

Answers to Chivi haBalki

1. Rav Saadia Gaon's answer to Question ד

הרעב והחלי והפחד והשוד והשברים
 כל אלה שאלה אחת והרבית דברים:
 למען ידעו כאב המוסרים ותמרורם
 ולא היו מכירים אלו העדירים

עוד שאלת על מיני היסורים
 והחום והקור למה מן האדם לא נעדרים
 דע וראה כי אלו לטובת יצורים ייסרם
 ויחדלו מעשות רע אשר לזה יסגירם

You also inquired about the types of suffering – the famine, illness, terror, theft and damage, the heat and the cold; why are these not lost from man? All of these are one question; you were overly verbose.

Know and see that Gd rebukes creatures for their benefit, that they may know the pain and bitterness of rebuke, and so that they will cease to practice evil. For this He will give them over. They would not learn this, were suffering lost.

2. Rav Saadia Gaon's answer to Question ה

למה לא יחיה האדם לעד ולא ירד שאול
 ואף כי תתאיו לעמדו פה במצור ובתאול:
 ובהפחידו אותם בצרותיהם יש בדתו בוגדים
 אז היו שכם אחד כולם לא היו עובדים:
 או להצילה מצרה וצוקה ורעד
 כי סרה דברת על שוכן עד:
 ערוך למו מאתמול תפתה בחמות
 גם אתה כאחד מהם בכעס א-ל נקמות:

פלאות התמהת והקשית לשאול
 מי יתן ונוצר מתחלה בעולם הבא לגאול
 בעשותו כל אלה יש רבים מורדים
 קל וחומר אם לא היו פוחדים
 צורתך המן החכמה לחיותה לעד
 אי זו דעת תשפוט לחלצך ממעד
 נכוננו ללצים שפטים ומהלומות
 אשר חשך לעת צר ליום קרב ומלחמות

You have expressed wonder, and asked stubbornly, why a man does not live eternally, without descending to Sheol. Would that Man had been created initially in Olam haBa, to be redeemed! And instead Gd desired to place him here, in pain and exhaustion.

[Even with] Gd having done all of this, there are still many who rebel. [Even though] Gd intimidates them, there are those who rebel against His law. How much more so if they were not afraid! Then, as one, none of them would work.

Would it be wise for your form to be kept alive forever, or to save it from trouble and pain and trembling? What intelligence could judge to save you from stumbling – when you have fomented rebellion against the Eternal One?

Verdicts and suffering are prepared for scorners; angry *tifteh* was arranged from yesterday for them. It will be dark at the time of trouble, the day of battle and wars. You will be as one of them, in the rage of the punishing Gd.

3. Rav Saadya Gaon's answer to Question ו

וכלי מלא צואה מה יועיל בהיותו רחוי
 הנני איש בכך מלין ודברי נחוי
 כי כל מימיו לא יקראו טמאות עד היפרדם
 קדושים המה מלפנים ולחיצון בכל מאדם
 אזלו מים מני ים ולא יטהר מאבך
 והוא אמר כבסי מרעה לבך:

קדוש איך לא יצרו – אמרת – מבית ומחוץ
 ומשלתו בשרץ ובלבינה בטמאתו לרחוי
 ידע תדע כי אין טומאה בחדרי האדם
 על כן בהיפרדם כאשר צוה יוסדם
 רק הטמאות טומאת הרשע בהם תבך
 ומה יועילו ללב כופר כל מיני נבך

How were they not formed holy, inside and out, you asked. And what good would it do for a vessel filled with excrement to be washed? You compared Man to a sheretz and a clay receptacle, in its impurity to wash. I will offer words of reply to you, and my message will be necessary.

Know that there is no impurity in the innards of Man; his fluids are not deemed impure until they separate. Therefore when they [do not yet] separate as their Founder commanded, they are holy inside and [impure only when] outside.

Only the case of those who are impure with the impurity of wickedness will cause you confusion. The water can depart from the sea and your arrogance will not be purified. What will all manner of waves benefit the heart of a heretic? He has declared: Cleanse your heart of evil.

4. Rav Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot, Introduction

And I forswear, by Gd, Creator of all, any wise person who examines this text and sees any error, that he should correct it, or any vague word that he should direct it in a straight direction. He should not be prevented by the fact that the text is not his, or by concern that I preceded him in revealing that which he did not. For the wise have compassion for

wisdom and favour it, as warriors favour [battle], and as Proverbs 7:4 says, "Say of wisdom: You are my sister," although the fools have compassion for their foolishness and do not abandon it, as Job 20:13 says, "He will have compassion for it, and he will not leave it."

Rav Saadia Gaon today

5. Daniel 12:7

למועד מועדים ורצוי

And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, and he raised his right and left to Heaven and he swore by the life of the Eternal that in a time, times and a half, and when the crushing of the hand of the holy nation is complete, all of this will be completed.

6. Rav Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot 8

Saying "in a time" is only to introduce the words, as in Shemot 23:15, "at the time of the month of Aviv". The essence is "times and a half." I have investigated and found that we should believe that the intent of "times" is the years of Israelite reign, and the end will be at the years of their reign and half of them, without a doubt. And this is that all of the times of the reign were 890 years: 480 before the Beit haMikdash was built, and 410 in the Beit haMikdash. And half of them is 445. In total, 1335, neither more nor less.

7. Rav Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot 7:2

People ask: Will we die after this? I respond that people will not die; they will be taken from the period of the Messiah to the pleasantness of Olam HaBa. Regarding this the Sages taught, "Those deceased people whom Gd will revive will not return to their dust."

8. Rav Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot, Introduction

The One who knows without a cause is the Creator, as I will explain. But all created entities cannot know without a cause, and that cause is search and analysis.

9. Rambam, Moreh haNevuchim 3:13 (Friedlander translation)

We who believe in the Creation must admit that G-d could have created the Universe in a different manner as regards the causes and effects contained in it, and this would lead to the absurd conclusion that everything except man existed without any purpose, as the principal object, man, could have been brought into existence without the rest of the creation. I consider therefore the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible, and best in accordance with the results of philosophy; namely, that the Universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being exists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing.

10. Rabbi Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot 4

Customary practice and construction place the most honoured element in the centre of the elements that are not as honoured. We will begin from the smallest things and note that a grain kernel is in the middle of all of the leaves – this is because the kernel is more honoured than they are, for the plant's characteristics stem from it... And the yolk of an egg is in the centre, for the chick comes from there. And the human heart is in the middle of his chest because it is the dwelling of the spirit and of natural warmth... And as we see this apply to most things, and I have seen that the Earth is in the centre of the heavens, with the spheres revolving about it on all sides, this validates for us that the Earth is the goal of Creation. We then look at all of the Earth's elements, and see that the dirt and water are silent, and the animals cannot communicate [abstract thought], and all that remains is Man...

Gd informed us via His prophets that He gave Man an advantage over His other creations, as Bereishit 1:28 says, 'And they will reign over the fish of the sea, etc.'... He gave us the ability to serve Him, and He put [the world] before us and gave us control. He placed freedom of choice in our domain and instructed us to choose the good, as Devarim 30:19 says, 'See, I have placed before you today life and good, etc.'... And if one will think that some non-human entity is more significant, let him show us the advantages, or some of them, which another creature possesses, for one could not find such a thing.

11. Rabbi Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot 3:10

They bring one of the two goats for the kohanim in the Beit haMikdash, and one they bring for the masses outside the Beit haMikdash...

12. Iyov 7:9-10

The cloud is finished and it goes, so one who descends to *She'ol* will not ascend. No longer will he return to his home, and no longer will his place recognize him.

13. Rabbi Saadia Gaon, Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot 7

I examined all of this well, and I did not see [a statement] in any of them that the Creator said He would not resurrect the dead. All of this says [only] that one cannot rise from the grave after he has descended there, and that one cannot shake off the dust and return to his home.

Parshat Vayishlach: Of Malachim and Men

1. Bereishit 32:4

"And Yaakov sent *malachim* before him to his brother, Esav, to the land of Seir, the fields of Edom."

2. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 75:4

מלאכים אלו שלוחי בשר ודם, רבנן אמרי מלאכים ממש

These *malachim* were agents of flesh and blood. The Sages said: Actual *malachim*.

3. Three ways to look at this debate in the midrash

- Context and Language The camp of Bereishit 32:2-3 vs. "Malachei Elokim"
- How malachim work Yehoshua 10:14, Sifri Devarim 306
- Does Hashem agree with Yaakov? Reaching out to Esav, Humbling himself before Esav

4. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 75:3

"מחזיק באזני כלב עובר מתעבר על ריב לא לו (משלי כו)..." אמר לו הקב"ה: לדרכו היה מהלך ואתה משלח אצלו ואומר לו "כה אמר עבדך יעקב"?

"One who grips the ears of a passing dog enters a fight which is not his own."... Gd said to him: He was going on his way, and you sent to him, "So says your servant Yaakov"?

5. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 75:11

באותה שעה שקרא יעקב לעשו אדוני אמר לו הקב"ה אתה השפלת עצמך וקראת לעשו אדוני ח' פעמים חייך אני מעמיד מבניו שמנה מלכים קודם לבניך, שנאמר (בראשית לו) ואלה המלכים אשר מלכו וגו'

When Yaakov called Esav "my master", Gd said to him: You lowered yourself and called Esav "my master" eight times; by your life, I will establish eight kings from his descendants before yours, as it is written...

6. Our malachim

Tehillim 91:11, Berachot 60b, Shabbat 119b