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## In Memoriam

## Dr. R.O.B Wijesekera, The Man Who Changed The Direction Of My Life, My Mentor And My Best Friend

L.N. Fernando

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I came to know Dr. Wijesekera in 1971 when he recruited me as a technical assistant to his Natural products laboratory at CISIR (Ceylon Institute of Scientific and Industrial Research). I was just out of high school, with a passion for mathematics and engineering. Dr. Wijesekera took a leap of faith with me and introduced me to advanced chemistry. He exposed me to a new subject area that grew into a passion. It was his guidance and advice that made me who I am today. At the beginning of my career, natural products, essential oils and their chemistry were somewhat foreign to me. Dr. Wijesekera's guidance made the transition much easier for me. He was an industry leader specializing in natural products with a focus on essential oils and spices. He is a man of vision, compassion and full of empathy. He encouraged me to study further and strive for more in my career. I have seen Dr. Wijesekera helping so many graduate students to obtain scholarships or assistantships in foreign

universities in order to advance their careers. When I indicated to him that I too would like to further my knowledge especially in analytical chemistry, without any hesitation he requested the director board to nominate me for a scholarship. In 1977, I was awarded a Colombo Plan Scholarship to study in Australia. I am so much indebted to him for making my dream come true and guiding me in the right direction. He was there to give me a hand when I applied and landed a position in the U.S. Dr. Wijesekera always made time to connect with me when I visited Sri Lanka years later. His friendship has been such a guiding force in my life. He will be greatly missed. As a Buddhist, we learnt in "Mangala Sutta", out of the 38 blessings "To associate with the wise" is one blessing. I certainly had that with Dr. Wijesekera. Thank you for such a blessing.

May you attain the supreme Nibbana!

*Mr. Lakdas N. Fernando was in the first batch of Laboratory Technicians Training Course (LTTC) conducted by the Institute of Chemistry, Sri Lanka. He obtained a MS in Food Science and Human Nutrition, and later on worked as a Research Analyst at the Department of Food Science, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA.*