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A Teacher

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Translated from the Russian by Jeanna Drogalina-Nalimov

On January 19, 1997, Vassily Vassilievich Nalimov—Professor, Doctor of Technical Sciences, an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, and one of the most unusual scientists of our time—passed away.

He was the founder and head of some new leads in science, such as the metrology of quantitative analysis, chemical cybernetics, the mathematical theory of experimental design, and scientometrics. The sphere of his scientific concern was of a remarkable range, and his proposed solutions were fairly exceptional: They agitated minds and gave rise to discussions for many years. His reflections on the probabilistic model of language, the probabilistic theory of meanings (and semantic architectonics of personality), the probabilistic pathways of evolution, and his thoughts on ecological problems and cultural crisis went so far beyond the ordinary outlook that they often sounded challenging to many people.

But V. V. Nalimov was not only a Scientist but also a true Teacher, very few such to be met with. He possessed this title, one of the most honorary titles a man can ever be worthy to have, due to his eminent personal character and not to an official rank.

There are two kinds of teachers. Anyone belonging to the first, treats teaching as a main goal of his life and does his best to make students accept him, transmitting to them all his personality is rich in. A teacher of the other kind can frankly consider himself not to be a teacher. He exerts influence apart from his will. To be apprenticed to him is much more difficult, and the influence on disciples is indebted to a great degree to the significance of his personality and the importance of his ideas.

A teacher of the first kind can be average. Or even good. He can also be a great teacher. The teacher of the second kind has no variety of choices: he is either great or not.

History knows quite a number of teachers of this kind among scientists and artists. Vassily Vassilievich Nalimov was one of them. He never seemed to be concerned about being better understood. He was just living in the flow of thinking, yielding valuable offerings. It happened that people who were charmed by his work and personality very often failed to penetrate the realm of his ideas. Yet each fruitful effort was lavishly rewarded, for the world they did manage to penetrate was marvelously rich.

And one more thing should be mentioned. The people who surrounded Vassily Vassilievich, as a rule, possessed some moral rectitude or just good quality. This resulted from the powerful mastery of his nature that emanated from him. He attracted those very people. And on the other hand, contacting him, was a mighty source of moral rectitude, both in science and life—again apart from his will.

Today Nalimov's disciples, like all Russian scientists, are living on the verge of disaster. But the very memory of their Teacher sustains hope. Nalimov managed to carry the light of his spirit through such ordeals, and even glimmers of that light are enough to help in overcoming much.

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