

The Lamps—Haazinu
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The story is told of a very wealthy man in a mountain village in Europe many centuries ago. As the man grew older, he was concerned about the legacy he would leave behind for his community.

He pondered and he weighed all of his options. At last, he smiled as he decided that he would construct the most perfect synagogue as his special gift to the community. He hired only the best artisans and craftspeople from far and wide. For months, the town was abuzz with excitement as workers labored in secret, day and night, on this holy enterprise. None of the villagers were allowed even a glimpse of the project before it was completed.

Finally, the synagogue was finished, and all of the townspeople were invited to view the new building. They were so excited. They walked in and found room for everybody. There were beautiful paintings in the entryway, an enormous ark for all of the Torah scrolls, high ceilings, lovely curtains, and comfortable seating. No one could ever remember so beautiful a synagogue anywhere in the world.

But then, as they admired it, they noticed a flaw. One townspeople asked: "Where are the lamps? What will provide the lighting in the sanctuary?"

The nobleman pointed to rows of elegant iron hooks that lined each wall of the synagogue. Then, he gave each family a lamp with a ring at its top. "You must bring these lamps when you come to the synagogue," he told them.

"Whenever you are not here, your part of the synagogue will be dark, but when you come, when you show up, your presence will illuminate our building, and the light of our community will radiate forth into our world."

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The story of the lamp teaches us that a synagogue is not only a building, but also the light and presence of its people. Each of us carries something unique and holy. Just as the wealthy man gave every family a lamp to light the synagogue, we are asked to bring our own presence, gifts, and spirit to our congregation. Our community comes alive when each person shows up and shares the light they carry inside. Without that, even the most beautiful walls, Torah scrolls, and seats remain incomplete.

This is the heart of the verse, *v'asu li mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham*, "let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." God's presence does not rest in stone or wood alone, but in the light that each of us brings and contributes.

The sanctuary is not built only once with artistry and effort but again and again whenever we bring our lamps to it. When we offer our voices in song, our hands in service, and our hearts in prayer, the whole space shines more brightly.

And when someone's lamp is missing, the absence is felt. Our task is not only to bring our own light, but also to help others feel safe and welcome to bring theirs. Together, we create a sanctuary filled with light, warmth, and belonging—a sanctuary where God dwells among us because we are a sanctuary for one another.