practiced. There were many other approaches to relationships, and that was a factor. If the women's

issue became the issue of the *havurah*, as opposed to the mystical issue, (02:37:03) then we would become like a feminist — on the vanguard of Jewish feminism. And we weren't cut out for that, because we didn't have enough women involved, and we just weren't cut out for it. We thought we were making this other kind of — I think this is my feeling about it. We were making this other kind of contribution, and it was an important contribution, and so that's it, you know. And we couldn't just say, oh, goodbye, we're now only going to be feminists as our calling card. We didn't want to do anything wrong about feminism. We weren't trying to, you know, squash anybody, but I'm just trying to be honest and tell you that this is the piece. Study was still very much in the center of it, and all of a sudden the feminist critique came into the study.

JG: Study was very much at the epicenter of *havurah* life, you're saying.

MP: It was. I think it was. It was classes and people studying with each other. That's my experience of it. *Shesh besh*. Study. (02:38:04) We were still kids but, study was very important.

JG: So you're saying if the feminist critique started to sort of become part of the focus of these —

MP: Yes, the conversations started to become more and more around feminism. And that was probably right, you know. It was a time of reconsideration of lots of these things. But there was some loss in it as well, because we hadn't — it hadn't just been an issue. I think what Green says is right. It was a pre-feminist moment, and there was loss in it as it became feminized.

JG: Right. There was a freedom to doing it without those considerations earlier.

MP: And when we left, it became highly feminized.

JG: And the lack of self-consciousness about that.

MP: Intellectual self-consciousness, that's right. Well, it was a lack of self-consciousness about that.

JG: I said about that.

MP: For a very self-conscious group, it was a lack of self-consciousness, (02:39:04) yes.

JG: Which is significant, and interesting.

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MP: Very. Very. But you could say about a number of other topics as well, but feminism the most, the most important.

JG: What else do you think maybe was less of a focus but falls within that kind of category?

MP: Gay. Anti-Zionist.

JG: Anti-Zionist, or —?

MP: Anti-Zionist. Anti-Zionist, yes. We just didn't — and communitarian. Yeah, there were a lot of anti-Zionists in the group, political lefties, and we just didn't want to do that. So we marginalized those people. That's the fact.

JG: And some left.

MP: Some left. I think eventually all left. Yes, it was — and, I don't know, it was during the time of the beginning of the settlements. (02:40:05) I signed petitions at Brandeis against the settlements in 1970, '71. Really early on — settlements — they were shacks at the time. But we worried about that and other people got really furious about it. Got furious. Roskies got furious at me for signing this thing. "How could you be in this letter?" He doesn't even remember.

JG: Breira, which was founded in '73 —

MP: Right.

JG: — was something that, for instance, people in Fabrangen, people in the New York Havurah were intimately involved in.

MP: Yeah, cause Ruskay started it.

JG: Exactly. And there were others. He wasn't the only one, but he was central. And in the *havurah*, Havurat Shalom in Boston, was there significant interest in Breira, or involvement in Breira?

MP: There was a moment, and I was one of the people involved. (02:41:04) I was always more political then, and I'm more political now, than a lot of the other people. But we were going to be neo-hasidim. I want to keep on saying that, because that's the fact of the

matter. These were things that came up in Jewish life and that were crucial, but that wasn't our countercultural moment. Our countercultural moment was post-denominationalism, learning as a way of expressing Judaism as opposed to *davening*, and things like that —

JG: And the elevation of spirituality.

MP: And the elevation of spirituality, that's what I was going to say next. And it wasn't going to be feminism. We weren't against it. We tried to accommodate it. It wasn't going to be politics. We were political, we rung our hands and gnashed our teeth, but that was what it was going to be. And so anything else that was distracting from that were distractions. It wasn't that it was bad. It was just distractions. (02:42:04) And we all felt it was crucial, I can remember having conversations, that if any one of those aspects of the agenda became the central part of the agenda, then the *havurah* that we knew was over.

JG: Is there anything else you wanted to say about the role of learning within the *havurah*?

MP: The role of learning was to meet each other. It was the best use of traditional texts that I've ever experienced. It wasn't to learn and know more. It was to know each other.

JG: To know each other and to know oneself?

MP: To know each other, and through that, know oneself. But even — no, I want to stay with the original thing. It was to know each other. We would sit and learn. People would prepare a lot. George Savran would teach Bible classes. He would prepare four or five hours for every hour that he would teach, (02:43:05) but even so, in that group, in that circle, on the second floor when we would sit around that table, we learned about each other. And that was transformative, and I think it has the best chance of being transformative of Jewish lives in the future. We should stop being a shul-based community. We should start being a learning-based community. And you can see it anyway — the Limud and all sorts of other learning programs are wildly more successful than shuls. We were post-denominational. That was crucial.

JG: The *havurah* was post-denominational? Why do you think that was crucial?

MP: Because Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, they were answering nineteenth century questions. We were trying to answer twenty-first century questions.

JG: And what were the twenty-first century questions?

MP: What did Judaism need to revive itself? What did Judaism need to survive? What did Judaism need to bring more people into a pluralistic (02:44:03) community? What should Judaism obviously do about issues of gender and issues of nationalism?

JG: Hence the focus on knowing and coming to know each other, as opposed to simply —

MP: Knowing oneself.

JG: Knowing oneself. Community is not possible if you're only focused on yourself. And community is critical.

MP: I think we achieved community because we weren't focused only on ourselves. Not everybody. There were some people that were focused on themselves. But a lot were not focused on themselves. A lot. More than you can imagine.

JG: Was it that they were not focused on themselves, or that there was an achievement of some kind of balance or equilibrium.

MP: Maybe. Maybe they were focused on more than just themselves. We were focused on ourselves. Everyone focused on themselves a little bit, going to graduate schools. (02:45:04)

JG: But it was also about one's own spiritual seeking, one's quest, one's own development was — developing knowledge also, skills, all of that.

MP: Of course, but it wasn't about developing skills, per se. It was much more self — but even more than that, communal knowledge. Stef and Jim and Steve and Charles and Terri — they only wanted to be on communal knowledge.

JG: People like Jim Kugel who came in with very little knowledge, though. You needed to — one of the things that has been talked about as characteristic of the early members was a certain level of knowledge and expertise for most people. And if you didn't have that, you had to catch up through tutoring — your own intensive involvement and learning — to catch up to a certain basic level of — so that you could participate in the conversation, in the *davening*, in (02:46:07) all the different aspects of communal life that we're talking about. So it presumed a certain level of knowledge, or it called for a certain level of knowledge.

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MP: Jim Kugel mastered stuff at a shocking rate. And he was very self-confident. I write in my little journal, you know, "Today Kugel became the teacher." So I remember the first day of sitting with Kugel, and he didn't know Hebrew but he knew Old French. Not just French, but Old French. So, we're reading the Rashi and he's translating the Old French. You know, he's making comments about it. It was dazzling, dazzling. He was dazzling. There's so much dazzling stuff at the *havurah*, you can't imagine! Dazzling. Rosenberg would write a poem for us. It was dazzling. Really, you know. Gershon Hundert would go back and find some document of some — it was like, unbelievable. (02:47:05) Really, dazzling — it was a dazzling time.

JG: Was there any sense of a curriculum, or a basic skill set that you needed to know or to acquire, and that classes were therefore geared towards?

MP: No, no, the classes weren't geared towards them, but you could get them. People were more than willing to sit down and give them to you, but not a curriculum in that way. That's why the Havurat Shalom Community Seminary idea was — I don't know. I don't think it ever really — we were going to do it. It was Zalman's idea, I think Green will tell you — did you interview Green? He'll tell you it's going to be Brother Michael and Sister Krendal and he was going to have us be like in missionary — all sorts of stuff that didn't happen. I think, (02:48:04) I stand with my understanding of the learning, there, and I don't think it's romanticized. I can think of too many examples of going through it. I remember in the *Shir ha Shirim Raba* — not *Shir ha-Shirim Raba*, *Shir ha-Shirim* — going through — "Love is as strong as death is," and working on that sentence week after week, just so much. My whole experience of love and even of finality and mortality, it was just — and that wasn't based on my knowing the Mishnah, you know. I learned the Mishnah later on, you could do it. And by the way, even the Dorton group — at one point we didn't learn in the *havurah* anymore, and then we wanted to learn from a guy named Jerry Fogelman in Brookline, and he was going to teach us Gemara, and he wanted to teach us in kind of a *k'seder* way, and it fell apart.

JG: In a what way? (02:49:04)

MP: In a systematic way.

JG: In an ordered way.

MP: Ordered way. *K'seder* is the word I used, ordered way. It fell apart. We were — this was not a way — this was not about acquiring knowledge. This was about noetic knowledge, you know. It was more precious and different. You want to learn Mishnah? Go to Brandeis.

JG: To what extent, if at all, did people learn in sort of *hevruta* style at Havurat Shalom?

MP: They did learn in *hevruta* style. I did. Lehmann and I were *hevrotas* for years. But it was the slightly larger communities that were more significant. And sometimes the whole. Yeah.

JG: Has that influenced — you spent a great deal of your professional career teaching in a variety of different settings.

MP: That's it. That's all I can do. I can't fill out forms. You can see that! (02:50:06) It's not like I don't know what to say, but —

JG: How did your experience at Havurat Shalom sort of inform your pedagogy, your ways of teaching and learning?

MP: I can — I'm pretty clear about that. The problem with Jewish teaching, and even Jewish learning in America, is you do "*aleph bet*," in other words, introductory classes, too much. And you do it with the smartest people on the face of the earth. So you take Jayne Guberman who went to Harvard and University of Pennsylvania and has theories, and then you say, "I'd like to give you the Rashi on —" It just doesn't cut it. So I decided early on to teach at a very high level, and learn as much as I could about other fields, so I could teach people (02:51:06) that know huge amounts of things at their level. Teach Judaism at the same level as they learn law.

JG: Or physics.

MP: Or physics! So I teach a group of scientists, and I love teaching them, but I also learn science before I go to teach them. Because I need it for the metaphors. I need it for the insights. I need to be part of that game so that I can do it. That is my — Green used to give *d'verei torah* —or anybody, really — but Green's the one who comes to my head on the parashah. Oh my God, we didn't know the parashahs were about that! And they were about that. So my pedagogic style is to teach not just up, but I hope even kind of at a soaring level. And that's the *havurah*. It was serious, it was intricate, it was delicate.

JG: And therefore soaring.

MP: Soaring. Otherwise — I don't want to hear the same story over and over. Even the Torah can get boring if you don't do something new with it. (02:52:08) We just change the lens, you know. And when I went to college and I learned from Buzzy, you know,

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about J, E, P and D, it was interesting. I was fascinated, more than fascinated. He was a fantastic teacher. But then when you come to the *havurah*, and it was the same little section that he taught us about J, E, P, and D, he put it all together again in a radically different way, and it was just, my God, it was breathtaking. You couldn't stop thinking about it for a day. And that's what I try and do. I try and make every class an encounter that has the possibility of changing your life.

JG: Do you think that's more likely to happen in a group setting than in a *hevruta* style setting?

MP: I do, although *hevrutas* are wonderful. I have lots of *hevrutas*. But yes, of course it is. Of course. (02:53:05) So, three-body problem. A little more physics. Two people attract each other, but three bodies are very hard to chart because the interactions are so complex. And these are ten body problems. Yes, of course it does. You need to break into the next realm, and it's very hard to do that. But you can. Last night I taught Glukel of Hamelin. You know?

JG: I do.

MP: It's a wonderful book, really amazing. And I have to say, just like the *havurah*, we got going on it. You could feel it. You could feel the velocity.

JG: Who were you teaching?

MP: I teach people on Central Park West, really wonderful amazing people I've been teaching for years. Seventeen years I've been teaching them, same group.

JG: So it's a group?

MP: Yeah. We know each other. We care about each other.

JG: Do you think that matters in learning? (02:54:04)

MP: I think your real commitment to each other matters a tremendous amount. Because otherwise you say anything, because I won't see you again anyway, what difference does it make, goodbye. But if you think you're going to know each other, and you're going to fall in love, that matters a lot. I'm sorry that your kid didn't get into the Bronfman Youth Fellowship but that was in some ways what the Bronfman Youth Fellowship was. We will fall in love with each other. We will become lifelong friends. And guess what? They fell in love with each other. They became lifelong friends.

JG: I know.

MP: That's completely out of the *havurah*. It was the *havurah* for kids. I showed the proposal to Kugel when I designed it, and he said, "I see that you're redesigning your youth."

JG: What about Wexner?

MP: Wexner comes more from Brovenders. It had a literacy component to it. But the interaction among the members, I still think, because in the hands of good teachers, shone through. So we really did get to know each other and build lifelong (02:55:07) communities. But it wasn't the purpose of it. And Herb [Friedman] didn't always think it was good, even. Herb sometimes would yell at me. He says, "No, the classes are too interesting. They're not learning enough!"

JG: What did he mean by that?

MP: He said, "I go to your classes sometimes and they're too passionate. People are — everybody's engaged and things like that. I need people to actually learn the material so that when these events happen in our future they'll know how to deal with them." And I said, "Really? Really, Herb?" But in the long run, most of the teachers that Wexner hires are more like me and less like him.

JG: In your interview with Bill Novak that was published in *Kerem*, you said that before your involvement in the *havurah*, there'd never been a link between your Judaism and your (02:56:05) social activism. How do you think your involvement with the *havurah* affected your perception of that relationship between Judaism and social advocacy, social activism, what we now call *tikkun olam*.

MP: I actually think the *havurah* invented the phrase *tikkun olam*. I think it comes from Arthur Waskow in 1973.

JG: Say some more about that.

MP: Michael Stanislawski did a little study tracking the phrase "*tikkun olam*." You know, if you had said to me in 1970 or 1971, "Well, here's a number of phrases. Which one do you think will make it in the Jewish community?" I do not think I would have rated *tikkun olam* which is a mystical understanding of collecting the *nitzotzot* and — I mean, really? That's going to be — Obama stands in front of the Jewish community and

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says (02:57:06) "You know, I believe in *tikkun olam*." Really? Does he have any idea? It's crazy, but there it was. So then that did have an enormous impact. On the walls of the UJA right now is our commitments to *tikkun olam*.

JG: Where did Arthur use it, Arthur Waskow?

MP: He used it in a series of speeches and then an article, and it just kind of took off. He was the real — I think it came from the *Freedom Seder*, if I'm not mistaken, but I don't really know the answer. You could find out.

JG: Jonathan Sarna has a very in-depth article on the history of the use of *tikkun olam*. He would say it was a little later, '87.

MP: '87? I don't think it was so late.

JG: No, he's not saying it's the first use, but it's when it became sort of a thing, widespread, everybody used it, it became a real touchstone.

MP: I'm not talking about that moment. I think that is probably '87. What I'm talking about is when (02:58:05) it stops being a mystical term, *tikkun olam malchut shaddai*, from the *Aleinu* and turns to *tikkun olam* before it becomes *tikkun olam*. When it's used for social action, and for the repair of the world by social motivation, this is — well, I mean, we're not far anyways off from each other. We're in the same, basically the same page. And I'm pretty sure it's Arthur that did it. And I revere him for that.

JG: So for you, when you're looking back —

MP: I also, I bought into it to a certain degree. I didn't really buy into *tikkun olam* that way. I can't say — you know, when I go to the demonstration on the refugees, things like that, yes, I'm doing that with a Jewish motivation. I have become a Jewish cosmopolitan. I've become a Jewish cosmopolitan with good, solid progressive credentials, and even at my work in the UJA, which some people think is establishment but I believe (02:59:06) is actually a shockingly progressive organization —

JG: You're a scholar-in-residence at UJA?

MP: I'm a scholar-in-residence at UJA because Mazon is a lovely food program for small amounts of people and advocating for the hungry. The UJA feeds tens of thousands of people per day, you know. If you really want to do the progressive agenda, and you want to get it done, then — as opposed to thinking about it and advocating for it — send us

some money and we'll help you. I find — I feel it's a privilege to work for UJA all these years. It will also be a privilege to retire. Having said that, I think a lot of the motivation comes out of Jewish texts including *Ahavat Israel*, so I — it is a lens in which I see the world, *Ahavat Israel*, and I am not going (03:00:06) to let go of that lens. So even though I have some sympathy with BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions], and I have some sympathy with Jewish Voices for Peace, things like that, I'm an *Ahavat Israel* guy — love Jews, love the Jewish people.

JG: How does that connect?

MP: Because my social action comes — I'm just answering your question — my social action comes out of my Jewish values. And I'm not able or willing to take some of my Jewish values and take them out so I can just have progressive values. This is just progressive values. When I was a rabbi in central New Hampshire, in Vermont, there was this guy that would come to the classes that I gave named Bernie Sanders. Bernie Sanders, he's gone on! He was then running for mayor of Burlington.

JG: And he just ran for —

MP: And he ran for president. And I voted for him — because I support him. But he studied (03:01:12) a text by — it's called the *Non-Jewish Jew* by Isaac Deutscher, in which he basically claimed that these are progressive values, these are Russian Revolution progressive values and they have nothing to do with Judaism. Judaism is a recalcitrant and, you know, reactionary tradition. It's not a stupid argument. I reject it. I still think of Shabbos as a general strike. [*laughs*] I still think of anti-slavery, anti-genocide issues. I feel motivated by my Jewish values, including *ahavat tzion*.

JG: And yet within Havurat Shalom in those early years, some of the strongest criticism — critiques that were leveled at it by members (03:02:08) like Bill Novack — were that members were not committed enough to social activism. And some people actually left the *havurah* over these issues. How do you see that now? Both when you look back on Havurat Shalom, but also on Jewish life today?

MP: Yeah, of course, he was right. He was right. We weren't committed enough to it. And we weren't committed enough to Israel. And we weren't committed enough to Israel when Israel was in trouble. Because in '73, Israel was really in trouble. And we didn't send money when we needed to send money, when we only gave tea and sympathy. All those things are correct. I learned from those things, you know. When I was at Columbia, I think I was still guilty of some of those things. At the UJA, I'm not guilty of those things. So at the UJA I've been able to be both a good *hevrahman*, a good citizen in the

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Jewish world, and I think do a lot of progressive politics and raise money for things (03:03:05) that nobody else can really seem to easily raise money for. So, there's a lot of compromise. It means I sit in a lot of living rooms and kitchens of people who made their money in objectionable ways, but at least I get them to give some to us.

JG: And you use them for these causes.

MP: Sure. It's not perfect. I have no messianic images of —

JG: Utopian images?

MP: Utopian images of how this all will come out. It's a lot of compromises. But I believe in it.

JG: It was almost a universal experience — within Havurat Shalom, the New York Havurah, even in Fabringen, which started as an outgrowth of Jews for Urban Justice — that the social activism, the collective social activism as a key leg of the edifice fell away. People continued their social activism, even (03:04:04) social activism as Jews, but more through organizations that were specifically geared to that, whatever the cause was. Whether it was Zionism and Israel, anti-Zionism, any other kind of, anti-war, all kinds of things. Do you think, looking back on it, that it would have been possible for Havurat Shalom or any of the early *havurot* in general to have social activism as a mainstay in its scheme of priorities and in the direction of the work that people were doing?

MP: No.

JG: Why?

MP: I think more about the kibbutz than I think about the *havurah*, or than Fabringen or the New York Havurah. Because the kibbutz was social action personified. We're going to create the “new Jew,” we're going to create the beautiful, socialist society, things like that. (03:05:05) And the intensity of the interpersonal experience became paramount, and the social action became less so. It could be because of the intoxicating nature of interpersonal experience when it works well in community. So you just don't want to do anything else, you know? Or it could just be that social action on a real scale needs a lot of money and fundraising and meetings and things like that, and we were consensus organizations — by the nature of who we were. And consensus organizations simply can't, they can't produce a social action movement, because too much interior tension, not enough money, exposes too many inequalities in the system. You know, UJA is a good social action system because we get really rich people (03:06:06) to pay for really poor

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people. Okay, that's good. But the poor people don't meet the rich people. They're not supposed to become friends. They're rich people. They're supposed to give a lot of money so that the poor people can eat and prosper and do all the kinds of things that they want to do. If you build a community, then the people who are making a lot of money, and the people that aren't making a lot of money, get pissed off at each other.

JG: Exactly, and it seems like there is an issue in the consensus model which all of the *havurot* had, the early *havurot*, that sort of precluded the possibility of always being on the same page about different political issues.

MP: Israel, the poor.

JG: All of those.

MP: All of them.

JG: So just because you can get a tremendous amount of spiritual fulfillment out of *davening* and that aspect of one's life doesn't mean that you're all going to be on the same page. And you weren't, in terms of those other issues.

MP: Right, we weren't. That's right. (03:07:06) Also, these things are moments in time, so once I got married and started having children, and needing a job, and things like that, I couldn't do all that stuff anymore. I needed to go home.

JG: Which was true of everybody.

MP: Which was true of everybody.

JG: One of the main critiques of the — critiques in the sense of a commentary — of the early *havurah* was that it was only possible because, with very few exceptions, people were single, or newly married. They didn't have children, they didn't have jobs that they were responsible for. They could focus. It was a time in their lives when they could focus precisely on this.

MP: Live in a little apartment with a crappy shower. I was twenty-two. It didn't matter.

JG: Right.

MP: But now it does matter. It does, you know? For good or for ill, it matters. My children would be so disappointed if I couldn't have sent them to college. You know, so

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— I think that's okay. (03:08:04) I want the next generation, I want it to be a parade, not a marathon. I don't have to run the entire distance myself. I want each generation to come in successive waves and get this done. And every once in a while, they'll age out. My daughter is a very socially active person. I hope she's soon going to become less socially active, so I can have grandchildren.

JG: So please watch this video.

MP: Let her know if you see her. I'll give her a picture.

JG: All right, so let's try and bring all of this together. So we've been talking mainly about this early period, '68 to '73. You were actually involved from —

MP: Sixty-nine to seventy-four.

JG: Seventy-four, when you graduated and then went off to —

MP: Philadelphia.

JG: So you left to go to rabbinical school. But ultimately you weren't ordained at RRC. (03:09:07) Can you just tell us briefly what path you took, and why?

MP: Well, yes, I'm the first *havurah*-ordained rabbi. I'm just sure that that's true. I got ordained at a *havurah* national conference, and I got ordained by *havurah* members. So what could be more than that? After the level and intensity of the study at the *havurah*, as well as the lack of papers and evaluation devices, let's say that, but not entirely that, I just decided to do it myself, you know. And I was going to decide to become a rabbi under my own terms, as opposed to JTS or RRC (03:10:05) or YU or anybody else.

JG: So you left RRC close to the end.

MP: I did, really close to the end. Close to the end doesn't even capture how close to the end it was. I decided I didn't want RRC. I think I left in January of the last year that they were going to make me go to RRC. They were saying “that they were going to make me go into RRC” gives you a little hint of my disdain for it at that moment. Not that — those people are good people, I'm kind of friends with some of them still — Sid Schwarz was in my class, he's a good guy. Herb Tobin, he's a good guy. But I didn't want to be a Reconstructionist Rabbi, and I didn't want to be an Orthodox rabbi because I'm not Orthodox. I didn't want to be Conservative; I'm certainly not Conservative. Reform I

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didn't even know very much about. So I wanted to be a pluralistic, post-denominational rabbi for small, intense communities. And so that is what I became.

JG: How did you do that?

MP: I studied with Zalman, I studied with Allen Lehmann, I studied with Norbert Samuelson — Reform — Norbert, and Conservative/Reconstructionist — (03:11:07) Allen, and Orthodox/Renewal — Zalman, and Bravender Orthodox. And Seyyed Hossein Nasr — Muslim. And all of those people came to my *smicha*. So in 1981-82.

JG: Zalman in '81.

MP: Yes, Zalman in '81. So I had already taken a *bechina* for the *rabbanut*, and I had done well enough at it so that I could have been what's called a *Rav U'Manhig* — which is enough, you know. You can then come back to America and call yourself a rabbi.

JG: You'd taken it at —

MP: You take it from the *Rabbanut* — you take it from the Rabbinat. Because I studied at Brovenders. But I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be the student of Zalman. I wanted to be a pluralistic person. I wanted to be a Jew, a rabbi for the Jewish community. And so I became Zalman's second *musmach*. But the first (03:12:07) *musmach*, Danny Siegel, was his *talmid*, his acolyte, his disciple. I'm not Zalman's disciple. Zalman is one of my great teachers. But I did not intend to become Zalman. David Ingber, maybe, he wants to continue the Zalman legacy. Most of the Renewal people that I know of, some of whom are extraordinarily talented, want to become like Zalman — are devout Zalman disciples, want to further his work. I don't. I want to further the work of the pluralistic Jewish community. So I only worked in pluralistic programs — Bronfman and Dorot and Hillel, Wexner and Limmud FSU — all these things, they're all pluralistic programs. And I want to turn the Jewish community towards study, because study is a unifying activity, and it should be serious, transformative, elevating study. So that is what I did. At my *smicha*, I got Zalman and Allen and Brovender and Norbert and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (03:13:14) to come in front of all these people and ask me questions.

JG: This was at a *havurah* retreat?

MP: A *havurah* retreat, *havurah* national conference. It's not called a retreat, it's called —

JG: The summer institute?

MP: Summer institute, yes. In Hartford, Connecticut. And for three hours they asked me questions. Just in front of about 150, 200 people. I just strived to answer as many as I could. I mean, Allan, at one point looked at me and said, "Can you recite a Gemara and teach it to us? You know enough Gemara?" And I said, "Oh, no, no." And he said, "Well, try!" And I did! It was an unparalleled experience. And there's a phrase in my *smicha* that says "We are sure that his fear of sin will take precedence over his own wisdom."
(03:14:06) And I appreciate that line.

JG: What does that mean to you?

MP: What it means to me is that it's not about me. It's not about my own view. It's not about the Conservative Jewish view or the Reform Jewish view. I'm afraid of sin. I'm afraid of going off the *derech*, so I'm trying to bring everyone together on the *derech*. That's what I thought the *havurah* was really about.

JG: *Derech*, however defined —

MP: However defined, yes. I mean, right now they say, "He's off the *Derech*." That means he's not Haredi anymore. But —

JG: That's not what you mean, clearly.

MP: That's not what I mean, but it's kind of what I mean. Forget about the Haredi part, but there is a Jewish way, and I want to be part of the Jewish way. And so I have been. I think I really have been. I think I'm a true product of the *havurah* in that way. As much, as true as anybody I think you have spoken to. I don't think I've sold out about it. I don't think I've — (03:15:06)

JG: What do you see in your path as being really a product of the *havurah*, and keeping faith with whatever the *havurah* symbolized, whatever its vision was, whatever its reality was?

MP: Pluralism, community, learning. Social action, social responsibility. Love.

JG: Is there a place in there for spiritual something? Spiritual — *tefilah*?

MP: I do think so, but — well, no. No. That's my search. My encounter with God. *Tefilah* is my encounter with God. I'm not going to design a community which is going to exclude the majority of people because they can't get into prayer. It's a highly

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poetic, subtle, complex and — (03:16:06) exquisite experience, which I'm highly committed to, and I do it a lot. If I think about the hours of my life that I spend in *tefilah*, it would be enormous numbers of them. I'm not going to exclude a wide population of Jews from things I said. I think if I talk about pluralistic and educational, and socially active and socially responsible, everybody should be able to do that. Everyone. And that's what I want. And in that I want to have my own prayer life, and my own spiritual search, which I've been persistent in, I don't do that — I teach *tefilah*, but I don't mostly lead *tefilah*, but I do teach it. It's a wonderful intellectual, liturgical exercise.

JG: So many of the people who were originally involved in Havurat Shalom, including Art, for sure, saw themselves as spiritual seekers.

MP: Right. (03:17:05)

JG: It was at the heart of what the *havurah* experience was for them, in many ways. And certainly for Havurat Shalom in particular, in comparison to both Fabrangen and the New York Havurah.

MP: Well, I am sorry that Art didn't build a movement. Zalman tried to build a movement. Art didn't build a movement. So we are a relic. It is a wonderful relic. I feel honored to have been a part of it. I feel thrilled. I feel it's divine providence that I was part of it, but he didn't build a movement, you know? Someone in this very room said that they like *Musar*, but *Musar* is a little group, and *hasids* is a big group. So what you can say about *Musar* is that it didn't really build a movement, you know?

JG: Some people talk about the “*havurah* movement.” Do you think there's a *havurah* movement?

MP: No, I don't. Not really. I think there's a series of *havurah* ideas. And I believe in them, and I love them. (03:18:08)

JG: What are the critical ones?

MP: Learning. Post-denominationalism. Pluralism. Sense of community. Social responsibility, social activism.

JG: Within a Jewish frame?

MP: Within a Jewish narrative. I would use the phrase Jewish narrative.

JG: Can you talk about that for a minute — why?

MP: Because I think we are part of a long story, and we have lots of literary creations — Torah, Mishnah, Gemara, codes, *achronim*, *rishonim*, Midrash — which are curriculum for who we are. And if you learn those stories and the narrative so the story and narrative clicks, it will teach you certain things. And those things are not well replicated in the rest of society. We want people to prosper, even with money. Most religions are poverty oriented. We want people to have universal (03:19:07) intellect. Most people don't do that. I'm saying what's in the article. But I believe in those things. We are global citizens. Most people are more and more xenophobic and turn inward. We are big about *tzedakah*. We believe in generosity to each other. Most people do not believe in generosity and do not practice generosity. Now everybody has little pieces of those. We keep them balanced. Anytime you go out of balance on those things, then the whole narrative structure falls apart. I think these are the narrative structures that the *havurah* has tried to prosper, as opposed to some other things. And if we build big edifices so we can all sit in shul together, I think that was a dead end. I think that was a mistake. I really do. The UJA right now is trying to prop up synagogues and make them exciting and dynamic institutions again. I'm hoping that they go the way of other Jewish institutions and new institutions come. I don't believe in those institutions. I like little minyanim.

JG: Do you see the independent minyanim (03:20:08) of today as in the legacy, shall we say, of the *havurot*?

MP: I do. Including the “partnership minyan,” the Orthodox partnership ones. I do see them that way. They don't though.

JG: They don't. Can you say what that is?

MP: The partnership ones? These are *frum*, egalitarian minyanim. *Mechitza*, but women lead the *davening* and give *d'vrei torah* and *leyn*. So that's very attractive to me. If my friends didn't go to Minyan M'at, so I would hang out with them and sing and drink once a week, I would go to a partnership. It would be a very amenable thing for me to do. The minyan that — in Israel, a lot of the minyanim in Israel, like the Hartman minyan, which is called something else — not Darchei Noam, but I can't remember what it's called right now, those things. Shlomo —

JG: Leader Minyan.

MP: Shlomo has been great at giving (03:21:06) musical voice to something enthusiastic in *davening*. All these things. But these are all small, intense groups. The building of big prayer halls so everybody can pray was, I think, a mistake. I'm a minyan guy.

JG: Do you see that sort of notion of small, intense community as among the most critical pieces of the legacy in which these other things that you've been talking about can thrive?

MP: I do. High liability Judaism. You have to really engage yourself, something to give and something to lose. Whereas you go into a big synagogue, nobody knows and nobody cares. It's not that they don't care, but it just — that's just not what they're about. So I'm not against them, but I don't think they are the vehicle (03:22:02) that will take us to the future. And the *havurah* was, I think, one of the sparks of the turn towards these vehicles, at least in the non-Orthodox world. In the non-Orthodox world, taking lessons from the Orthodox world, very early on, because Zalman and Art and a few others could actually read Orthodox texts. This is significant and transformative. Maybe even salvific.

JG: So, as you look, here we are, we're almost fifty years after the founding of the first *havurah*, and we're, at this point, pretty well into the twenty-first century. When you look around at the challenges that the Jewish community is facing today, that we and the world are facing as part of the larger community, what do you see as the major contributions of the *havurah* and its lessons?

MP: I just have a totally different — I have a totally different one than comes out of the conversation that we have. (03:23:07) And the lesson that I think is totally different is that it gives secular Jews a way about going about being Jewish — small, intense communities of social action and social responsibility with Jewish narratives. This is what secular Jews can do, and most Jews are secular, you know. I'm not so worried about the people that go to Reform or Conservative movements, but they're shrinking, you know, rapidly shrinking, and they're not tooling at all. They want to. They're good people. They're well-meaning. They don't know how. I wouldn't know how to tell them to do it either. For the middle of the twenty-first century. But these small communities of secular Jews, and you can see them in lots of places now — Moishe Houses, and Hillel next, and the Beis, all these things. They're all kind of a reformulation of the *havurah* so that people who come from a secular Jewish perspective will know what to do, where to belong. (03:24:05) Even the Jewish community centers. Right after you leave, the guy from Krakow's going to come and we're going to talk about a secular Jewish community of Krakow, because the religious communities are boring and no one can bear them. I don't know if rabbis are going to be the heads of the Jewish world or the Jewish people in the next generation. I think that they won't be. But communal organizers, and community leaders, I think, will be. So that's my thought about it. And I hope to go to Europe and

form those kinds of communities. Lay leaders are very important now. They didn't used to be so important. Now they're very important. That was a real departure from all the other things, but that's what I think.

JG: A lot to think about. A lot to think about. As we sit in the beginning of the Trump era here.

MP: Yeah. I don't know if we can fix that. We can fix that, actually — just one comment about Trump. I do a lot of studying what's called the (03:25:07) second great awakening.

JG: What's that? Oh, the second great.

MP: The Second Great Awakening. It was the movement of the 1820s, which was counter to the Constitution and the Founding Fathers, who were a bunch of seventeenth century European rationalists. And these were the utopian off — Mormons and Millerites and Adventists. And then you can see it right after Wilson, also, in the Harding, Coolidge, Hoover period of time. You can see it now, you know. There's a spirituality to that, and people feel it deeply. And fundamentalist Christianity is part of that. Can we — but every once in a while, you can flip it to a progressive point. Dorothy Day, and people like that, they did that. And the people that I call the post-millennial dispensationalists, they said, "We're going to move ourselves forward, (03:26:08) based on a religious revival in the face of an Enlightenment philosophy." And if we take part in that conversation, we can help with that. Even the *havurah* people, because we're religious people, we know about religious language. And I want to — I do think that. Those are the people that voted for Trump. And I understand why they voted for Trump. They voted for Trump out of religious motivation, whether it was worrying about abortion, or life or pro-life or things like that. Whatever misguided things they were doing, it has a religious motivation to it. And in the 1960s, at least this particular religion that I was part of, in the late sixties/early seventies, at least was a progressive religious motivation. And that is a thing to contribute. I hope we can contribute it.

JG: Final question for you. We're living in a time when there's increasing (03:27:07) awareness of diversity within our community. Racial diversity, interfaith marriages, all kinds of diversity, economic diversity. A time when many Jews feel like they're back towards the universalist impulse because we are living so closely, in a global community. And how important is it, do you think, for secular Jews to continue to deal with what is coming in the world, in the world in which we live, from within this Jewish *derech*, this Jewish framework as opposed to something that's more pluralistic in that larger sense?

MP: Yeah, I think about this a lot. What would victory be for us? Okay, we did good. (03:28:07) We lasted three thousand years. We had good values. We brought lots of Nobel prizewinners, enough, goodbye. Let's all intermarry and go back into the gene pool and [kiss] see you later. It's not a stupid idea! Simon Rawidowicz has the great article, "Israel the ever-dying people." That's his strategy for innovation. I kind of like the idea that many of us think that this is it, that we're in the last generation of Jews. It's a good strategy — because if you're the last generation, go for broke. It's a very good innovation strategy.

JG: And yet that's not what your life's about.

MP: I still think that God needs us. Jews, in the world. It's a kind of outrageous statement.

JG: Why?

MP: Because of Torah. Because I think — I have to say this in a shorter way. In the Book of Exodus, in chapter nineteen, there is a (03:29:08) mission statement, which I believe is *am segulah*, *goy kadosh*, and *mamlechet kohanim*. So *Am Segula*, you know, is we're the treasured people. We have a lot of memory, because we're old, and we've been at it for a long time. And you should have a people that has a long memory. And to be assigned to everybody else, *al seboul*. And then *Goy Kadosh* — we should be a little distinctive. Separated. A little holy, something, we care about these things. But the real one for me is *mamlechet kohanim*, we should be the conduit of blessing into the world, and I believe that we can be the conduit of blessing into the world. And the world has to know that it can permanently change. I'm optimistic. I'm extremely optimistic, I'm an optimistic person, and I'm optimistic now because I think the world can change because we are the *mamlechet kohanim*, the kingdom of priests. And the kingdom of priests means we have to be open to the blessing coming through us. We have to be careful that we don't burn up as the blessing comes through. And it's a precarious job. And I do think that the *havurah*, just to (03:30:07) last kind of, I do think the *havurah* tried to be *mamlechet kohanim*. I do think it — one of the first things the *havurah* did; people don't talk about this — is we got rid of the Kohen/Levi/Israel aliyot. We didn't do Kohen anymore, because we were egalitarians. Not just them, but everybody. You know, just because your father's a Kohen doesn't mean you get to be a Kohen! You're not going to get your first aliyah. We're not doing that anymore. We're all in this. We are the *mamlechet kohanim*. That's what I feel. We are the *mamlechet kohanim*. We need hasidim, we need friars, we need Reform Jews, we need secular Jews, we need Bundists, we need BDS, we need scholars, we need 'em all because we're the *ma mamlechet kohanim*. That's what the *mamlechet kohanim* does. And I think there's still blessing pouring itself into the world. The overflowing *Shefah* of God is still pouring God

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into the world. I'm still a religious guy, you know. Even though I say the other stuff. I myself am (03:31:07) a religious guy, and I feel that, I feel that all the time, even right now, that God is pouring Godself into the world and I want to make sure there's a conduit to bring that blessing into the world. I think that's us. It's worth the effort. And also, you get nice apartments. So, you know, that's it.

JG: That was a great way to end. Thank you so much. It's been wonderful.