

WORDS SPOKEN IN MEMORY OF

MORRIS BALTER

by

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The family of our dear friend has accorded me a melancholy privilege. Would that it could have been postponed for many more years.

I had known of Morris Balter even before I came to Pittsburgh thirty-six years ago. His dear wife's mother, Goldie Stone, was a leading public worker in every good cause in the city of Chicago. Her remarkable career has been recorded in her autobiography, "My Caravan of Years." When Goldie Stone knew I was coming to Pittsburgh she told me of her daughter's husband and how eager she was for us to meet. We met very soon and an especial type of friendship grew up between us.

The special nature of our friendship has something to do with a history of our Reform movement. The Reform movement had made a new emphasis in Judaism. It was a noble emphasis. It put all stress upon the ethical teachings of the Prophets and said that ceremonial and ritual matters are only of secondary importance. This was an important change of emphasis but we paid a price for it. The ritual and the ceremonials which we declared to be secondary were actually all-important in the history of Jewish intellectual development. Most of the material of that great monument of

the mind, the Talmud, and its dependant literature, had to do with ritual and ceremonial. Coming in closer touch with the Prophets, we lost touch with the scholars. We stressed the conscience of Judaism, which was good, but lost its intellectuality, which was bad.

Now Morris Balter's childhood and boyhood were like mine. We came from a similar background in which the old-fashioned scholarship was stressed. So we came into the Reform movement with rich memories and a fair competence in the old learning. I have been blessed with many friends here, intelligent and brilliant friends, but Morris's sharing of old rabbinic scholarship made our friendship a little special. We would discuss some of my studies in the field of Jewish law and he would never be inclined to consider it a mere intellectual eccentricity. So he and I shared a world of old-fashioned learning. It was perhaps impractical. It was a sort of a dream landscape out of the past. But in that landscape Morris and I walked side by side.

Because he had this historic intellectual past, I needed his help especially when I became President of our World Union for Progressive Judaism. I made a place for him on the American Board of the World Union and we met at meetings and at our world convention.

One of the favorite metaphors in our Jewish tradition is to compare a life to a tree. We speak of "the tree of life." It may be strange to apply this ancient Biblical metaphor to a modern American businessman but it is true.

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Morris's roots went deep into the soil of all our yester-
days, and the branches of his interest spread out to the
various countries of our concern. And for these special
qualities he was a special friend and for that reason we
shall not forget you, dear Morris.