

Rabbi Yael Splansky
In Honour of The Tailor Project
Holy Blossom Temple
Yom HaShoah, 5779 – May 1, 2019

(We begin this solemn eve of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, with a moment of silence and we light a candle in memory of Lori Gilbert Kaye, who was slain in her synagogue last week in Poway, California. In 2019 she was murdered simply because she was a Jew. She is remembered by her congregation and friends as “a teacher of radical empathy.”)

I wish to thank the four families for sharing their stories and to acknowledge the many more families who are here as descendants of Mr. Enkin’s tailors. Each one of you is an inheritor of an extraordinary story of love and luck, of survival and resilience, of hard work and hope. We honour your stories on this night of *Yom HaShoah*. And we are so grateful to you, Faye Keiffer, who told her story of survival for the first time tonight. We can only imagine how painful it is to do. We are now witnesses to your testimonial and we will always remember your story.

We also must express our gratitude to our dear congregant, Larry Enkin, who conceived of this evening of dedication and commemoration. The Tailor Project calls attention to an important moment in Canadian history, in Jewish history. And we must learn from it. I know you, Larry, are equally motivated by the mitzvah of *Kibud Av vaEim*, honouring your parents. With this Tailor Project you are giving us an opportunity to speak your father’s *Shem Tov* and to reinforce his

legacy of loyalty and leadership. We are so grateful to you -- for how you remind us of all that Holy Blossom Temple stands for and how we must rise to the occasion of courageous and compassionate leadership, which is so desperately needed now in our own day.

Our congregation, Toronto's first synagogue, has devoted itself to refugee relief and immigrant resettlement since our founding in 1856. Whether Jew or non-Jew, newcomers have been the focus of our care and concern -- Vietnamese Boatpeople, Soviet Jewry, Muslims and Yazidis from Syria. I'm pleased that some new Canadians are with us tonight. We are so blessed to live in this good country. Today's Canada is to the world an example of how a country, shaped by its principles, can be both open and secure.

A few words about our Honourary Life President, Max Enkin.

They say: "Clothes make the man." Max Enkin, *alav HaShalom*, was the man who made the clothes that made the man. Moreover, when the world was still reeling from the devastations of war, Max Enkin realized that MAKING the clothes could actually be the way to RESCUE a man. He and his partners BECAME the men who RESCUED the MEN who made the clothes that made the men, women, and children of Canada.

Rabbi Plaut, of blessed memory, wrote of his friend Max:

"He was small in stature, but large in vision. He did not pursue honour, but honours pursued him. He was a Jew to the core, but – or because of it – non-Jews were attracted to him. ...His reputation for unbending integrity, the esteem in which his co-workers as well as his competitors held him in the fashion field; his many honours, among them the order of the British Empire and the Order of Canada.

These were sign-posts of a career to which any man would point with justifiable pride – except that Max Enkin never pointed to himself. He

was self-made yet utterly modest. His greatest asset was not material wealth, but a good and noble heart.)

He had above all, a way of looking at life's problems from a religious perspective. He considered ethics the heart of Reform Judaism, and many was the time when he would ask me: "What does Judaism require of me in this situation?"

...In a way that was the secret of Max Enkin's influence: he asked Jewish questions."

Rabbi Marmur gave the eulogy for Max Enkin in 1990. He said:

"Max Enkin was a great Canadian. This country meant very much to him. His aim was to integrate the Jewish with the general, so that nothing of what is best in Judaism be squandered and nothing of what is good in Canada be lost.

...The combination of a sense of obligation, a disdain for outwardness, a stress on ethical conduct, integrity, honesty, truth, and a deep love for his people brought him to HBT....He was a giant among men, the undisputed father of this house, this Temple, and indeed the house of Reform Judaism.... He was a model for generations of our leaders; a symbol of what so many strove to become."

Leadership of Imagination and Determination

I'm told that before and during the war, Max Enkin banged on every desk at Queen's Park, on every door on Parliament Hill. But even he, with all his strengths, could not break through the fierce anti-Semitism of the days of "None is too many." But he would not be deterred. He would not rest until he found a way to bring his Jewish brothers and sisters to safe haven. As an immigrant himself, he knew how fortunate he was and that it could have just as easily been otherwise.

How we long for his guidance today! Let an echo of his wisdom steer us now. Let us be blessed with a measure of his imagination, his determination. Let us find our way to his clarity of vision, his loyalty to God and country, to deep-seeded love of The Jewish People and to Israel. Let us find ourselves walking in Max Enkin's footsteps to strengthen one another in this hour – when we once again search for confidence and calm.

The Eternal Light which hangs just above our Torah scrolls is a replica of the *Ner Tamid* of the Steelerstrasse Synagogue of Essen, Germany. It was destroyed on Kristalnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. This Eternal Light was dedicated on Rosh HaShanah, September 5, 1946, one year after the war and one year into Max Enkin's Presidency. No prayers were yet written, no melodies were yet sung, no history books printed, no conception yet of the inconceivable number Six Million. All they could do then was to simply light a light.

Who would have believed that after all that was lost and after all that was learned, we would have to face the recent news of such ugly anti-Semitism again today? We thank our elected officials for pledging to uproot any hint of this most pernicious and tenacious kind of hatred wherever it may lurk. We hear you when you promise to work to protect all citizens from gun violence, to make all Houses of Faith Houses of Peace, and so our sanctuaries can be sanctuaries once again.

Candle Lighting Ceremony

In just a moment we'll light Six Candles as we remember the Six Million and we'll sing the haunting melody of *Ani Maamin*. These were the words sung by many of our people as they walked to their deaths. "*Ani Maamin* – I believe. I believe with a perfect faith in the coming of the Messianic Age of peace for all the world. *V'af al pi she'yit'm'maya....* And even if it be delayed in its arrival, despite all this, I still believe."

To light the first candle we invite Larry Enkin together with our Prime Minister. The remaining five will be lit by members of our congregation who are all descendants of those brought to these shores by the Tailor Project. They are Faye Greenholtz, Daniel and Abby Blumberger, Eva Madras, Anne Dublin, and Morris Cooper, who is a Past President of Holy Blossom Temple and who just shared the news of a new grandson born just yesterday.