MISHA IN MOSCOW UNIVERSITY†

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I do not speak for myself alone. I represent a few of our close personal friends. All of us would like to honor Misha's memory, but I am personally indebted to Misha.

A brief vignette: together with some old university friends I had the opportunity to say good-bye to Misha on his last evening before he left for Israel. I was asked to make a short speech for all of us and I started by saying: "I am sorry, Misha, forgive us". Misha just laughed as he was in excellent spirits.

In 1956 I was accepted to Moscow State University and the first person I met at the Physics Department was Misha Marinov, who was then already carrying himself like a king. The fact that Misha had been accepted to the University that year was a stroke of blind luck. Before 1956 the upper limit of people of the certain ethnic group [Jews] was set to be zero, but in 1956 a special delegation (I don't know of whom it consisted) appealed to Nikita Sergeyevich [Khruschev] personally to take away this quota. This was soon after the 20th Party Congress, which had an enormous effect on all of us, and Nikita Sergeyevich personally ordered that the quota for Jews in the University be eliminated. That was the first and the last such year and many people that we know today began their education then. Misha was accepted, of course, when his abilities were judged objectively.

I must say that it was thanks to Misha that I remained in the Physics Department. I came from the periphery Moscow and, except for some mathematics, I knew very little. Immediately there was a question of me being expelled. Luckily, in class I sat next to Misha and stubbornly asked him to explain everything to me. There was never the slightest hint he ever became annoyed; on the contrary, he was always prepared to explain things to me thoroughly and clearly, step by step. And so I stayed in the Physics Department. Dear Misha, thank you very much.

Misha always wanted to be a physicist. I know that as a high school student he attended a physics group, where he was distinguished by his exceptional abilities: he always solved all the problems first, while sitting at the front of the class.

At the University there existed an internal classification of students: the

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most advanced students (most of them residents of Moscow) were called "titans" or "giants", followed by two additional categories which were less advanced. Misha was from the first day unquestionably a giant and a titan.

Upon being admitted to the University he was immediately singled out for his outstanding mathematical abilities. During the break Misha was would walk alongside the professor down the corridor discussing certain geometrical problems of which I couldn't even begin conceive. To me he was an "Olympic God" and I regarded him as such until we became closer. Then he wasn't an "Olympic God" any more and simply became Misha Marinov.

Everyone realized that he was a giant, but not only in the scientific sphere. Our generation lived through some very turbulent times: we were the children of the 20th Communist Party Congress, witnessing the events in Berlin, Poland and Hungary. In seminars on the History of the Communist Party some very heated discussions took place. Misha participated in these discussions, but his remarks were usually very brief and critical. He thoroughly studied the history of the communist party and tried to formalize the history textbook, although, of course, it was impossible.

This is how Misha Marinov is described in the diary of one very smart and mathematically educated (as you will see from her writing style) girl, who knew him during her years at the University: "Misha wasn't interested in girls, at least not in the ones from the department, and even slightly despised them. However, saying that this was mutual would be incorrect. Misha was very attractive with a kind of biblical beauty, for which he received the nicknames of Mephistopheles, Judas and, oddly enough, Trotsky. Women admired him, but were a bit afraid of his cynical remarks, usually uttered in a soft purring voice and accompanied by the famous "integral" smile."

I considered Misha a close friend and often confided in him. One day he in turn told me something about himself. Generally, he was a person with a very intense inner life that was rarely revealed The circumstances revealed to me that day that, in my opinion, that changed him as a man and as a person forever. On his first day back to elementary school after having been away for a long time he was severely beaten by his classmates. He wanted to know "why", "what for" and the indifferent answer followed: "Don't you know? We are beating the Jews!" This remark changed him forever and from that moment an intense change took place inside him. It seems that at that moment he had already decided to dedicate his life to a single cause. When asked about the purpose of Misha's life, I would say that his chosen purpose was to serve Israel, the Promised land of his Forefathers, according to his own words.

The decision that he made that day at school was always with him and he never changed. The amazing thing is he decided to dedicate himself to a certain purpose and from then on all his efforts were aimed at perfecting himself and preparing himself, making himself maximally effective in achieving his goal. He did everything in earnest, always strived for perfection and it was known to all that if Misha was doing something, he was doing it very well, and if he knew something, he knew its very essence.

The last letter I received from him was in June, when he was already ill. I had heard about it and wrote a letter to say that we were all with him and thinking about him. It was then that he mentioned the possible source of his illness. In 1957 we all went to work the Tselina in Kazakhstan. There Misha also performed remarkably. At night we would witness certain amazing "natural phenomena", similar to the aurora borealis: the black sky over the step would be lit up by flashes of fantastic beauty. We admired it and didn't realize what it was. As it turned out later, these were the after-results of the latest nuclear experiments, which were carried out in Semipalatinsk area, in the atmosphere. We, of course, weren't warned about this. After these events the area was suddenly swept by a kind of hurricane, accompanied by a downpour of an exceptional strength, such that the locals deemed very unusual, almost unreal. It is possible that some of us suffered, as a consequence, as Misha certainly did. Misha, like many others, used to sleep outside on the haystacks, because the air indoors was impossibly stale. Other young men and women used to cover their heads and faces for the night, but Misha was proud of his "mane" and never covered his head in the summer. Misha got absolutely soaked during that hurricane and he thought that it was then that he contracted this disease, which remained inside him till it awoke in his last years. That year, in September of 1957, he lost a great amount of hair, which could have been a sign of being exposed to radiation.

Misha and I often met during the following years, working together, going to seminars and discussing many issues. I think that we always regarded each other with mutual sympathy. As for myself, I simply loved Misha.

Speaking of Misha as a person, I want to emphasize one of his main features, recognized by many others as well; he was a very self-contained person. His own internal judgment was always the ultimate and the deciding factor for him. He was very independent in his views and didn't recognize any authority. At a relatively early age he already voiced such opinions about such "great figures" that I shuddered. He had what you might call a certain "self-reliance".

Misha Marinov was a very wholesome, complete person. Such he was, such he remains in my memory and I hope, will remain always.

Translated from Russian by Maria Marinov