



Keeping The Lights On

By Hekla Björk Unnardóttir

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INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

"Dear everyone,

I'm afraid I have some bad news. Our synagogue is closing, and there doesn't seem to be anything I can do about it.

Running a synagogue is not, and has never been, easy. There are bills to pay, services to be held, and events to organize. You have to be vigilant with maintenance of the house - both the building in which we pray, and the house that is the community - by which I mean all of you - who are under my guidance as a Rabbi.

The community is vulnerable; and with good reason. Terrible things can and do happen. In the past year alone, there was a significant increase in violent acts against Jews, and the places important to us. Luckily, no such terrible things have happened to our community. And yet, our problems seem greater than ever before.

A month ago, I received a notice from the local government that the Municipal Council has decided to evict us from our house of worship if we don't pay the bills on time this month. The rent has been late too many times, and we have nowhere near the amount of money to make the payment on January 1st. Our synagogue is closing for good, and for that I'm deeply sorry. My leadership of this synagogue has proven to be insufficient, and I take full responsibility. I offer my sincerest apologies for my failings, and will gladly open my ears to any grievances you may have.

This means that our Hanukkah celebration will be this synagogue's final event. I hope that we can celebrate the holiday together in harmony, and remember all the wonderful times we've spent in each other's company.

You will receive invites shortly.

On a more practical note. We are set to be out of the building by January 3rd, so if you could lend a hand with packing down, or driving the boxes to our storage, it would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,
Amira Herzog"

ABOUT THIS GAME

Keeping the Lights on is a GM-less game about a synagogue, and its surrounding community fighting to keep it running, trying not to burn out in the process.

It is a collaborative story game about a tight-knit community, and how its members act when times are hard. It's about burnout, and how to deal with it when it happens. But this is also a game about light, unity, charity, and hope.

You play as four members of a soon-to-be closed synagogue, during Hanukkah in the year 2019 (5580 in the Jewish calendar). You, along with the other members, are fighting to keep it running, but all the discussion, arguing, and organizing takes a toll on your health. You must keep your spirits up, while dealing with life on the side.

This game endeavours to give you a well-rounded experience where you can explore difficult feelings in a safe environment. At the same time, this game can offer a way out of the hardship that it deals you, or at least make the idea of facing that hardship by yourself less scary.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

- Exactly 4 players, who have 2 or more hours of time
- 4 note cards
- Writing implements
- 16 matches
- A dreidel (a four-sided spinning top with the Hebrew letters נ ש ה ג - Nun, Gimel, Hey, Shin - on the sides)*

**If you don't have a physical dreidel, you can use a digital one, by typing "dreidel" into Google's search bar.*

PLAYER GOALS

- Play easy, and play fair.
- Remind yourself of your needs and expectations as a human playing a game, and communicate them clearly and honestly to your fellow players.
- Make your emotional safety your first priority. Pause the game if you feel uncomfortable, and remind yourself that you can always stop playing if you want to.

- Make space for quieter voices, and make everyone feel welcome regardless of experience or background.
- Actively strive for inclusion, respect, self-advocacy, and self-care.
- Stay true to the fiction you are creating together.
- Make it up as you go, and leave blank spaces to fill in during play.
- When it's time to make something up, think small, and don't plan too far ahead.



SETUP

Sit around a table, and pass each player a note card and something to write with. Distribute the matches evenly between the players, so each player has 4 matches. Keep the matchbox within reach.

Place the dreidel in the middle of the table, so everyone can reach it.

Allocate some space on the table for “the pot”. This is where players will put in matches and where they will take matches from, when the game demands it.

Have someone read the player goals on the previous page out loud.

CHARACTER CREATION

There are two parts to creating characters. The first one, you fill out by yourself, and the second one you fill out as a group. To each part, there are some questions that you can use as inspiration. You don't need to answer all the questions, and you are free to add details about your character that wouldn't be answers to any of them.

CHARACTER ATTRIBUTES

Just as there are four sides on a dreidel, there are four defining parts of your character in this game. Think about how you want to fill them in for a moment, and talk to your co-players about your ideas if you need help. You can go back and revise your answers at any point before the game begins. When you're satisfied with your answers, write them down on your note card.

“And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.”
(Genesis 17:5)

As God gave Abram a new name, to reflect his new identity, each player must also take on a new name and a new identity for the next couple of hours. These are the attributes that make up each player's character.

1 Name: What is your character's name?

“Knowing Torah doesn't prevent you from sinning” (Yiddish proverb)

You are human after all. You may be pious or fundamentally a good person, but there will always be something that could be improved.

1 Glitch: What is your character's main flaw? What troubles them? What will make it harder for them to do or get what they want?

"And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'It was with a mighty hand that the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.' (Exodus 13:14)

As the strength of the Lord's hands brought you out from Egypt, so too will the strength of your hands bring your friends out from despair and hopelessness.

n Hands: *What do your character's hands look like, and what does that say about them? About their occupation, age, race or any other traits relevant to your character?*

"A Jew is twenty-eight percent fear, two percent sugar, and seventy percent chutzpah." (Yiddish proverb)

You share a history and a faith the rest of the Jewish people, but you also have traits that make you unique as an individual.

w Shtick: *What is your character's shtick - their way of doing things, their personality, their hobby, or a trait that sets them apart?*

GROUP QUESTIONS

This last question is for all players to discuss, and decide upon together. Your characters as a group need to have a dynamic that will allow for them to be amicable with each other, but that also ensures that some conflicting interests exist among them.

"Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh - All Jews are responsible for each other" (Shevuot 39b)

This Aramaic phrase from the Talmud is the basis of the idea of communal responsibility in Jewish law. It implies that you help each other out, and have each other's backs. You are responsible for the well-being of your peers, and they are responsible for yours.

o Position: *What roles do your characters have in the synagogue, and in the community at large? Do they hold certain positions in the synagogue organization, or are they just regular members? What do the rest of the members think about them, and vice versa? What are your characters' relationships to each other, and how will that play out during the game?*

Examples of community roles:

- The sharp-tongued grandma who people confide in
- The work-obsessed baker who makes the challah and the best latkes
- The dedicated conversion student who has a lot to learn
- The jokester single father who laughs off everything

SETTING CREATION

When you've created your characters, it's time to give them a home.

First, decide where the synagogue your characters attend is located. This will help you set the tone and atmosphere of the story you'll be telling. Here you can also name the synagogue.

Synagogue descriptions:

- A small synagogue in a run-down building in a drive-by town
- The largest synagogue in a smaller city
- A historical synagogue in a hip European city
- A rural synagogue somewhere you wouldn't expect

Next, decide on a few prominent faces in the community. Their descriptions don't have to be long or detailed - a name, and a few keywords about their personality and role in the community will do. This is also the optimal time to flesh out the synagogue's Rabbi Herzog from whom your characters received the introductory email.

Lastly, choose one of these four options for the method that the congregation has decided to use to keep the synagogue from closing.

- A crowdfunding campaign on the internet
- Organizing a charity concert
- Selling off antiques in a charity auction
- Protesting the municipal council on the streets

PLAYING THE GAME

SCENES

The game lasts for eight scenes, each scene representing one day of Hanukkah. The game can be played in one sitting of about 2 hours, or it can be stretched out over the course of the actual holiday, each actual day a new scene and day in the game. Scenes can be of varying length (they may be a good deal longer if you're playing the eight day version), but a good rule of thumb is to make sure that something about the game world changes over the course of the scene.

Each day has a short theme that helps guide you through the story. You can interpret the themes any way you want; they're simply there to get you started. See the table below for the list of themes.

DAY	THEME
First day	Discussion
Second day	Setting up
Third day	The first milestone
Fourth day	Anticipation
Fifth day	Setback
Sixth day	Crisis
Seventh day	Solving the problem
Eighth day	Not in our hands anymore

MATCHES

The matches represent how close your character is to burnout. The fewer matches the player has, the higher their character's risk of burnout. This affects how well they deal with stressful situations, and how well they can perform the tasks expected of them. A character with a high risk of burnout may grow more cynical, and may feel drained and exhausted.

Each player may decide for themselves what number of matches represents a high or low risk of burnout for their character.

EACH TURN

DESCRIBE THE SCENE

Describe the scene from the perspective of your character. Where are you? What do you see and hear? What's going on around you? What is your character thinking and feeling right now? You may do this in whichever way you want, but be sure to incorporate the theme of the day.

DETERMINE WHO IS THERE

When you've described the scene, determine which of the other player characters are there with you, as well as which other characters are present. If there are non-player characters in the scene, you can have another player act as that character for the duration of the scene.

SPIN THE DREIDEL

Spin the dreidel, and make a note of the result. It will determine how much energy your character will have during the next day.

Results:

- If it lands on Nun (נ), the character of the player setting the scene does not lose or gain matches that scene
- If it lands on Gimel (ג), the player gets all the matches in the pot.
- If it's Hey (ה), the character gets half of the matches
- If it's Shin (ש), the player puts one match in.
- The player who spins the dreidel puts in or receives their matches after the scene.

USE THE STORY PROMPT

For each of the eight scenes, and depending on the method of fundraising chosen, there is a story prompt to help oil your creative wheels. You must use this prompt in some way during your turn to add an additional element to the story. You'll find a lookup table of the story prompts below.

STORY PROMPTS

Day/Method	Crowdfunding	Concert	Auction	Protest
First day	The last time you helped someone	A song that makes you feel at home	Your reflection	The last time you met injustice
Second day	Your morning ritual	A happy memory	Something you broke	How winter affects you
Third day	Something that makes you laugh	A first impression	Your most valued possession	An intimate moment
Fourth day	A small voice	A big crowd	Something you fear	A moment of silence
Fifth day	A comfort item	A moment of bad luck	A bad decision	A lesson learned
Sixth day	Your greatest regret	A confession	A shoulder to cry on	What you need right now
Seventh day	Someone you love	An unexpected guest	A present	
Eighth day	Why you need this community			

TZEDAKAH

'Tzedakah' is a Hebrew word that means *justice* or *righteousness*, but in Jewish contexts, it is used to signify *charity*. Tzedakah is an ethical obligation that one must perform, regardless of financial standing.

If a player ends up with no matches, and wants to continue, they can ask the table for tzedakah. If that happens, all players who wish to give tzedakah play out a short scene that describes how the other players help the asking character to cope with or recuperate from burnout. Players not giving tzedakah may also participate in the scene by describing their reasons for not being able to give a helping hand - whether that be that they are close to burnout themselves, or some other reason.

Each player giving tzedakah decides how many matches they give the asking player.



ENDING A SCENE

At the end of each scene, have someone read this paragraph aloud:

“The day is over. The sun is setting. We have little time left together. Let us kindle this light in remembrance of all we have shared with each other, and let us hope for a brighter tomorrow.”

When someone has read the passage, the player to the left of them lights a match from the pot and lets it burn down. While the match burns, each player can think about a wish their character has for the next day. The wish doesn't have to influence what happens in the following scene; its purpose is to allow for a bit of breathing room in between the action.

Using a match from the pot after each scene means that there'll be fewer matches for the rest of the game, making burnout more likely.

ENDING THE GAME

The game is set to end after the eighth scene, but if you want, you can keep going for as long as you like (just remember to add more matches). When you end the game, you can then decide if you want to leave the story as it is, or you can come up with an epilogue during the post-game discussion.

An epilogue can give answers to as many or as few questions as you would like. Relevant questions to ask might be:

- Did the congregation save the synagogue from closing? If yes, how? If no, what could the characters have done differently?
- How did the characters' relationships change after the final scene? Or, how did they endure?
- How does the community fare in the future? Are they a growing community, or did the hardships cause people to leave?
- What did the characters learn or experience that will remain with them long after?

DEBRIEF

After the game, it may also be a good idea to spend some time debriefing, and discussing your experiences as players. What parts of your game did you like, and what parts didn't you like? Was there anything you would have done differently? If so, what?

Talk about your communities, and how burnout affects them. What can you do in your circles to prevent burnout, or help someone who is going through it?

When you're done, take some time to hang out as yourselves, and maybe eat some fried food, or some snacks.