**Yom Kippur 5773—September 26, 2012**
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**"Can I borrow ten dollars?" A neighbor in the displaced persons camp asked the famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal. "I've got a package coming any day now from a relative and I promise I'll pay you back next week."**

**In the aftermath of World War II money was scarce, but Wiesenthal figured, "Why not help out a neighbor? After all it's only for a few days."**

**Monday arrived, the man came up to him and said, "I don't know what happened. The package didn't arrive, but I promise it will be here any day and you'll get your money."**

**The next week the man had another excuse for not paying and the following week an even better one. This went on for months until one day, the man approached Wiesenthal with a ten-dollar bill in his hand and said, "My papers finally came through, and I'm getting out of this place. Here's the ten dollars I owe you."**

**"Keep it," Wiesenthal said. "For ten dollars, it's not worth changing my opinion of you."**

**Most of us are pretty good at holding a grudge—at staying mad—often long after we can remember what we were so mad about to begin with.**

**What are we holding on to?**

**A phone call that wasn't returned? A door slammed in anger? An invitation we didn't receive or a thoughtless comment made in frustration? An immature remark made by a child or an honest mistake made by a parent?**

**Of course these things leave us feeling hurt and angry, and it's hard to let go. The ancient rabbis understood this, if fact they say we're actually allowed to stay angry for a little while—but not forever. Jewish law is very clear, if we refuse to grant forgiveness after being sincerely apologized to three times, the sin is then on us.**

**It really is all about us you know. We often think forgiveness is for the perpetrator of the sin, but it's really for us, the victims of that sin. Harboring anger and resentment doesn't hurt the other, it hurts us. Forgiveness really isn't about the other person, it's about us—it's about the possibility of a different**

**future. Maybe that's why God forgave us all last night in the first five minutes of the *Kol Nidrei* service. In the middle of the fifth page, God says, "*Salach'ti Ki'dvar-echah*—I forgive you, as you have asked."**

**But it's not God's forgiveness those closest to us need, it's ours. As we read last night, "For transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atones, but for transgressions between one human being and another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until they have made peace with one another." God cannot forgive our spouses, our children, our parents, or our siblings for the things they said or did that hurt us—only we can do that.**

**God wipes the slate clean so that we can have a fresh start—God forgives us. Are we willing to do the same—to make a different future possible for those we claim to love? Or would we rather stew in our anger and cling to our resentment?**

**Yes. Some things are unforgivable, pathological emotional or physical abuse, rape or murder. But that's not what most of us have to forgive—those aren't the chips we've got on our shoulders.**

**I don't know what those closest to you have said or done to hurt you. I don't know what left you feeling wounded and betrayed. But I do know this: none of us is perfect. Yes, we are victims, but we're also perpetrators. We've all hurt those closest to us. We've all let spiteful speech cross our lips and land like daggers into the hearts of those we love. How can we expect forgiveness when we refuse to grant it?**

**The Talmud teaches that a person who forgives another is forgiven for all his sins. We must forgive those we love if we expect them to forgive us.**

**Forgiving does not mean forgetting. Forgiving those who have hurt us does not mean that we have to erase what happened from memory—it means that we transcend it. You see, forgiveness doesn't change the past, it changes the future.**

**It took Mark Horton thirty years to finally realize that.**

**"Growing up, my brother James was my best friend," Mark recalls. "We did everything together. When kids would pick on me, he looked out for me and protected me. I looked up to him. I wanted to be just like him. He was my hero. But then everything changed. James became temperamental and self-centered; he'd make snide comments and embarrass me in front of my friends. My own brother, who had always defended me against bullies, became the biggest bully**

**of all. I felt so betrayed. I wanted nothing to do with him so I kept to myself and counted the months until he left for college. We hardly spoke after that.**

**He moved to New York. I moved to California. We'd see each other every few years at some family event and exchange pleasantries. He was trying, but I wasn't about to give him the satisfaction," Mark reflects. "Not after the pain he'd caused me."**

**"Time passed and I got married and had a daughter. I'd give James an occasional thought, but that was it. Three years later my wife was pregnant with a boy and I sat my daughter down to explain that she was going to have a brother—that's when it hit me.**

**I had a brother—a brother who I loved and missed. All these years I'd been holding onto my anger and my resentment because I wanted to punish him for betraying me. But the truth is, I was punishing myself. What was more important? Being right, feeling vindicated, or having my brother back? I couldn't change the past, but I could create a different future, so I picked up the phone."**

**What is the future we want? For our children, for our parents, for our families?**

**Do we tell our parents to cut us some slack because we're doing the best we can, when we expect perfection from them?**

**Do we tell our children playing in the park that their friend, who accidently hurt them or bumped into them, said he was sorry and they should go back to playing together, when we haven't called our own brother or sister in a year?**

**Do we tell our spouse to forget an insensitive comment we made, when we still nurse our anger toward our own mother or father for something they said or did years ago?**

**Forgiveness is about the future. We've all been hurt by those who love us. But we've also hurt those whom we love.**

**None of us is perfect. We've all made mistakes. That's what today is all about—accepting the simple fact that we are not perfect—our husbands and wives aren't perfect. Our children aren't perfect. Our parents aren't perfect. We all need to be forgiven, and we all need to forgive—to forgive one another and inscribe ourselves for a different future in this New Year.**