

Interview with Moshe D. Weinstock—12/6/89

Q: What are you reading?

A: A book about mythology by Joseph Campbell (an anti-Semitic writer who taught at Sarah Lawrence). I'm also going through Shas which I have already gone through three times and I was an editor of a Yiddish newspaper in the hasidic community for 10 years.

Q: What yeshivas did you study in?

A: In Pupa, Hungary. I'm a painter and I made a watercolor of my rebbe, Rabbi Greenwald. In 1952 I went to the Chazon Ish because I wanted to publish a sort of Hungarian Reader's Digest.

Q: When did you go to Israel?

A: In 1949. During the war I was in labor camp near Nuremberg and in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: You went to Israel in 1949 and when did you come here?

A: In 1959 and I want to return there because I have two sons there. They are Bratzlaver Hasidim. I also have another son and a daughter. My daughter teaches retarded children in Cleveland. My son is a book wholesaler in Williamsburg and a very strong Satmarer Hasid. But I am against the Satmarer.

Q: Where are you from?

A: Erlau, Hungary, the same town as the Ktav Sofer. I was born in 1922. I'm 67 now.

Q: What kind of gallery do you have on the Lower East Side?

A: We sell mats, prints here and in Melbourne, Australia. My wife is also an artist. We make exhibitions for artists.

Q: Can you make a living from this?

A: A very nice living.

Q: The book you wrote about the Holocaust in Hungary, were you able to sell it?

A: It's very hard to sell such a book. And also I had a conflict with the Satmarer. They broke my head (He shows me a scar on his head.)

Q: You had a real fight.

A: A fight? Is it a real fight when six teenagers attack you?

Q: What was it about?

A: I had a newspaper in Hungarian, called New Horizon and it spoke favorably about Israel.

Q: Why did you write that? You knew it would get you into trouble.

A: Because I believed in it, and I wanted to popularize it. I discussed Judaism and I said that all the Jews should be in Israel (He himself plans to go in two years when he and his wife will both be eligible for Social Security.) We can't go by the laws of the Torah, living together with the Gentiles.

Q: Do you think people in Israel should all serve in the army?

A: Yes.

Q: When, after the war, you learned that your family had perished, did you stop believing in God?

A: No.

Q: What kind of work did you do when you came?

A: First I worked in a sweater factory. Then I worked as a sign painter. Then I studied at Pratt Institute and became an artist.

Q: Tell me a little more about your newspaper, New Horizon.

A: About thirty percent of those to whom I sent it, paid up. I published it for ten years during the 1970s. The Satmarer attacked me in 1979. I also found in YIVO an anti-Satmarer newspaper that existed in Hungary. The Satmarer terrorized the entire community.

Q: What do you do every day?

A: I get up every morning at 5:00A.M. and go to minyan and after that I study Talmud. There is now a Satmarer community here in Seagate.

Q: How do they view you?

A: Like a leper. They say the Zionists knew 6,000,000 million Jews would have to die in Europe for a State to be built. And I say: Who could have even dreamt that

such a thing would happen in the 1930s? It's ridiculous. And I wrote this in my paper and it made them very angry. I also wrote in editorials that they were terrorists.

Q: How did they attack you?

A: They called and said: "We have 200 Russian paintings. Can you evaluate them? They're in Williamsburg" So I went there and it was nothing. I went into a private house and six men in their twenties began to beat me. I fell down and was full of blood. They hit me with an iron. And they didn't allow the ambulance to come. Outside 200 people were standing who knew in advance what would happen. They prevented the ambulance from coming. They made a circus out of it. Finally my wife got me to Coney Island Hospital. They said they did it in the Rebbe's honor. Two weeks later he passed away.

Q: Do you think they did it with his knowledge?

A: No. In his last fifteen years, he was senile. They terrorized other people too, Vishnitz, Belz. I had already closed the paper before that, for financial reasons.

Q: Does it bother you to be seen as an outcast by them?

A: I can't tell you it's great but I'm so busy.

Q: Who read your paper?

A: The Satmarer, especially the women. I reprinted excerpts from novels. Today I write books about Israel, mythology, all kinds of things. I'm now working on my fifth book.

Q: Since you're a hasid and hasidim don't even read about these things, much less write about them, is there anyone you can communicate with?

A: No, there is no one.

Q: Is your wife supportive of you?

A: Oh yes. She's also a writer and an artist. She studied in Brooklyn College. I'm actually more of a caricaturist.