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High Holidays 2017

### Getting Rid of the Mud

Several weeks ago, I attended the wedding of my cousin Steven and his wife Margie. The Rabbi shared a fascinating custom and moving story. Before the couple came to the chuppah, he gathered together all the relatives in a room to ask us each to forgive each other, because, he said, it's impossible to grow up in a family, with siblings and parents and relatives, without having some secret anger. And you don't want people to have to go into the next phase of life with all this karmic load. He believed that bringing us together was so important. That way, he said, we can forgive each other and really bless each other. It was a very powerful experience.

Then he shared a story with us. On one occasion, a young girl was present while he was doing this forgiveness ceremony and she wanted to know how to do it. I tell you, he said, it was a wonderful thing that she asked this question. She really wanted to know how to do it. It was as if nobody had ever shown her how to do forgiving. So he said to her, "Could you imagine that you have a beautiful shiny white dress on, and here comes this big clump of mud and dirties it? You would want to clean it off, wouldn't you?" "Oh, yes," she said. "Could you imagine then, instead of the mud being on the outside on your dress, the mud is on your heart?" "Uh huh." "And being angry with people and not forgiving them is like mud on your heart." "I sure want to get rid of that," she said. "OK, how are you going to go about doing that?" He suggested that she close her eyes, raise up her hands in her imagination, and draw down some golden light and let it flow over that mud on her heart until it was all washed away. In this way she really began to understand forgiving. Do you understand how important it is, he said, just as with this child, to learn how to forgive so we can all find renewed richness in our relationships and find the bonds with estranged parents, siblings, friends and neighbors renewed, strengthened, and healed.

As we shed the old year and turn to look at the new, we are reminded that that a theme of these Days of Awe is atonement.

In our tradition, atonement is an act of reconciliation, the desire to make amends or reparations for a wrong-doing. This is a time to forgive and ask for forgiveness.

Forgiveness is an act of generosity — both for you as well as the one being forgiven.

Forgiveness is a gift – not only to the one that is forgiven, but a gift to the one who grants it. Forgiveness lightens the soul, and removes the weight of carrying the anger with you.

There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.