The Golden Buttons – A Yom Kippur Story

Once upon a time, there was a poor old couple. They didn't have very much, and now Yom Kippur was coming.

The wife said, "We have nothing special to eat for Kol Nidrei dinner, the meal on the night of Yom Kippur and we will have nothing at all to eat when the fast is over after Neilah, the last service the next day. Let me ask our neighbors for help."

But the husband shook his head. "No, I will find work. I am a cobbler. Someone must need shoes fixed before the holiday."

[Pause and ask the kids:]
"What do you think—should he go to work, or should she go ask the neighbors?"

So the husband went out, and the wife began to clean the house. She cleaned upstairs, downstairs, and finally the cellar. There she found an old trunk. Inside was her husband's blue jacket. The special jacket that she never let him wear because she worried he'd wear it out and because it has gold buttons. Gold buttons. Gold buttons! The jacket has three shiny, valuable gold buttons!

[Ask:]
"What would you do if you found three golden buttons?"

She quickly cut them off and ran to the shops.

With one button she bought food for the Kol Nidrei meal, fish and soup and eggs and cream cheese and lox and wine from the grocer.

With another she bought candlesticks and candles, so they could bring light into their home from the candle maker.

With the last button, she bought bagels and challah and kugel—her husband's favorite for the break-fast meal from the baker.

She hurried home, cooked, and set the table beautifully for Yom Kippur dinner, leaving the kugel and the eggs, cream cheese, lox and bagels in the ice box for the break-the-fast after the sun sets and three stars appear on the next night. Speaking of stars, it was almost time for the holiday to begin and where was her husband?

Her husband was out searching for work. Every place he went to see if people needed their shoes fixed he heard the same thing. "I do need my shoes fixed but I have no money to pay you." Like he often did he would fix them anyway, it was a mitzvah to be generous after all, even if all he had to give was his time and skill.

Finally he came to the last row of shops, the grocer, the candlemaker and the baker. He asked each of the three shopkeepers if they needed their shoes fixed. Indeed they did and guess what they paid him with? One golden button each! Soon he had three gold buttons in his pocket.

But by then it was almost dark. He had no time to shop. Saddened, he went home.

And what did he find?
Candles glowing, food ready, wine poured, fish and soup and challah on the table!

He was happy but also worried. “Did my wife have to beg for this?” He kept his hands in his pockets all through the meal.

Afterwards he asked, “Where did this feast come from?” She told him about the jacket and the three buttons.

He smiled and pulled three buttons from his pocket. “Look! They came back to us!”

They hugged and wished each other: “Gmar Chatimah Tovah, may you be signed and sealed from good in the book of life”.

As they were grabbing their coats for the walk to the synagogue he took a peak inside the ice box, expecting it to be empty as his stomach would be after a whole night and day of fasting, but there inside he saw the kugel, the lox, the bagels, the cream cheese and he knew just what to do. At synagogue he’d invite all those whose shoes he fixed for free because they had no money to come back with him and his wife for break-the-fast so they could all share the end of holiday meal. He’d even share the kugel, but maybe he would take the first slice.

Moral for the children
Every good thing we do comes back to us. When we give and help others, blessings return in ways we can’t always see. On Yom Kippur, we remember: kindness makes the world as bright and beautiful as shiny gold buttons.