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MBS ([00:00](#)):

I'm working on building community at the moment and I'm noticing I have two different types of community. One is a wider net. Now I live in Toronto and it's a great city with great people. And I kind of know a bunch of them, just a little, and I'd like to know some of them more. So inspired by the book, *The 2-Hour Cocktail Party*, which I can thoroughly recommend. I've been hosting monthly events where 15 or so people I know-ish come and spend two hours. I kick them out at 9:00 PM on the dot. We have a drink and we meet up with other people.

([00:39](#)):

To facilitate things, there are two or three moments where I pull everybody together and I ask them to answer a question. We answer it to the whole group. And what that does is it seeds the next round of introductions and conversations. The second type of community is a deeper vessel. I'm inviting other men who are at about the same stage of life I am, and we'll have a



conversation about what it means to be an elder in our different worlds. I'm 55, so one part of me is thinking, you are way, way, way too young to be claiming to be an elder as a role.

[\(01:21\)](#):

But actually I do feel that's calling me. I do feel that might be the next sort of thing for me to step towards. And here my hope is that I'm asked questions, questions that will help call me forth. Two different communities, but for each good questions right at their heart.

[\(01:43\)](#):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Hal Gregersen is a man who loves questions, perhaps even more than I do. I mean he has dedicated his life to it, as an author, as a speaker, as the former executive director of the MIT Leadership Center. He and I both believe that questioning can transform the future of learning and make the world a better place.

[\(02:15\)](#):

Now, I introduced Hal by his first and his last name. And the truth is he doesn't actually really have a middle name. And in the spirit of great questions, you're probably wondering why.

Hal [\(02:29\)](#):

I am Hal B, no middle name and Gregersen. My brother's middle initial is A, and my sister's middle initial is D. My father was in the military and had a very long first and middle name. And so he vowed when he had children we would not be vex with such things. So I have a three letter first name and a middle initial and that's it.

MBS [\(02:56\)](#):

I love that.



Hal ([02:59](#)):

There's a lot in name. It's Dutch. Half of my family comes from Denmark, the other part from Sweden and England. And those roots play their own tune in my life, I think. My grandfather was a sheriff of Park City, Utah during the prohibition period in the 1930s. And he was really good at resolving conflicts. And one time they had a strike in the mines. They were silver mines mostly there and they had a strike in the mines.

([03:38](#)):

And he met with the labor unions outside of the city of Park City to make sure that when the people coming to break the strike came in, the labor unions wouldn't do anything to them. And so he let the strike breakers come in to work the mines, he followed the group into the city and by the time he caught up with them, all heck had broken loose in downtown Park City. And there was this massive brawl that lasted for several hours and he ended up ultimately losing his job.

([04:10](#)):

And the reason I'm telling this story is he said to the people who subsequently investigated the incident, that he trusted the labor unions probably too much. And that was his bias. That was my mother's bias. It's sort of that sense of the world is trustworthy and trustable, is an operating assumption. And so that was important as I was growing up because my father was a construction worker and I moved seven times before I was five years old across the United States.

([04:49](#)):

Going from construction site to construction site and every one of those places required building trust, figuring out what's going on here, how do you make friends, how do you fit in, fill in the blank. How's that first starting point?



MBS ([05:02](#)):

That's a brilliant starting point. I want to ask you, what's been the greatest gift that trust has brought you?

Hal ([05:14](#)):

I'll be very honest, Michael. My watch is an Omega Seamaster on the back is a seahorse. And I think there are people, friends, especially some close friends, some family that I can turn to when the world gets dark, when things get really, really difficult. And the watch and the Seamaster piece is I happen to believe in a divine presence, let's put it that way. And you asked me what trust has really made the difference in my life. I would say that that sense of divine love and presence in my life has probably given me the most strength in the hardest of moments.

([06:05](#)):

And sort of parallel to that is our really close friends. That when we've lived in five countries and three continents. I count on relatively this many fingers, some really close friends that became part of our lives as we lived in those places. Where something difficult happens professionally and personally, I can trust them that whatever spoken is held in confidence and a few of them especially, I can trust that they're going to come back to me with a pretty straight talk about whatever the situation is. And that's why I love them so much and trust them.

MBS ([06:54](#)):

Well let me ask you the flip side of the question, Hal. Part of what happens with trust is you end up getting your heart broken when that trust is betrayed. How do you keep your heart open after it's been broken?

Hal ([07:19](#)):



It's an excellent question, Mike. And I am reminded first of an experience in my life and then a story. Well they're both stories, but the experience is my father was a farmer, then he became a construction worker and mechanic and he worked really, really hard. I mean, really hard. Think of that sort of, in the dry western part of the United States trying to eat living out with his family before I was born. So he worked really hard, mechanically gifted.

[\(07:59\)](#):

If something broke on the car, he could make the part and if he didn't have the tool, he'd make the tool. And he was just really good at anything mechanical. But when it came to social dynamics and parenting and family structure, it was problematic. And his only way of approaching that, now I understand it, but as a four-year-old, I didn't. He had just had a lot of deep disappointments in his life and he had very little trust in the world and a lot of the confidence wasn't there.

[\(08:30\)](#):

And so when you get those things going on, it's pretty heavy control in a home environment. So basically the world revolved around him, high control. Sometimes he was pretty intense with that control. I remember I was probably four years old one time, I don't know what I did, but I got hit on the back of the head and I smacked my head on the edge of the table. I'm sure he did not intend that, but it cut a big gash and had to go to the hospital.

[\(09:02\)](#):

And so it was an unpredictable place. It was an untrustworthy place when my dad was around. My mother was completely the opposite. And so I learned growing up to live two questions basically, which is how do I avoid getting hit or how do I avoid getting in deep trouble and yelled at? And will I ever measure up and matter? So whether it's a home like I grew up in or whether it's a workplace or a community, whenever we're living some variant of those two questions, which is how can I avoid getting in trouble and will I ever measure up and matter around here?



[\(09:50\)](#):

When I'm living those sorts of questions, trust is not present obviously. And so I grew up with that. Those were the questions that I was living. And there came a point at which I finally realized literally in my early forties that that's what I was doing, Mike. That's what's going on. If you look at Kegan's hidden competing commitments' logic, I was doing that in some programs with a colleague Roger Lehman at [inaudible 00:10:22]. And I'm like, "Oh crap, that's what I've been living for these last few years."

[\(10:27\)](#):

And in fact, that's what a lot of people are living. And so this is where... Fast-forward now, my father passed away 20 plus years ago. I still had not resolved that, how do you build the trust and how do you get beyond that lack of trust even when he passed away, Mike. There just wasn't that thing going on. And I'll never forget when I was teaching at London Business School in 2005, 2006, and it was intense. It was a great experience, but it was a real intense learning experience.

[\(11:00\)](#):

And I was having a really difficult time at one point. I remember walking through a little church park there on the way to London Business School and finally feeling in my early forties, this sense from my father that it's okay, he actually loves me. I can love him, I can let this go. And it was a watershed moment to be able to not only in that very personal tight space to do that, but it also opened your heart up to bigger things beyond that.

MBS [\(11:42\)](#):

What do you think allowed for that moment of grace? Because it's often not just a walk through a churchyard, there has to be something that's happened in the



lead up to that to have that moment happen. I'm just curious to know, is it work you'd done? Is it people around you? What had open the door?

Hal ([12:13](#)):

Something like that, you try to look back and make sense of it and there are lots of things that you're trying to figure out what was really going on. So my first wife passed away in 2003 just before I went to London, very unexpectedly. Within two weeks of finding out she was ill, she was gone. And then in time I ended up remarrying and there's nothing better to understand your assumptions about the world and how you deal with your kids than having a consultant come into your family.

([12:48](#)):

And sort of like, "You know, when a kid does that, or that kid does this. They pretty much always get their way. Were you aware of that?" And I realized, "No, I wasn't." And those kinds of things, they come back to that question, how can I make somebody else happy? How can I avoid a problem here? And so we ended up starting to meet with the marriage counselor because those assumptions I was holding were getting in the way of our relationship and our family, ultimately. Our blended family.

([13:21](#)):

And so part of it was that stream. I think second stream was Parker Palmer to be honest. And Parker Palmer, many may not have heard of him, but he's an educational philosopher I suppose, is how he would describe himself. He's devoted most of his life to a phrase that I read in the first book I read of his, To Know as We Are Known. And the phrase was to learn or to teach is to create a space where obedience to truth, not a capital t. Obedience of truth is practiced.

([14:09](#)):

And his way of approaching the world is like how can you create the environment or conditions around you where that kind of dynamic can play out? And one of the things that he recommends is he spent some lengthy time



in a Quaker community, trying to find himself and figure out who he was. And they have what they call a clearing committee where you get a group of trusted people together and all they can do is ask questions and you answer them.

[\(14:46\)](#):

That's it. That's the dynamic for a couple of hours. And I'll never forget the first one I did with this trusted group of people. It started to peel away some of these protective things that I'd worked so hard as a kid to put in place that needed to be dismantled. And that was one of the starting points. So part of it was a pretty significant life event. Part of it was actually Parker Palmer's work.

MBS [\(15:16\)](#):

Which I know is who you're going to read from today. So how did you choose what to read from knowing that this work has been so significant in your life?

Hal [\(15:26\)](#):

Well, like you. We have books all over in our space. If we were both to sort of move the camera around, there'd be books everywhere. And Mike, I thought... I was first honored by your request to have this conversation because it's an unusual one. In the sense that who has really changed your life basically. And I looked through stacks and stacks of books after your question prompts, and it was partly an intellectual exercise, but it was mostly a heart exercise.

[\(16:05\)](#):

And it was like, who has grabbed the deepest crevices and corners of my heart in the way in which I think, I act, I feel, what I value and how I approach the world? And it came down to Parker Palmer. Coming back to some bit of closure on that prior conversation. It was like, how do you let go of very difficult things in your life that need to be [inaudible 00:16:44] Let go of not in the sense that they're gone because they're always present but let go of in the sense that they don't hold their power today like they did back then.



[\(16:54\)](#):

And Parker Palmer introduced me to a Hasidic tale, where someone came to the rabbi and said, "Why does the Torah tell us to put truth on top of our heart?" And the rabbi's response is, "It's sitting there until our heart breaks and the truth can fall in." I find it just a powerful metaphor about being ready. And so it was probably, in retrospect, a lifetime of experience that finally came to a head with two or three really blows on the side of the head and heart moments in my life where I was ready finally for some new truths to drop in.

[\(17:47\)](#):

That's why I like Parker Palmer. He's full of that kind of insight that invites us to reflection around the truths we're living.

MBS [\(17:56\)](#):

I know, rather than just picking two pages from a book, you've kind of done a more curated gathering of reading from him.

Hal [\(18:05\)](#):

I saw him speak in the early 1990s and I was just mesmerized by him. The first book I bought was *To Know as We Are Known*, and that's where that thing came out to teach is to create a space where obedience to truth is practiced. That's interesting. Today it would be called psychological safety in one sense, but I love the way he framed it. And in fact, Amy Edmondson is also a super fan of Parker Palmer. So I read that and then I'm like... Then the next book I really fell in love with was *Let Your Life Speak*.

MBS [\(18:41\)](#):

And for those who are just listening holding up books and they're bedecked with Post-It notes, which is one of the marks of a book well-loved. Which is like, "Oh, I need to remember this page. Oh, and this page. Oh, and this page."



Hal ([18:54](#)):

And you look through it and you've got multiple markings from pens and pencils and various [inaudible 00:19:00]

MBS ([19:00](#)):

Different readings. I love the column stat that you're showing us there, which is like this is a book that has been read many times.

Hal ([19:07](#)):

And so the orange was one reading, the blue was another reading, the yellow was a third reading. But this is a beautiful, easy, one day read around his life and some very poignant stories from very light filled moments in his life to the deepest of darkest depression years of his life. And so it's this powerful story and then the final one is called A Hidden Wholeness, where he absolutely loved and never had the chance to meet Thomas Merton, who also was a philosopher more from a religious background.

([19:47](#)):

But Merton said, "In all living things, there was a hidden wholeness." And that book just was profound because I had gone so much of my life trying to get rid of this ugly parts of my past. And finally realized, "No, you don't get rid of those things. You love them. You learn to appreciate them. You put your arms around them. You embrace them. And you can talk to them like, "Yeah, that worked really well when you were four years old to scrunch and say, how can I protect myself?"

([20:24](#)):

But you don't need to do that when you're teaching students at MIT. It's not the same context, "Hal, grow up." So I looked through those three books, Mike, and I tried to find two pages, but it was like there's so much embedded in his



thoughts, there's got to be a better way. And that's where I ran across a two-page article he wrote, and when I read it was like, this is it. For someone unexposed to Parker Palmer, to me, this captured so many essences of who he is.

MBS ([21:02](#)):

You're given such a beautiful lead up to this and such a warm introduction. So let me hand the mic to you reading essay from Parker Palmer, Hal Gergersen. Over to you, Hal.

Hal ([21:12](#)):

Thank you. The title of the essay, Are You Listening to Your Life? I was in my early thirties when I first began to question my calling, teaching at a university and doing it reasonably well. But I felt stifled by the confines of academic life. A small voice inside was calling me towards something unknown and risky, yet more congruent with my own truth. I couldn't tell however whether the voice was trustworthy, whether this truer life I sensed stirring within me was real or within reach.

([22:02](#)):

Then I ran across the old Quaker saying, "Let your life speak." I found the words encouraging and I thought I understood what they meant. "Let the loftiest truths and values guide you live up to those demanding standards in everything you do." I believed I was being exhorted to live a life of high purpose, as did Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and Mahatma Gandhi. But clinging fearfully to my academic job even though it was a bad fit, I tried to teach the way I imagined my heroes would.

([22:43](#)):

The results were rarely admirable, often laughable, and sometimes grotesque, as when I caught myself preaching to students instead of teaching them. I had simply found a noble way to live a false life. Imitating my heroes, instead of



listening to my heart. Vocation, the way I was seeking it had become a grim act of will. Today, some 30 years later, I found deep joy in my vocation as a writer, traveling teacher and activist. And let your life speak means something different to me now.

[\(23:22\)](#):

Vocation I've learned, does not come from willfulness, it comes from listening. That insight is hidden in the word vocation itself, which is rooted in the Latin for voice. Before I tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen for what my life wants to do with me. I've come to understand vocation not as a goal to be achieved, but as a gift to be received. The treasure of true self I already possessed. Vocation doesn't come from a voice out there calling me to be something I'm not.

[\(24:02\)](#):

It comes from a voice in here, calling me to be the person I was born to be. Accepting this birthright gift of self turns out to be even more demanding than attempting to become someone else. I've sometimes responded to that demand by ignoring the gift or hiding it or fleeing from it, and I don't think I'm alone. An old Hasidic tale reveals both the universal tendency to want to be someone else and the importance of becoming one's self.

[\(24:37\)](#):

Rabbi [inaudible 00:24:39], when he was an old man said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me, 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me, 'Why were you not [inaudible 00:24:53]?'"" When we lose track of our true self, how can we pick up the trail? Our lives speak through our actions and reactions, our intuitions and instincts, our feelings and bodily states perhaps more profoundly than through words. If we can learn to read our own responses, we will receive the guidance we need to live more authentic lives.

[\(25:16\)](#):



The soul speaks only under quiet, inviting and safe conditions. If we take some time to sit silently listening, the soul will tell us the truth about ourselves. The full messy truth. And often ignored dimension of the quest for wholeness is the need to embrace what we dislike about ourselves as well as what we're proud of, our liabilities, as well as our strengths. We can learn as much about who we are from our limits as from our potentials.

[\(25:49\)](#):

For years, I thought that becoming a college president was the right thing to do with my life, despite the fact that I am too thin-skinned for the job. But when I embrace this limitation and found work where thin skin, let's call it sensitivity, is an asset, not a liability. The fact that I'd never become a college president no longer felt like a failing. Instead, it felt like a homecoming, a return to my true self, full of peace and joy. We can move towards such homecomings by seeking clues to vocation in childhood memories.

[\(26:28\)](#):

When I was a boy, I spent hours putting together little books on how airplanes fly. For a long time I thought that meant I wanted to be a pilot. But a few years ago I saw what I really wanted all along was to write books. Our highest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of what others think we ought to be. In doing so we find not only the joy that every human being seeks, but also our path of authentic service to the world or in the world.

[\(27:00\)](#):

True vocation joins self and service, says theologian Frederick Buechner who defines vocation as the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. The world's deep needs are met daily, not only by caring doctors and inspiring teachers, but by good parents, good plumbers, good hairdressers, good friends. And as all those people know, the gladness of authentic vocation is always laced with pain.



([27:32](#)):

Ask any parent suffering through the travails of her child's teenage years. But the pain that comes from doing the right job well and the pain that tells us we're on the wrong track are different. And the soul knows the difference. When we're on the wrong track, the soul feels violated and abused and cries out for change. But when we suffer from doing the right job, well, the soul still feels fulfilled because it knows how to take this kind of suffering and use it to make meaning and extend the heart's reach.

([28:06](#)):

This emphasis on self and gladness has nothing to do with selfishness. The Quaker writer Douglas Steere said that the ancient human question, who am I, leads inevitably to the equally important question, whose am I? Since there is no selfhood outside of relationship. When we answer the who am I question as honestly as we can, we will be more authentically connected to the community around us and we'll serve more faithfully the people whose lives we touch. Where the gift of self is finally the only gift we have to give.

MBS ([28:47](#)):

Hal. Beautiful. Thank you for reading that so well and for sharing such a lovely piece.

Hal ([28:52](#)):

Thank you.

MBS ([28:56](#)):

To go back to the picture you painted before, what's the truth in this that breaks your heart open?

Hal ([29:04](#)):



One of my first professors in graduate school was named Bonner Richie. He introduced me to Parker Palmer, to give you a sense of Bonner, he to me is the best questioner I've ever met in my entire life. And he not only asks good questions, he lives them and he puts himself into very dangerous places like the conflicts in the Middle East to try to make a difference. He's now in his eighties. And just a few weeks ago, I had the chance to be with him and asked him for some advice where in one sense it was almost like a father's blessing because he was like a father to me.

[\(29:54\)](#):

And it only could come from Bonner to have the impact that it had on me, which was Bonner basically shared with me and he knows me well, he knows my story. He said, "Hal, you've done good in your life and you've made a difference. You can accept that. And in fact you don't need to do more." And Mike, that goes right back to that question of will I ever measure up and matter? It was like it could only come from Bonner in that moment, in that space where it was in a sense, "You're okay. You measure up, you do matter. So let it go. Let it go."

[\(30:51\)](#):

I'm not sure if that answered your question, but it's a story that came to mind.

MBS [\(30:56\)](#):

I wish I'd asked the question that prompted that anyway, so it worked out perfectly.

Hal [\(31:04\)](#):

Could you re-ask the question though because it was an important one?

MBS [\(31:08\)](#):

Well, I reiterated the metaphor you shared before the reading, which is truth on top of the heart. Why is that? Well, it's when the heart breaks, the truth can



enter it. What's the truth that breaks open your heart in the Palmer Parker piece?

Hal ([31:37](#)):

This is Exposure 1001 here.

MBS ([31:41](#)):

Thank you.

Hal ([31:45](#)):

So in one of Parker Palmer's books, he talks about one of these clearing committees where other people were asking him questions when he was trying to decide should he become a university president. And they asked him all kinds of questions, one of which was, what would you like about the job? And his responses were all things he didn't like about the job. And they finally called him on it and said, "I'm really asking what would you like about the job?"

([32:17](#)):

And then there was this long pause and here is this very accomplished, mid-career professional who in the company of friends says to them quietly, "I just want to have my picture in the paper with my name underneath it." And the rule in that space is to not laugh but it was hard for them to not. And I believe they did chuckle, but I'm not sure. But that was the moment that Parker realized his heart needed some real breaking. So now I'm coming back to my space, which is, it's really, really hard to let go of that deeply rooted childhood question of will I ever measure up and matter?

([33:13](#)):

And I kind of think of Thor, the God of thunder from the Marvel movies, coming down with that big hammer and [inaudible 00:33:26]. And there were a few near misses that he made. But the point is what has really struck me hard, the deepest first strike... I'll back up. Every decade of my life, I thought the next



decade would be absence of problems, Mike. [inaudible 00:33:49]. When I get 30, it's not going to be that way. When I get 40, it's not going to be that way. And it was in my late forties, I finally realized this is life.

[\(33:59\)](#):

And so early forties was when my heart was broken with the passing away unexpectedly of my first wife. The second massive heartbreak was actually teaching at [inaudible 00:34:12] in France where every element of who I was had been turned upside down and I had moderate to severe depression, sometimes it was hard just to get out of bed. And I'll never forget driving through the forest to [inaudible 00:34:27] near the campus of [inaudible 00:34:28] in France, late at night after teaching, long day. Hearing a Michael Franti song called See You in the Light in the Middle of France for the first time.

[\(34:40\)](#):

And it's basically when the vampires gather round to bite, you've got to get them in the light. And it's just like, "Okay, you can do this Hal." And it was just a powerful moment. So teaching in that very foreign culture, country space for me was really difficult. Then in 2014 when I had a heart attack giving a speech in San Diego, that's when afterwards this counselor coach, we had a conversation and she basically said, "Hal, if you don't change the questions you're living and the way you're living those questions, you're going to gift your father another heart attack.

You're going to gift to other... You're going to have another one. When are you going to stop living that question? I didn't do a good job, even a heart attack... It wasn't a Thor of thunder blow, Michael, through...

MBS [\(35:37\)](#):

Need something even more obvious than a heart attack.



Hal ([35:41](#)):

And then it was almost dying a year later at base camp and the Khumbu Icefall of Everest, being in a place I shouldn't have been, doing something too fast, not having quite the right choices at different points in time. Luckily missing an avalanche that blew my tent away a half mile because I left three days earlier because I was so sick. But that moment put another blow where it's like life is fleeting, it comes and it goes faster than we think kind of thing.

([36:16](#)):

So you get those sorts of things in your life that add up. And I'm just thick-skinned, I guess. Thick skull. I get a lot of bumps on my head because I hit my head all the time. I'm tall. It's taken a lot to finally now in my early sixties to be able to say with more comfort to myself, "Your own hidden wholeness, Hal, is okay. That part of you is actually a good part of you when you understand it's there." I still wrestle with some of those things, but not nearly the way I did two decades ago.

MBS ([36:59](#)):

He asked you if I may, a related question, one of the lines from the reading was understanding that really a life well lived is when I think the phrase was, deep gladness meets the deep needs of the world. What does deep gladness mean to you now?

Hal ([37:25](#)):

It's linked to awe and wonder and beauty. There are moments when I'm either with people or in nature and I'm behind that lens with a camera [inaudible 00:37:41]. I love photography. I have all of my life and there's that moment of connection. Just a few weeks ago, I was at another local city here in New England on the Atlantic shore, taking some photos of some beautiful boats floating in the bay as the sunset and completely mesmerized. There was deep gladness inside of me.



[\(38:06\)](#):

And then I heard this voice behind me and this voice said, "What are you so interested in there?" I turned around and it was this quite old man and he's like, "I just really want to know. What are you really interested in?" So I explained it and shared a bit of it. And come to find out he was finished. He had moved to New England decades before, we spoke some Finnish to each other. And at the end of this whole conversation, it was like we were friends and he said, "I'm in my late eighties."

[\(38:39\)](#):

My wife and I decided this harbor is where we're going to live our life out. I'm going to die here, but every day of my life, to me, if work is not play, filled with this deep gladness you're talking about." He's like, "Why do it?" You felt like that wasn't some trite statement he was making. It was a lib statement that had been just... It was in the fabric of his face. I'll send along the picture sometime. He let me take a portrait of him. It was just like, this is who this person is.

[\(39:16\)](#):

So that's one form of deep gladness. The second is, at one point, this was almost 20 years ago, a good colleague and friend of mine, Sean Bechler. She invited a handful of people to write their sort of statement of themselves and come and talk about it. And in the process of doing that, I ran across this phrase from Latin that meant eyes lighting up. And for me, whether it's a grandchild, whether it's you right now, whether it's people in a classroom setting. Whether it's that stranger in the harbor in northern New England.

[\(39:58\)](#):

When you have those moments where eyes light up, that's deep gladness because not once, I've never in my life experienced that kinds of eyes lighting up moment when I've been in that moment thinking about myself or trying to control the situation.

MBS [\(40:19\)](#):



Hal, it's been such a wonderful conversation. Thank you. Thank you for being so very open and vulnerable and just beautiful for that. I do have a final question, and this could take another hour to answer, but the question I love to finish on is what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation.

Hal ([40:55](#)):

There's a story I read years ago that's a variant of Parker Palmer's work, but it comes from a different part of the world. And the story is essentially Robert Fulghum who wrote *All You Needed to Know, You Can Learn in Kindergarten* book. I don't even remember that book, but he was really intrigued by a peace center, a peace institute that was built and set up in Crete by a person named Alexander Papaderous. Now, Alexander Papaderous had lived in Crete during World War II.

([41:31](#)):

He was a young little boy and he lived through a very horrific moment in Crete where the Nazi soldiers landed on Crete, were pushed back, came back in more numbers and massacred some villages and took over the island. And the hatred within Crete for Germans runs very deep. I will never forget going to that place, intentionally to go to that peace institute because of the story Robert Fulghum shared about his experience at that institute. Where he had been through two weeks of learning about how do we bring divisive hatred together and peace together.

([42:13](#)):

And Alexander Papaderous lived a life that would be inviting people into that more communal, peaceful space. And at the end of this whole two weeks, last session, last moment, Alexander Papaderous asked the audience, are there any more questions? Fulghum always raised his hand in those moments and he would ask the following question, what is the meaning of life? And most of the time he said people would laugh and they would walk away, get their stuff and leave the conference setting or whatever, but he would always ask it.



[\(42:53\)](#):

When he asked it, people laughed, but Papaderous looked him, Robert, right in the eye like, are you serious? Are you playing with me? And it was serious. And so he said, "I'll answer your question." And he pulled out his wallet. Inside of his wallet was about a Euro or quarter sized mirror that had been hand shaped into a round sort of thing. And Papaderous said, "I found a broken piece of a German motorcycle mirror when I was a little boy. In the midst of all of this conflict, I over time on a rock turned that shard into a round piece.

[\(43:32\)](#):

And then as a kid growing up, I always loved shining it into dark places to see what was there. Now I'm an adult." Papaderous said, "I always keep that mirror in my wallet. I'm not a kid anymore." He pulled it out. He was shining it on the people and he said to them, "My life, my purpose, I don't know what the meaning of your life is, but the meaning of mine is to shine light into dark places." And that reminds me of another of my favorite quotes by Elie Wiesel. He said, "I love the word quest in the word question. I love that word."

[\(44:19\)](#):

And then he later said, "Answers divide people, questions unite them." And that's the spirit of what we're talking about here. For a lot of my life, I was living a divided life. I was trying to get rid of this bad part of my past instead of understanding it and embracing it in that Parker Palmer-ish, Thomas Merton-ish hidden hole in the sense of it's not only okay, but it's you. And to me, those two stories I just shared about questions can unite us.

[\(44:53\)](#):

That sense of curiosity, shining that light into dark places. That's I think the world and parts that we're living in and the more I or anyone can engage in that kind of work, I'm grateful, especially when the light comes my way or the questions come my way too. It's not a one-way street.

MBS [\(45:21\)](#):



You remember how relating that Hasidic tale, someone came to the rabbi and said, "Why does the Torah tell us to put truth on top of the heart?" And the rabbi's response is, "It's sitting there until our heart breaks and the truth can fall in." Hal said it was about being ready, but I feel it might also be about being willing to find places to be where your heart might break. It's another way of coming at that Wilker poem I love so much in the book *How to Begin*. "Winning does not tempt him.

[\(45:56\)](#):

His growth is to be the deeply defeated by ever greater things." Being defeated, deeply defeated by ever greater things. That's where a deeper form of truth waits for us. If you enjoyed my conversation with Hal, I've got a couple of other interviews of this 2 Pages with MBS series to recommend. One is Liz Wiseman. My conversation with her is titled *How to Thrive*. And then also my conversation with Kiran Satia, *How to Rethink Ambition*. I think both of those tie in nicely with the conversation I've just had with Hal.

[\(46:33\)](#):

If you'd like more Hal as well as his books, which you can find most places, you simply go to his URL, his name, not a middle name, obviously. Hal Gregersen, H-A-L-G-R-E-G-E-R-S-E-N. Thank you for listening. Thank you for loving the podcast. Thank you for reviewing it. Thank you for passing on and mentioning and encouraging other readers. If there's one interview in particular that struck a chord, you're awesome and you're doing great.