

## Teshuvah Even for the Mitzvah

According to a story often circulated by Chabad, the great 9<sup>th</sup> century Babylonian sage, Rav Saadia haGaon, was once traveling incognito, and stopped at an inn. The innkeeper served him generously and gave him a comfortable place to sleep. In the morning, Rav Saadia thanked him and left. A few minutes later, Saadia's students asked the innkeeper: "Where did Rav Saadia go? He was just staying here!" The innkeeper chased after Rav Saadia, apologizing profusely. Rav Saadia reassured him that he had been perfectly comfortable, but the innkeeper insisted: "if I had only you known who you were – I would have treated you with much more deference!"

This inspired Rav Saadia to teach about *teshuvah*—repentance—not as something just for transgressions, but as something to do even on our mitzvot. Like the innkeeper, we can do *teshuvah* for the incompleteness of our intention, our focus, or our execution of mitzvot. According to the legend, Rav Saadia would do *teshuvah* for his mitzvot every day.

As we approach the High Holidays and do the work of *teshuvah* this season, this year, I am struck by this teaching of Rav Saadia. As I look back on how the leadership of Temple Beth Israel and I have responded to the demands of a year of Covid, I know that we have done *mitzvot*. We have worked hard to take care of this community. We have tried to create policies that keep us safe while also making the community as accessible as possible.

And just as surely, my mitzvot have been incomplete. Whether because of tech challenges or health challenges, our decisions and policies have not made community accessible for everyone, and I am sorry. In my efforts to keep the whole system of community connected, I have sometimes lost track of individuals and their needs, and I am sorry. As we have dealt quickly with changing information, my communication has not always been clear, which has caused some anxiety, and I am sorry. I have deployed volunteers to reach out, which has sometimes annoyed you, and I am sorry.

I do not expect ever to achieve perfection, but I do commit to doing *teshuvah* on my *mitzvot*, and on my service to this community. I will continue to do my best, and then as I learn how I have fallen short, to try to do better. May we grow in our *mitzvot*, even as we acknowledge that perfection will always be an elusive destination.