A FEW WORDS ABOUT MISHA MARINOV

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I hope these brief notes will help to add some features to the portrait of Misha Marinov.

I met Misha in 1980, when I started learning Hebrew in a small private group in Moscow. While I was a beginner, Misha had already acquired a good knowledge of the language. I should explain that at that time and place you could safely learn virtually any living or dead language, but not Hebrew. Because of the anti-Israeli policy of the Soviet government, this "language of Zionists" was practically forbidden. It was taught only in a very few special places, of course fully controlled by the government. Ironically, Jews were not allowed to study there. The few teachers who were brave enough to teach Hebrew in private groups, usually at the teacher's or a student's home, often had trouble with the authorities. We worked hard learning Hebrew, and it was fun to do it together with Misha, who loved the language.

Since my very first meeting with Misha, I was strongly impressed by his unusual personality. He was a brilliant physicist, erudite and, most of all, a person of highest integrity. He was a deep and independent thinker, too. It showed when he talked about physics, or politics, or life in general. When he made a statement, it was keen and profound. Apparently, he had a clear and integral picture of the world in mind. He was a perfectionist and made high demands of himself and other people. He was deeply involved in preparing himself for going to Israel. A committed Zionist, he was sure that the Jews from all over the world should live in Israel. He knew a lot about Israel. In many respects, Misha was an idealist. I should also say that there was a great esthetic beauty in his views and arguments. Misha had a profound influence upon me. My decision to move to Israel was, to a great extent, a result of this influence.

At that time Misha and his family had already applied to the Soviet authorities for an exit visa. As the result, he had to leave ITEP and earn a living, for 8 long years, by translating scientific literature from Russian into English and vice versa, and even by doing hard manual work in construction. Incidentally, I also did some translating for the same employer (it was called "The All-Union Center of Translations of Science and Technology Literature").

After some time (probably in 1982) the KGB informed the Center that Misha did not have a permanent job. According to the rules, this made his further work at the Center impossible. Therefore, I would take more translation assignments than I needed, and give them to Misha, so that he continued working until 1987, when he, his wife Lilia and daughters Masha and Dina were finally permitted to leave the USSR for Israel. By that time I had already become a "refusenik" myself. I remember well the day when Misha and his family obtained permission to leave the country. Misha was very happy. Incidentally, on the same day our family was handed our next refusal.

One more recollection about translations, this time from Hebrew into Russian. After a couple of years of studying Hebrew (but before I and my family applied for the exit visa), I registered as a Hebrew translator in the Center of Translations. The people of my generation will understand that this registration required some courage. A few months had passed when an editor called me and said that there was a translation assignment for me. Going to the Center, I was not sure that what was waiting for me was not a KGB officer... It turned out that a scientific research center in Moscow had indeed ordered a translation of a masters thesis in solid state physics from the University of Negev in Beer-Sheva. Misha and I splitted the thesis in two, and worked on it in parallel, consulting with each other over the phone. I remember that it was a tremendously difficult project, as our knowledge of scientific Hebrew at that time was almost non-existent. Actually, Misha and I used this opportunity to learn more Hebrew, and we were having fun.

When my family and I applied for the exit visa, I was ostracized by many of my colleagues-physicists. Misha was one of the few colleagues I could talk to about my work. Though our fields were quite far apart, he was always ready to listen. Misha introduced me to the "refuseniks seminar". It was a high-caliber seminar or, rather, colloquium in mathematics and natural sciences attended by scientists who were refuseniks, some of them for many years. At that time, the seminar was led by Prof. A. Yoffe. I was proud to give a talk there. It was very important for us, in those uncertain times, to interact with each other, as we all were "in the same boat". The future of the reforms in the USSR was unclear, and so of course the future of the refuseniks and their families. However, we had a feeling that the times were changing. A funny detail is worth mentioning. In 1987 I was told by the authorities that we would not be allowed to leave until 1995. A couple of months later we got the exit visa.

Misha and his family arrived in Jerusalem in 1987. He wrote me letters about Israel, gave practical advice and explained things. These letters were very important to us. We came to Jerusalem one year later and Lilia met us at the airport. We were happy to meet her and Misha again. Then Misha was offered a professorship at the Technion and moved to Haifa. We talked over the phone, and sometimes got together. Misha enjoyed his renewed scientific activity and he liked to teach too. Once we stayed in Misha's and Lilia's place overnight. It was fun to hike in the mountains near Haifa together and discuss things. I must say that Misha's views of Israeli politics were different from mine. Like many other people at that time, I believed in the so called "peace process" between Israel and the PLO initiated by the Oslo agreement. Misha was very negative, and quite emotional, about it. Unfortunately, he proved to be 100% right.

Misha confronted cancer with strength and courage. When I came to visit him, he was in a good mood. He smiled a lot. We talked about everything, laughed and told stories. He died very soon after that meeting.

Misha's integrity, and personality in general, made him a role model to those around him. He is missed by many. I am proud that I was his friend, and I will always remember him.