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Vassily Vassilievich Nalimov...

The Whisper of Destiny

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V. V. Nalimov, Moscow, 1987. Painting by Vitaly S. Gribkov

JOINING IN sharing the deep sense of loss that another colleague—Professor Vassily Vassilievich Nalimov—left this earth on January of 1997, Professor Rustum Roy, from Pennsylvania State University in the USA, wrote in a fax message:

Gene [Garfield] and I spoke of how the unique giants of our time—women and men with an integrative, and truly ecumenical view of science and philosophy, good and evil, despair and hope—are slowly disappearing, and there are no more younger people to replace them.

Professor V. V. Nalimov was not only the carrier of illuminating ideas but also a human being with an incredible personal life. His courage and outlook during the trying experience of the Gulag period turned him into a creative spirit. He became one of “the unique giants of our time.” Above all, he always insisted on being “a free thinker.”

V. V. Nalimov was born in 1910. His father was a professor who died in a Soviet Gulag camp in 1938, his mother, a surgeon who died in a military hospital in the 1919 typhus epidemic. His studies at Moscow State University were interrupted by political conflict with the Komsomol, and he had to leave the university and start working in an electrotechnical institute (1931–1936), during which he published research on the photoelectrical effect in 1933. On 31 October 1936, he was arrested and sentenced to five years

imprisonment in the Gulag, which was extended to eighteen years of repressed status. After years of labor at woodcutting and gold-field mining, he began work at the local metallurgical plant, and in 1943, was appointed chief of the laboratory under a conditional discharge. In 1949, he was arrested a second time and sentenced to exile for life in Kazakhstan, where he worked in a metallurgical laboratory. In 1954, after Stalin's death, Nalimov was finally released. In 1959, in the Institute of Rare Metals, he organized a mathematical group to process experimental data with computers, and in 1965, he was invited to be Assistant Director in the Moscow State University Interfaculty Laboratory of Statistical Methods. In 1975 the laboratory was dismantled and Nalimov was named head of the Laboratory of Mathematical Theory of Experiment in the Biological Department of Moscow State University. He kept working up to the very end of his life, remaining on the staff of Moscow State University as a Scientist-in-Chief.

His intellectual powers and gift of creativity allowed him to be a generous source of important ideas—even at age 86. Ideas were the seeds he scattered in books and talks throughout his long life. His many publications include books on mathematical statistics, scientometrics, psychology, philosophy, and problems of consciousness and culture. A recent autobiography published in 1994 in Moscow (in Russian)—*Kanatokhodets, (Tight-rope Walker)*—relates the story of the whole century that was the backdrop for his hard and courageous personal life.

“The greatness of man is measured against mysteries which he cultivates, or before which he stops”—this motto from Maeterlinck's *La Mort* is the opening to one of the main books by Nalimov, *Spontannost' Soznaniya (Spontaneity of Consciousness, 1989)*. It can as well serve to characterize the whole of Nalimov's surprising life.

Vassily Vassilievich Nalimov is difficult to write about: he is too “multi-dimensional,” as was his conception of the whole Universe. His personality embodied the realm of ideas he cultivated. Two ideas were the most essential ones for him—*freedom* and *non-violence*—and they inspired his spirit and world outlook. He was initiated by love for freedom through his teachers both at school and in the Mystical Anarchism Movement. This love molded his character and personality and his work as a scientist and free thinker. Many times I was myself convinced that this initiation, together with his courage to face life's challenges, helped sustain him on the verge of disasters—in Gulag, in Soviet science, in Russian life. This initiation proved to be a real shield which he used in a masterful way when required to take a stand, to oppose, to repulse. I felt he was not alone, but charged with the collective power of those whose torch he had taken up. They continued within him—as he became a warrior and a spirit opened to the Universe: its Great Mysteries, its Grandeur. What I speak of here are not just words—there is also other evidence. About to leave the Earth for a space unknown

to me, but maybe evident then to him, he spoke of the Universe and Freedom. He was very weak at the time and couldn't sit up without cushions, but he saw Something, and talked about it with such inspiration and delight it was as if he were looking through the window of the Universe.

As he grew older, he went on living with an ever-growing interest in life. His books remain a testament to his intellect and spirit—full of illuminations and insights well-formulated in terms of science and philosophy. He kept writing even during the period of his heart infarction in 1991—refusing to go to the hospital because it lacked a library and writing desk for him. In the years from 1991 through 1996, he wrote four books, remaining at his desk for 10-14 hours a day—ill, tired, and...happy. And all this time, instead of complaints, I heard much more often an appeal to listen to: “And what is interesting...!” Thinking never ceased to excite him.

I live now thinking of him every instant, talking to him, gazing at the life-sized portrait of him in his study, saying “hello” and “bye,” longing for meeting with him in my dreams. I could not understand my missing him so much—seemingly beyond all reason. But once, a “reason” became clear. Working on a manuscript of V.V.'s, I had to check a reference to the Russian poet, Maximilian Voloshin, whom V.V. liked very much and whose lines he used as epigraphs in his manuscripts. I opened the book of poetry and found a poem marked in red (as was V.V.'s custom) which was unfamiliar to me. It was a message:

*Now I am dead. I am all the lines of the book
In your hands...
And thereby removed the chains of love from your shoulders,
But my ashes burn...
And now in the hour of anxiety
I can be turned over.
But All your ways are set forever
By my seal.*

Thus, once again, V.V. explained to me what was going on in the Universe. I wanted to speak to him, and he answered. I longed for his help, and I received it. Beyond time and space. What is reality? Vassily taught that a person is always open to a variety of potentialities and is free to make choices and to create. A human being acts spontaneously, listening intently to what is ripening in the planetary consciousness. That very listening to the whisper of Destiny, enables one to make decisions generating “filters” which can change one's system of values. “The transpersonal feeling of oneself charges the possibility to become aware of coparticipation in different worlds and cultures.”

I am happy to be sealed that way.





Cause-Effect Links
Mikhail Zlatkovsky