MY FRIEND MISHA MARINOV

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When I began writing my memories about Michael Marinov, I realized that it wouldn't be possible to consistently and systematically describe the "warm chaos" that rises in my head when I mentally say the two words: Misha Marinov.

When I first got involved in theoretical physics, Misha became one of my most authoritative consultants, in spite of the very small difference in age between us. He always had enough patience for an answer, and the answer was always thorough and detailed. Let alone me, a beginner in theoretical physics, but more than once I witnessed practically every member of the theoretical department turn to him for references or advice, some very renowned people amongst them. Misha was "a walking encyclopedia."

When the Institute received a new periodical, containing an article which wasn't clear, but related to a very critical topic, it was usually Marinov who reported on this article at the seminar of the theoretical department. When the experimentalists at the Institute had to be presented with a popular explanation of a new mathematical approach in theoretical physics, the same Michael Marinov was asked to prepare the report at the all-Institute seminar. Misha's "educational" activities took up so much time, that, in my opinion, it even interfered with his own research.

People liked to get Misha's advice, sometimes even on subjects not related to science. One can only imagine the wide spectrum of the questions asked, but a particular case that I learned about gives an idea of what a great degree of trust Misha's comrades felt towards him. A member of the theoretical department, K., once approached Misha with the following question: should he join the Communist Party or not. Such an act was particularly nontrivial, since everybody knew that Marinov was apolitical and had some friends who were dissidents or something of the sort. "Comrade K." in his addressing Misha was most likely being sly. He had already made his decision about joining the Party, but he wanted to demonstrate his doubts to Misha, so he wouldn't be judged harshly for his "conjunctional" choice. In other words, comrade K. respected Michael Marinov.

I have worked in the Institute of Theoretical and Experimental Physics for 25 years, from 1965 till 1990, since the age of 24. My friendships with two people, Misha Marinov and Zhenya Tarasov, played a crucial role for me during this period, influencing my choice of what is usually called "way of life" (destiny). Despite my sufficiently successful career in theoretical physics, I finally decided to abandon scientific work and to fully immerse myself in social processes during the period of perestroika. In 1987 with some friends I organized a society "Memorial."

My choice of "social service" in place of scientific career to a significant extent took place under the impression of the many conversations with Misha, our discussions of the social processes, which began in Russia with Michael Gorbachev's coming to power. In this context, it would be relevant to recollect the dramatic circumstances, however ordinary they were for those times, under which the Jews were leaving Soviet Union during this period.

Misha was deeply aware of his belonging to the Jewish people. His knowledge of its history was superb and he felt keenly Israel's arduous struggle for survival. One could say that he wanted to be with his people in a difficult moment to help preserve its statehood. But it can also be phrased differently: he sensed "the spirit of the times." The state of Israel came to be and has been sustaining itself for decades solely because hundreds of thousands of Jews all over the world decided for themselves that they must be in Israel at that instant.

There is factual evidence as to how serious Misha regarded his departure. Already a number of years before he applied for a permission to leave, Misha had enough scientific publications, based on which he could submit a dissertation and receive a degree of Doctor of Science in Physics and Mathematics [an analogue of professorship]. More importantly, there existed a general opinion that it was time for Marinov to complete his dissertation. But he didn't do so assuming that having completed the dissertation would make him more "valuable" for the Soviet government and it would be more resolute at keeping him in the Soviet Union.

My closest interaction with Misha took place during the last years of his stay in the USSR, after he left ITEP and submitted the exit documents. The Soviet authorities, as it was then customary, refused to allow Michael Marinov's family to depart and they waited, having joined the numerous family of "refusniks", as they were called then.

In order to support his family, while he and his wife Lilia already had two children, he had to earn money. And this he did constantly, mainly by translating scientific articles.

At that time I myself used to work on the side during vacations, going out of town with a group of friends for construction work. That was the so-called "shabashka". Most of the time our brigadier was my and Misha's friend Petya Volkovitsky.

And so Petya and I invited Misha to join our brigade. He became my partner. You had to see the thoroughness and the zeal with which Misha was familiarizing himself with the nuances of the shabashka.

It is a pleasure for me to remember the time when Misha and I worked together. At one stage Misha and I started working separately from the brigade: we accepted a construction contract and completed it by ourselves, just the two of us. The work used to start in the summer, but during one month of my vacation we didn't manage to finish the work and had to continue until the winter, going out to the construction site Saturdays and Sundays. Sometimes we would also include an additional weekday. In this manner we assembled three timber summerhouses in the countryside outside Moscow.

It was easy for me to work with Misha, although everyone who has ever done it, knows that the shabashka often gives rise to conflict. This is related to psychological incompatibility in addition to strenuous work for 12-14 hours a day in rather harsh living conditions.

Misha was a very tactful person, forgiving partner's mistakes or omissions, trying to take upon himself the more difficult share of the labor. In the mornings and evenings and during the work itself we talked a lot. The topics were "eternal" and rather "standard" for the Soviet intelligencia of those times. I am convinced that these particular conversations to a great extent prepared me as a social activist, although clearly, our social interests and intentions were different. I was thinking a lot about the social processes which took place during that period, the period of the early "perestroika" in Russia, trying to find my own place in them and finally did find it. Misha, on the other hand, talked of the history of Jewish people and of his own need to participate in the establishing of the state of Israel. In spite of the seemingly complete difference in subjects, we were talking about the same thing, the possibility and the need of personal participation in social processes, one in Russia, the other — in Israel.

Translated from Russian by Maria Marinov