

ON AIR

Shimon Rosenberg - Y. Lefkowitz

Behind The Mike

Michael Medved Broadcasts
His Jewish Identity

In an exclusive interview with one of America's most popular radio talk-show hosts, Zman gets a glimpse of the man beneath the yarmulke. Michael Medved, a baal teshuvah, has always worn his Jewish identity proudly, even as he has risen to become one of the most popular political commentators in America today. He shared with us his personal story of tribulations and triumphs, dreams realized and myths shattered.

Michael put down the receiver, conflicted. He had no regrets over his decision, but he had never imagined it would be so costly.

The official he had just spoken with did not mince words. He explained that by turning down two consecutive offers to appear on one of America's most popular television news programs, Michael had committed professional suicide. He would never get this chance again. Moreover, just weeks earlier, he had published a book, and even though it was selling very well, his appearance on such a prestigious national show was worth tens of thousands of dollars in free publicity. His television appearance would also provide an opportunity to promote his book before millions more American viewers.

Now the opportunity was lost due to an unforeseeable and incredibly unlikely booking issue. The initial date that had been offered to Michael for his appearance on the show corresponded to the first days of *Pesach*. He would be *mechalel* the *Yom Tov* by appearing on television that day. He had explained to the program's booking agent that it was impossible for him to appear on a Jewish holiday.

Fortunately, the program manager was interested in Michael and called him back to offer a second date. Just Michael's luck. This time it coincided with the last days of *Pesach*! Once again he was forced to explain that the holiday prevented him from appearing.

To the non-Jew at the program's offices, the whole business didn't make sense. Who would turn down such an offer—twice?! This business about the Jewish holidays was nonsense. He told Michael to look for his fortune elsewhere.

Now Michael was churning inside. Nobody who hoped to succeed in the media on a national level could afford to snub the host of that show, one of the most famous figures in America. There was a very serious chance Michael would be blacklisted now. No more interviews, no more publicity....

Michael's career was over....

Or so it seemed.

Looking back at the incident today, Michael Medved can smile broadly. His daily, three-hour radio show is broadcast on 200 stations coast-to-coast and reaches over 4.75 million listeners weekly. According to *Talkers Magazine*, it ranks fifth on the list of the country's most popular radio shows. Although most of his listeners are in western and central United States, he can be heard along the east coast as well.

For Torah observant Jews, Michael Medved's commitment to Torah values confirms so marvelously that making sacrifices for *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* does not hurt a person even financially. Though viewed by his loyal talk show followers as a commentator on American politics, Medved speaks proudly of his religion. He has no qualms about sharing the beauty of Judaism and lets millions of Americans know that this is a non-negotiable part of his life. He speaks proudly of observing *Shabbos* and keeping a television-free home.

Through his life and success, Medved demonstrates to all that there is nothing in Judaism to prevent others from achieving high goals.

Medved's History

Michael Medved was born in Philadelphia on October 3, 1948. The family later moved to San Diego where Medved's father David worked for defense contractor Convair and later for NASA. His mother was born in Germany to a religious Jewish family named Hirsch that lived not far from the legendary Orthodox community of Frankfurt.

"Unfortunately, they have no relation to the family of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch," Medved says with regret. "I wouldn't mind at all believing that we have some connection, but after researching the matter thoroughly I have found that the two families are completely unrelated."

Like so many other German Jews, his maternal grandfather was conscripted into the Kaiser's army during World War I. He was a full German citizen and a wealthy

businessman, but in 1934 he fled Nazi persecution. As Medved explains:

My grandfather, who died three years before I was born, had a small chocolate factory that he inherited from his father and grandfather. My mother's family made chocolate for several generations. In April 1934, on the day of Hitler's birthday, the worker's union of his factory came to my grandfather and told him, "We want to fly the swastika flag on Hitler's birthday."

My grandfather told them, "You can't do this. This is my property and I don't give you permission to do this."

My grandfather was a prominent citizen who was very respected in the city, but this didn't help. They told him, "If you don't let us hang up the flag, we'll go on strike."

My grandfather did not bend and they went on strike as they had threatened.

At that point my grandfather said, "Once you no longer own your business, and they do this to you, there is no future here."

He decided to sell the business and leave Germany forever. Of course, the whole family told him, "You're crazy. Why are you leaving Germany?" But he wasn't fazed. He left Germany and moved to Philadelphia. My mother was nine at the time.

Not only did he come to America, but he

helped over 100 people get out of Germany, including family and friends. To this day I meet people and they tell me, "Your grandfather helped my family get out of Germany."

Here in America they never really had money. They had a very hard time, but that's not important. What is important is that they left Germany and rebuilt their families in America. They never forgot how America took them in. My uncle Fritz Sigmund Hirsch—my mother's brother—was in the Army Air Corps in World War II and he had the opportunity to carry out air raids against Nazi Germany.

As his name Medved indicates, Michael descends from Ukrainian Jews on his father's side. His paternal grandmother was from a family of fervent Chassidim, followers of the saintly Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov. They lived in the city of Machnovka, not far from Berditchov. His paternal grandfather came from the city of Chmielnik.

My grandfather came to America in 1910. He arrived alone with his brother with a plan to work and earn enough money to bring over his wife and six children to America. He had to work for four years to save enough money to buy nine tickets on a



With *Zman*'s correspondent Y. Lefkowitz.