Once upon a time, there was an old couple who lived in great poverty and there was a great poverty throughout the land. And *yontif* was coming. And it was not just an ordinary *yontif* that was coming. It was Rosh Hashanah. And it was not just an ordinary Rosh Hashanah. It was a Rosh Hashanah that came out on a Shabbat. And they had no money with which to make *yontif*. What do you do?

The wife was desperate. So she said to her husband: "Please, let me go to the neighbors and ask them for a handout. Jews are charitable people. They won't turn me down. "But the husband said no. I am going to go out and find some work. Surely, in spite of the difficult economic conditions in which we live, in spite of the poverty, there must be some people who need to have their shoes fixed for yontif, and I am a good cobbler. I would rather work than have to accept donations from other people."

So the husband went out to look for work. And the wife began to clean the house, so that the house, at least, should be ready for *yontif*, even if they weren't. She cleaned the first floor and the second and the attic and then she went downstairs to clean the cellar. She cleaned the cellar and there she found an old trunk. She opened it up and found her husband's old blue blazer, the blazer that she never let him wear for fear that he would use it up, the one that she always made him save for a special occasion.

She took it out and noticed that it had *three gold buttons* on it. Golden buttons! Do you know how much gold was worth in those days?? Quickly she cut off the gold buttons and ran with them to the grocery store. She bought food for *yontif*: gefilte fish and chicken soup and lots of other goodies. And when she went through the checkout counter, the clerk totaled up the bill—and it came to exactly one gold button. She gave it to the clerk and went on her way.

The clerk was very happy for he had not a single customer all day because of the poverty throughout the land. He was thrilled to have the gold button.

Then the woman went next door to the antique shop, and there she bought candlesticks and two candles so that they could light candles in their home in honor of the holiday, and so that they could make a blessing, thanking God for the New Year. The owner of the store was very happy to have a sale because he had not a single sale that day, because of the poverty throughout the land. He charged her one gold button.

Then she went next door to the specialty store and bought a bottle of wine. She didn't buy just ordinary wine, but the best wine she could find, in honor of the holiday. And she bought one more delicacy at the store. She bought *kugel* in honor of the holiday for she knew her husband loved *kugel*. She bought wine and *kugel* and she paid for it with one gold button, and she went home to make yontif.

Meanwhile, her husband was out looking for work. He went door to door but no one would give him any business. True, they all had shoes that needed mending but they had no money. They couldn't afford to pay him.

The man was just about to give up when he went by the grocery store. He went in and said to the grocer: "Do you have any thing that needs mending?" And the grocer said to him:

"I sure do," and he gave him his shoes to fix. And guess what he paid him with? You guessed it—one gold button.

Then the cobbler went next door to the candlestick maker, and said to him: "Do you have anything that needs mending today?" The candlestick maker said: "I sure do!"

And he gave him his shoes to fix, his and his wife's both, and he paid him with... the one gold button that he had received.

Then the cobbler went next door to the specialty store, and he said to the owner: "Have you any shoes you need repaired?" And the specialty store man said: "I sure do." And he gave him his shoes and his wife's shoes to fix, and he paid him with the one golden button that he had just taken in. So now the cobbler had three gold buttons in his pocket.

The cobbler was very happy—but there was one catch. By the time he finished fixing the shoes it was almost dark already. It was too late to purchase food for *yontif*.

So he came home. He got back just as the sun was setting. He didn't have time to change clothes, or even to empty his pockets before the Sabbath and the holiday began. He walked in and guess what? The house was lit and the table was set. And there were candles, and there was food, and there was wine and there was even *kugel* on the table!

The cobbler was very happy—but part of him was sad at the same time. He figured that his wife must have gone and borrowed or begged from the neighbors. But what could he do? It was Shabbat and it was Yom Tov. So he sat there all through the meal, and he kept his hands in his pockets. He held on the three golden buttons.

After the meal, after they sang Shabbat songs recited the *Birkat Hamazon,* the blessing after meals, he said to his wife: "it was a wonderful meal and I thank you very much. But why did you accept charity? "

And she said: "But I didn't." And she told him the story of how she had been cleaning in the cellar and found the sport coat with the three golden buttons. And as she did, he said:

"Stop!" And he reached into his pocket and pulled out the three golden buttons. And he said:

"They came back to us!"

And they hugged each other in joy, and said to each other: "*Lishana tova tikateyvu,* my dear, and may this be a good year for us both for it has surely begun in a wonderful way."

Why do I tell you this story? Because many of us sit here in synagogue this evening and while our tradition instructs us to consider the dispensation of our souls, we can't stop thinking about our jobs, our mortgages, our retirement funds and the pile of bills that keep pilling up and await us when we get home. I tell this story because as our nation faces what economists call potentially the greatest economic crisis in history, and our families

face growing expenses and shrinking resources many of us are wondering if we have any old sport coats with gold buttons in the garage, some are considering a second career as modern day cobblers to help make ends meet.

I tell this story not to remind us of our anxiety, but to gird our spirits with hope –

All my life I have been told by my grandparents and historians about how the Great Depression was a defining moment in the life of our nation. I have read that in the face of those great national and individual hardships our national character was born. John Steinbeck immortalized the struggle of the time and the American resilience in his classic work The Grapes of Wrath and Tom Brokow celebrated the product of the Great Depression by enthroning them with the title The Greatest Generation. Historian agree that never before in history had a generation been better prepared for the sacrifice, rigors and hard work of war as had the generation that fought WWII at home and abroad. The spirit of volunteerism, the work ethic, the commitment to national purpose and solidarity – all were products of the pressures placed upon young men and women when the financial systems of the United States came apart at the seams and the social safety net was slow or failed all together to save them. The stock market crashed but eventually and quite heroically American men and women, businesses, institutions and eventually government stood up and answered the call – we have them to thank for our freedom and security this very day.

And so I have to wonder as our nation faces what economists call potentially the greatest economic crisis in history – what will be the epitaph of our generation? When historians, authors and journalists write the story of our time, of how our nation and its citizens faced the rapid and systemic collapse of our most trusted institutions and systems - what will they conclude? How will we weather the coming storm?