

EDITORIAL

Perpetuum Mobile
Prof. Zvi Laron – Israel Prize, 2009

We salute Zvi Laron, Professor Emeritus of Pediatric Endocrinology, Tel Aviv University, and Director of the Endocrinology & Diabetes Research Unit at Schneider Children's Hospital, on the occasion of being awarded the 'Israel Prize' for research in medicine. The Israel Prize is awarded each year on the Independence Day of the State of Israel, by the Ministry of Education, to people who have been outstanding in their contribution to one of the fields of humanities, science, culture and art, and to those who devoted their life to contribute to society and the state. The prize is given in the presence of the President, Prime Minister, Chairman of the Knesset, President of the High Court, and the Mayor of Jerusalem.

Zvi Laron graduated in medicine in 1952, four years after he immigrated to Israel in the significant year of 1948. After residences and research appointments at Massachusetts General Hospital, Pittsburgh and Harvard Medical School, he laid the basis for pediatric endocrinology in Israel. The birth of pediatric endocrinology in Israel was not easy. At those times investing in new medical fields and laboratories was not a priority of a country struggling with the many problems of a new state. Despite limited resources and no institutional support, his impressive pioneering efforts for building from scratch a laboratory with in-house endocrine assays succeeded. Old timers remember him running around with blood samples and fighting for a first quality lab.

In addition to founding a center for the treatment of juvenile diabetes mellitus, Zvi laid the



basis for growth hormone therapy in Israel. Zvi Laron recruited all the country to collect pituitary glands for the production of pituitary growth hormone (GH) for patients with GH deficiency. His active research on the diagnosis and treatment of these patients is well documented in the medical literature. The discovery and description of what has become known as Laron syndrome opened new horizons in GH research and understanding of the GH field. Most of the first pediatric endocrinologists in Israel started at his clinic that later became an

institute. Those graduates later started pediatric endocrine centers of their own in other medical institutions. I was one of the lucky ones. The lessons in his clinic included a close look at laboratory assays and the personal example of a physician who is involved in all aspects of the patients' problems, starting with the clinical aspects, laboratory studies and psychological support of a chronic clinical problem.

Zvi is the example of Descartes' saying: "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am). He has been very active in research from the first day of his career to the present. His last 'baby' is the lower rate of cancer in patients with GH deficiency. Last week I was asked by one of his current research students to collaborate in a new study. His everlasting efforts in patient care and research make him eligible for the title '*perpetuum mobile*'.

When he was asked, "In your position, and at your age, why are you still doing all this scientific

work and hanging posters in conventions?”, he answered with a question: “Would you ask an artist why he still paints?”

I wish him many more years of fruitful work. I am sure that as an example of a physician who has devoted his life to patient care, research and teaching, and as a pioneer with an inner fire of dedication, who against all odds created an

impressive institute and a large number of followers, he deserves the recognition of the state.

Zvi Zadik, M.D.

(A former student of Prof. Zvi Laron)