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Tabatchnik, Mark. Memorial service. 21 January 1993.

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REMARKS AT MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR MARK TABATCHNIK

by Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman

January 21, 1993

Mark Tabatchnik was an extraordinary person. Slender as a willow, one would think that he would bend and shiver and even break before a heavy wind. Yet nothing could daunt, let alone break him. He withstood every onslaught, overcame every difficulty in a long and tumultuous life. There was an incredible strength and determination in the man, which was always present, even when he complained most bitterly about this or that turn of fate in his life. The complaint was never diluted by weeping or whining. He shouted from strength, not from weakness. The source of strength was his belief in himself. He often described himself as an "old revolutionary", and one could sense the pride behind the phrase.

The other source of strength was his Clementine. When I last saw him, some days before he died, he described the coincidence of both of them requiring hospitalization at the same time, and how he fought with the doctor who suggested that they be placed in different institutions. Even at a moment of terrible physical debilitation, he summoned the strength to insist and fight and argue that they be not separated, and he succeeded. For weeks they lay in Lenox Hill, on different floors, but spiritually together. "I cannot live without her",

he said to me. "We are one". And the same with his beautiful daughter, of whom he was so proud. I remember the tales he would tell of her exploits, decades ago, when she was still a child.

His mind was brilliant, his analytic capability sharp, his memory filled with countless details and facts to buttress his opinions. The only reliable archive in the huge mechanism called UJA was one man - and whenever a chairman or department head or community official asked a question which no one could answer, someone would say, "OK - call Tabatchnik - he will know." And he always did.

This old Russian, this warm-hearted Jew, may have felt, many times in his life, that he was not sufficiently rewarded or recognized or applauded, and if he sometimes exploded in bitterness or frustration, those of us who were close to him and really appreciated the unique qualities of the man, always understood and tried to pay him the respect he truly deserved. He was not soft - he pressed hard on those points in which he believed - and that was the measure of his greatness. He believed in what he was doing with his life; he worked longer every day than most of his colleagues; he had a long view of history and his part in shaping it.

Does this describe a life well lived? I think so. He was a civilized, intelligent, useful person, and those of us who knew him best will continue to talk about him as long as we remain on this earth. About how many can this be said? Mark made his mark. May he rest in peace. We bless his memory. Amen