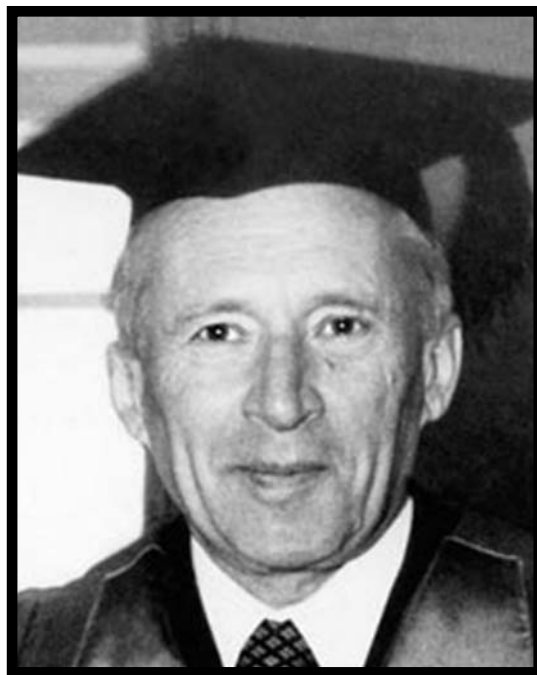


Israel Moiseevich Gelfand



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Israel Moiseevich Gelfand died October 5, 2009 in an American hospital (in New Brunswick, New Jersey) at the age of 96. This sad news was telephoned to me by Yu. M. Vasiliev, one of the closest friends of Israel Moiseevich. “Thus, an epoch has passed!” said Yurii Markovich sorrowfully.

I. M. Gelfand was born September 3, 1913 in the Ukrainian village Krasnye Okny (just its grammatically incorrect name branded it as a remote place). And 38 years later he got the highest scientific prize of the USSR, and still two years later he was elected Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. And then he became a full Academician, honorary doctor of many universities of the World, foreign member of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA, and laureate of various international rewards. In the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1980) he is spoken of as “mathematician, his main works concern functional analysis, mathematical physics, and applied mathematics”. However, for me and a broad circle of Russian biologists he was first of all known as the organizer of the Moscow Seminar on Experimental Biology, which undoubtedly was the best among similar meetings and for many years determined the pulse of scientific ideas in this field of Russian sci-

ence. Gelfand was the soul of the Seminar, its brain center, a tuning fork, which helped us, his students, to unmistakably determine whether our works were worth attention. Many years later I realized the most important principle (in this word, I. M. stressed the last syllable, which sounded more energetic and impressive): “For many of us the main danger is not choosing too great a goal and not reaching it, but the spending one’s whole life pursuing many obviously insignificant objects”. Gelfand never openly declared this Michelangelo’s maxim, but it was for him an axiom, which he followed in all his undertakings – including the Seminar on Biology. And we all, participants of this Seminar, visited it with only one purpose – to communicate with the *Genius*. Therefore, when in 2008 the *Russian Journal of Developmental Biology* proposed that I, among other “Gelfanders”, write memoirs about this Seminar, I titled mine simply “Genius” ((2008), **38**, No. 6, 379-380). Look there to learn how a boy from a poor Ukrainian village, lacking even a school diploma, moved from his position as coat check attendant at the Lenin Library to one of the great achievers of our times.

V. P. Skulachev