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I grew up in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. In a modern Orthodox setting, strong Zionist families, many Holocaust survivors came and settled in the area of Brooklyn, and.. I had a strong sense of my Jewish identity. And um... I went to Yushiva, Jewish parochial school from kindergarten... even really right when I was in college. In fact, I went to Brooklyn college, which might be considered Jewish parochial school, in those days. And um...my circle of friends and acquaintances and my parents' acquaintances, all, all were from this homogeneous modern Orthodox ilk. We were surrounded by, um... or I should say, shared the community with the Jews on the right called the city Jews, also coming out of the Holocaust and trying to reestablish the surviving city communities, and um... and also secular Jews, and... and an Irish-Italian non-Jewish community as well. But we were really very secluded, very parochial.

My father who was born and raised Lithuanian came to this country as a young man lost most of his family in the Holocaust. He did have one younger brother, the youngest in the family who somehow made his way to Palestine before the war and raised his family in Israel, and my connection with Israel was strong, because I had the feeling that that's where my people are, that was the, that's the key to Jewish survival, that's the heaven for against an anti-Semitism. And also, because I had a family there I had an auntie, uncle and a cousin, one of who was of my age and was named after the same grandfather, so we had the same last name, Moshe Levin. But...um...I...I think that's about it.

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In that world I grew up with a sense, strong sense of being a minority while all of my immediate world was this modern Orthodox ilk. I and all of my classmates and friends, we all knew that we lived in a world, in a city, in a country in which we were a small minority. And the world was dominated by the protestant, Christian, catholic Christian mealier. We felt it of course, during the whole Christmas season, we felt it with, on... on the Sabbath, with... the world went along without us. We were walking to and from the Synagogue, even as these little kids dressed in suits, and everybody else was driving around, stores are open, they doing their purchases, going on with their daily business. And our school was that tiny little school for Jewish boys and girls right next to PS 161... A large, big public school with the big big big big yard, and a big basketball court, and so on and we had monkey bars in our school yard. By the way, Barbara Boxer, who's now senator of CA went to PS 161, and I would be a typical of the less of a later or let's say of a more a secular Jew. And I had a sense that I was living a totally Jewish life,

but in an alien environment, in a foreign environment - this was not home. This was not home.

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Well, when I was in my, in my early teens I joined the Zionist youth group, simply because that was and the youth group for Orthodox kids, called Biniakiva. And it was just a place for us to have fun with other kids, meet girls as we were just beginning in our lessons and have something to do on shebad afternoon, Sunday afternoon and so on. And then the word spread that during the summer they wanted us to go to a Jersey, to a farming camp, to where they were going to teach us how to be farmers that so we could go to Israel and work on the kibbutz. It was called hah shara. And ...um...and that was absolutely strange to me. I had no intention of going to Israel on the back of a cow as we would kid around, joke about it. And...and, you know, I live in Israel, even though I was not, even that this was not home for me in the sense that it was not the permanent place for the Jewish people, I did not have any intention of actually living in Israel. And that's in spite of fact that every single day, three times a day in my prayers I like all the rest of us, recited: "Oh God, bring us back to Zion, come back to Jerusalem, let's rebuild the temple, gather our exalts from the four corners of the earth," and so on. It was interwoven into us throughout prayers, it was woven into our psyche, but it was, it was more of a visuary psyche, as... as supposed to reality.

01:36:57 Then when I was nineteen, after my second year, my sophomore year in Brooklyn college, my friend and I decided to go abroad. We wanted to expand our horizons, we were going to go to Europe. And that was not appropriate for boys of that kind of a background to go as far as Athenes, Greece and not to go to Israel. We had relatives that stayed in Israel and etcetera. And so, we added Israel onto our trip, a good portion of the trip: it was a half summer in Europe and half of summer in Israel. Fabulous time in Europe It was really an eye opening experience to get a sense of a larger world. And then came to Israel. And I was overwhelmed; overwhelmed by a sense that I was home, in a land whose language I did speak, because Sheba training did not teach us a conversational Hebrew, Biblical prayable Hebrew,... Aramaian Hebrew and etcetera, Yerish. I did not speak the language, I was not familiar with the music, food was strange to me, the weather was radically different. And, and, and yet, I felt home. I felt I was home. I think that feeling came from the recognition that now I was in a land where being a Jew was not what separated me. That was something inconsequent ional, because virtually everybody there was Jewish. And that we would be measured by how we lived our lives, the kind of people we were, and being Jewish was a given. I saw Christians in Israel, when I Jurasaleum, places...Nazareth, Bethlehem see people at the churches actually could not get to Bethlehem, it was before the 60th war. And I saw Arabs. But the Arabs seemed to be like a part of a landscape. They were there, they represented this ancient lifestyle that my ancestors were connected to, and they were what seemed to be a small minority relegated to certain areas of the c. who lived primarily in the North of the Galeo, and so on. And I did not take much of note of them. But of what the people of

Israel were doing, how they had made the desert bloom, how they were developing an economy and technology. The cars., the streets were teeming with activity, the stores were, they were manufacturing many their own products, they were importing. It opened my eyes to what a place would be like if Jews were given an opportunity to develop and to flourish in a natural, in a natural pattern. I was very, very proud of what Israelis had accomplished, extremely proud, exceedingly so. Their young people in military, it seemed to be a moral military, an educated military. And I saw, I assumed the government to be beyond reproach, they would not backed out on the best Jewish ideals. So, I was very, very, very proud and thrilled to be there. At the end of the summer I called my parents and said: "I just registered as a student at the university in Jerusalem, I will be majoring and economics and philosophy. Could you please inform Brooklyn college that I want to be able to leave of absence, and I plan to stay this year." And I stayed not one, but two years. I got myself lambredo motor scooter from Italy, and lived on the back of that for those two years, going all over the country on that little motor scooter, and making friends and getting into Israeli crowd. I had become fluent in Hebrew in the last time of the summer, because I spent all my time then with my cousin, who spoke no English, and he invited me to circle of friends. So, by the time university started which was in middle late October, after Jewish Holohi holidays, I was able to integrate into Israeli society. And the second year I was there, my younger brother who had finished high school came and stayed until went to Bangurian university. And it was a marvelous experience and I felt very much at home.

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My brother still lives in Israel. He's been in Israel over thirty years, he is married. He and his wife have six children... and I forgot to turn my cell phone off...

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At the end of my two years in Israel, I still had one more year to complete university, but my father took very sick. He developed a heart disease and a cancer and I am the oldest of three boys, so I returned and that was the last year of my father's life. And when he died I was really without direction. And I was going to psicotage, memorial prayer after someone passed away, or a year after the death, and I got involved in local Orthodox Synagogue. I just got married and in this new community there was an little Orthodox Synagogue, and the rabbi was from the old world, did not really reach out to people who were non Orthodox, who were not well versed into Judaism and etcetera. So I took it upon myself, started class and from that grew into involvement into conservative Synagogue down the street that was just starting, trying to get of the ground. They asked me to lead services and teach classes and so on. I was in the process ... my father's business and his partner, my uncle and I began taking it more and more, and after a while I decided that that's what I really want to do in my life - to become a rabbi. So, I enrolled into Jewish law seminary... school of conservative movement, at that time the only one.

Now there is one in Los Angeles and Jerusalem. I enrolled there, not with the intention to become conservative, I was still an Orthodox Jew, but because I wanted to devote my career to reaching out to unaffiliated people who lived in this area. While I was at the seminary I converted so to speak. I was moved by the scientific approach to religion, comparative literature, the documentary hypotheses. I stopped seeing the torah as divinely handed work or gift, but rather as a product of countless human hands over many centuries. And with that, the authority behind being meticulously observative of all Jewish law, obeided. Now I saw Judaism is having been developed historically, in an evolutionary manner, so I became a full fledge conservatory Jew. And... strongly Zionist as well, and it formulated all my values.

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In those years I had an assumption that I think, that vast vast majority of American Jews, Orthodox and non Orthodox, which is basically was that Israel was the land that was sparcely populated, and when the Zionist movement began, it became a land for people that had no land. It was selected by the Zionist movement for very obvious reasons - this is what was our original homeland, that what we were forced away from and exiled and our prayers for 2000 years have been to return there, and now the people without the land were people returning to the land without people. The fact that the land was so arrogant, uncultivated, when the Zionist movement began, marshes and dessert and cetera, was the indication that no one owned the land, cared much about the land and etcetera. 01:47 A little more sophistication let me to belief that the ... money was collected by the Jewish community throughout the world, for the Jewish National Fund, which purchased tracks of lands from absentee landlords who lived in the Damascus, who lived among Lebanon or, what have you, and there were peasant farmers there. And as the Jews to go over the land these peasant farmers in their own villages, actually began to leave their serfdom and started working with and alongside the Jews, started to make some money. And old economic system of Arab sheiks were breaking down and so they moved to Jerusalem and the sheiks, and the nobility, and etcetera, were resentful of the changes of their life. That is to say that their peasant farmers were no longer providing for them so to speak and began to develop antagonism toward those Jews, who in the beginning were received well and were quite cooperative with the vast majority of Arabs. And in 1948, 1947, when United Nations partitioned the land, because of friction that developed between Arab and Jew, Israel was prepared to accept a mere sliver of the land, and make a state out of that, but five our nations refused to accept that, declared war against Israel attack. And almost as if in maccobean times, a small group of Jewish settlers, pioneers, who called themselves Palestinian Jews, fought back these Arab.. And when the seized fire was called in 1948, the actually had more land then were given them by the United Nations. And during that time, Arabs had fled the land, they had fled at the call of the sheiks and their mufti, and so on. The call had been - back away from your homes and villages, come over here across the border, we will wipe them out, we will push them into the sea, push all the Jews into the sea, then you'll come back to your

homes, and theirs. And so, these people voluntarily run away, and then when Israel and Israelis, the seized fire took place, Israel conquered more land, Israelite said - we can't allow these people back - they are the fifth column, they clearly, they sort of our enemies. They were those Arabs who did not leave, and they were invited to citizenship of Israel, and they were getting along just fine, the only difference between them and every, the Jewish Israeli was that they were not drafted into the army, for obvious reasons -in benevolence, the state of Israel did not want them to have to fight their own brothers, and that sort of made sense. And their lives were far better off than the Arabs' who lived in other Arab countries, and certainly Palestinians who had fled voluntarily without leaving the refugee camp. The other part of the narrative was that the reason the refugee camps still exist is that unlike Israel who took in Jews, hundreds of thousandth Jews who were forced out of Syria, and Iraq, and Egypt etcetera, that had taken place in 1956, with Egypt. Then in observed end of society these Arab countries insisted upon keeping those refugees along the borders to use them as a propaganda tool for ultimately wanting to take back for land. And then in the six day war they have with the word -we're gonna push them into the sea, and the Arabs attacked them from all the sides, but with creative military planning and strategy, and the boldness, and the courage of Israeli, the way of Israeli military, they were successful in defeating those Arabami almost from the start, Egypt is one clear example, and they ended up when the Arabs called for the seized fire, they were on the verge of taking, they taken the Sunni campaign, they go on Heights and, you know, all of the West Bank. And Israel was eager, was willing to give it all back, all they wanted in exchange for the land, was peace. They gave back all land of the Sunni to Egypt, all they got in return was diplomatic relations, peace. They were prepared to do the same with West Bank, Egypt did not want the Gaza Strip, and so it was left on the Israeli occupation. The West Bank was full of Palestinians. King Husein then did not want the Palestinians, he had too many Palestinians in Jordan already, he was ruling the country as a minority, from the hash and a hash of my kingdom and therefore, he did not want the West Bank back, Israel wanted.., all he wanted was peace, and no one could move. And that was the impression that I, and I would say, the vast vast majority of American Jews, and I would say, the vast vast majority of Israelis had about why the situation was the way it was. And Israel was prepared to continue to work, to build the country, and one day there will be peace, one day the Arabs will realize - they can't defeat us, militarily, and therefore, they should make peace. And it became also clear that Israel was not eager to absorb more Palestinians, and the next West Bank, etcetera, because it would ultimately demographically would put the end of the Jewish character of the state. And so, Israel wanted to see the Arabs in their own separate land, they have plenty of land, all the way to the West Bank....., and go to those lands, or Jordan can take them back, or wherever, but leave Israel for the Jews and the minority of population let's have peace.

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With this Valtanshan, with this overview of the Israeli -Palestinian situation, I regarded

Arabs and Palestinians as the enemy, but also intriguingly exotic people. I was fascinated and wanted to get closer without putting myself in danger. And one day, a Palestinian doctor was brought to San Diego on behalf of the Jerusalem Foundation, which was established by Teddy. Kovic, then mayor of Jerusalem, and was known for making Jerusalem an open city for Jews, and Christians, and Muslims, as a matter of fact it was also one of the indication of how right the Israelis were and how wrong the Arabs were, because when Jerusalem was under domination of Jordan, Jews were exorcised from the city not able to go to any of the holly places and many holly places were destroyed.

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The doctor, Banya I think was his name, came as a guest. And when I heard about it, I set up a breakfast for him to meet all the Jewish doctors from my congregation to learn what a Palestinian doctor was going through in Israel. In return he invited me that evening to reception that was been giving in his honor at a Palestinian restaurant in San Diego. I came there with my kipp and my hat, clear as a Jew, and a rabbi and the Zionist and began to meet people who had issues of their own. At the course of conversations around the table, people at first aware of me, but I think impressed that I came there, I began to hear their side of the story and their narrative - how harassed they were when they went back to Israel to visit and how few of them could go back to visit, and what was it like for them at the borders and so on. And I decided to go back to that restaurant after the doctor left and establish relationship with the owner. And one day the deputy mayor of Jerusalem came here as a guest speaker, I brought him to that restaurant and he began to tell me who that family was and that it was Tashibi family, a family that have been very wealthy and politically very very strong before 1948, and actually was in favor of peaceful coexistence with the Jews in the Zionist movement in those days, and ultimately lost almost everything. And through the owner of that restaurant who himself was a graduate lawyer from University of Cairo, and, I started to establish some kind of appreciation for and a report with Palestenians. And when I was taking my next trip to Israel, I asked them for the names and telephone numbers of his sister who I might meet there, his brother in law and so on. And I made contact with them in Israel, they lived right outside the city of Jerusalem, in a village called Bethalena, professional people, engineers and so on, with on going business, and began to make some kind of personal contact in which I saw Palestinians as . . . like me, with different religion and different language, but very very similar. Around that time, I was walking out of a concert in downtown San Diego, and on the way to my parking lot, was walking alongside a couple. We started talking, and he turned out to be a Jew of European decent and she's Lebanese, a Christian Arab. And they were married, I think, at that time for about eight years, they were getting along just fine, I was fascinated by it. So, I invited them to meet with me, and we should talk and bring something out of it. Turn out not too long after, they called and they wanted to meet me at the Synagogue, and they had a friend by the name of Manal. Manal was a Palestinian born and raised, born at a refugee camp in Gaza strip and raised in Kuwait after about a year old, by parents who were well educated, were teachers, she went on to

University training, got a masters degree, I think, in England and went on for PHD in biochemistry in Boston. And when she got to Boston, she was looking for a room, and ended up just answering and adding, renting a room in a home of Zionist Jewish family stayed I think for three years. And this couple, a phenomenal couple, Gevendals, brought Manal to meet me with the suggestion that through her we could invite a group of Palestinians and through me a group of American Jews and we could start dialoging. I know nothing of dialogues that began in San Francisco with the travelers. I just knew that it was fascinating exciting idea. And I called about, you know, half a dozen or more, close friends of mine who were well in touch with what's going on Israel, and bright, and at the same time reasonable, and people we could speak with and so on., and Dars invited a number of Palestinians. And we came together at their home, and we went around the room introducing ourselves, and it was an unbelievable experience. It broke down, it shattered the image I had of Arabs are my enemy, Palestinians are my peoples' enemy. And opened up the door as wide as it could be for me to see all of these people as people like me, who had a narrative that was different from mine. And the narrative that I had already begun to learn through Jewish sources, Israeli journalists had begun exposing truth about the way in which Israel was found and created and about its wars and so on that didn't jive with the the party line that I have been brought up with and to these people that was their main story. And I think that the Jewish values in me of compassion and concern and and not turning ones back on those that have been oppressed made me very very sensitized to what these people have gone through and the like, and I began, my heart opened up to them, and I think theirs to me.

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And being in the social setting, in somebody's living room everybody bringing some food, and their respecting kosher because of me and and the people that I had brought, and are respecting their ways and so on, made for a beautiful beautiful encounter. And we began meeting every three weeks and rotating different homes and in each homes we were introduced to the customs, and the pattern, the lifestyle and the family situation and the business and financial issues, you know of all of us and uh began to know each other and care about each other.

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And what I started to feel was that uhm at least equal to the openness that was developing in me about their issues was a growing love for them as individuals and people, and naturally the realization that were I was in a room with any Palestinians in from any town, any village, any city, anywhere, and got to know them as I getting to know these people I would start feeling that feeling of love as well. And that as they got to know my narrative and my life, and not just my view of Israel and the Palestinians, and Arabs in general. But as they got to know me as a person they would develop concern and caring and perhaps even love as well. And uh, that what's been building. Dialog for me has become an encounter were people from markedly different sides and different positions introduce the other from their perspective. Not with the intention of convincing

the other but letting the other know where am I coming from why am I so adamant about this, why can I compromise here, not compromise there, why this means so much to me why this has been woven into the fabric of my being. And each side introducing the other to these perspectives, to these stories, to these to to to this *veltenshunt*,

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allows us to appreciate the nature of the conflict and to develop the motivation to resolve that conflict. Not to allow it to remain a stalemate. But to say, “You know there is pain going on here, on their side as well as mine”, we should not just simply say its okay to live with that and maybe our children and grandchildren will resolve one way or another. Our responsibility is to is to resolve those issues, to eliminate that pain, and to recognize the commonality and appreciate the commonality between us. So the requirements for dialog are honesty and openness being truthful about ones position, not pussyfooting, not walking on eggshells, or coming up with arguments for the sake of arguments, its being real. The requirements for dialog are learning to listen to the other person’s side to their narrative, without feeling that you have to respond, and argue, debate or give, but just hearing appreciating and understanding. And what should come out is a desire to say “I think that I I understand where you’re coming from it sounds to me like this is your position, is that correct, do I understand you correctly?” “Yes you do.” “Okay, now I would like to share with you my perspective.

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And and I would like you to understand mine as well as you think I understand yours. And the resolution to issues I think uh if dialog were on a more official scale the resolution would come naturally as opposed to being forced. So uhm, there is no question in my mind that dialog is the way in which to resolve really all disputes. I think that I had some of those skills as a counselor in my *rabbinate...*

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but clearly the dialog experience has made me a better rabbi. I have a better way of helping couples resolve their issues, business partners resolve their issues, factions in the synagogue resolve their issues, really making sure the other one is heard and understood. And and focusing on the humanity of both sides who are conflict, my hope and prayer of what we have seen here in the United States with the, I like I hope the mushrooming of dialog groups all over, maybe its is like mushrooms, they kinda just spring up like naturally without, without uh any special care. They spring up because people want to resolve issues, their in pain. Uhm, I hope that spreads to the extent that it gives, it gives strength and courage so that so kinds of groups that exist in Israel, exist between Arabs and Jews, that exist that even crossing the border is not just Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews but even across the borders, and that they realize that there is a ground swell of support for the appreciation and understanding of those narratives. And I want to add one thing, one more thing, particularly it was, the uhm strong subject of our last dialog meeting when we discussed the Geneva Accords at in great depth, and that was the realization that resolutions are not going to come from one side giving up their narrative, and saying you know what, you were right we were wrong, we apologize, we etcetera. That the result of

understanding and appreciating each others narratives is, the next step is, I truly understand where you are coming from, I think that you understand from where I'm coming from, where do we go from here, don't don't ask for me to give up my history, don't I can't, I am not going to ask for you to give up your history, our interpretations are even more powerful than the fact, and we will never sort that out and if we try to do that we will spend out whole lives trying to dig back into history. Where do we go from here, because clearly we care about each other, clearly we want an end to the pain and suffering that we are causing each other, and we want to live our own lives in a beautiful and a productive way, so where do we go from here. And uhm, I just hope that uh Israelis and Palestinians, and Arab, and Jew, and Christian, and Muslim, move in that direction, of where do we go from here, to see to it that our children can play and laugh and sing together.

02:07:59:22

Welcome

02:08:02:20

Inaudible question

Sure.

02:08:07:00

Yeah

02:08:09:20

Yeah

02:08:15:20

Start discussing question:

02:08:30:10

I certainly I certainly don't mind in talking about it, I just want to see uh what value it is but uh I think I think that I can add a little something to that that will add a some spice to the uh to that. Uh I think that what makes me a good candidate for dialog are several factors. One is that I was brought up in my orthodox *echseva* upbringing with the study of the *Talmud*. And the *Talmud* are is a collection of volumes and volumes and volumes of discussions and debate amongst rabbis two thousand years ago nearly two thousand years ago, uhm in uhm trying to come together from having two different perspectives, and what the *Talmud* does is constantly say, is constantly...looking at the arguments of the other side, there is an old joke about the uh uh two parties to a dispute come to talk to the rabbi, and the rabbi listens to one of them, and he listens to that story, and the rabbi says "your right", and then the ones starts giving his side of the story, and the rabbi says "your right", and the rabbi's wife listens to this overhears and comes up the rabbi and "how can you say that he's right and he's right, they, they disagree so much, and you say they're both right" and the rabbi says "your right too." As funny as that story might be, there is tremendous amount of truth in it, that is *Talmudic* education, its to see that in a dispute there is right on both sides, probably more than it was wrong on both sides. Its that justification and appreciating that is of tremendous value in in being a good dialog participant.

02:10:14:23 I think there is another factor too, fourteen years ago, next month, I was diagnosed with a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which is a slowly growing, but ultimately terminal disease, and I, as much as I would like not to be a cancer patient, I realized that there are certain gifts that come with it, and one of them is the appreciation of living in the present and appreciating every single moment and I think that that it added to my being a decent dialog participant because I have an appreciation of the wonder that life can be and should be and how we don't have time in this world for hate, for spite, for resentment, for anger, it's all, those things are all a natural living, but we are not doing ourselves justice by allowing ourselves to remain in those spaces, we have to get through those spaces because the magnificent of living, the miracle of being alive, is too precious a gift, it's a gift of infinite value, and I don't think there is anyone that wants to end their last days and taking their last breath and saying I am satisfied in spent most of my life fighting, especially when deep down in their hearts they realize that they weren't as right as they pronounced themselves to be, and the other party as wrong as they insisted. I think all of us want to end our lives and say that I was given an unbelievable gift of existence, so many quadrillions of sperm cells and eggs never made it, mine did, and I lived it to the fullest. And living it to the fullest is not living it in anger, resentment, and violence and warfare, living it to the fullest is living it with peace, and with love, and with compassion and with understanding and with kindness, and with joy. That is what dialog is about... getting to that point. 02:12:42:26

Okay? 02:12:47:11

Allright.

02:12:49:00