A Few Reasonable Beliefs on Creation:

A Study of Sefer Yeẓirah and Saadya Gaon's Commentary

Rabbinic Text Immersion

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Rabbinic Text Immersion Abstract:
David Vaisberg's "A Few Reasonable Beliefs on Creation."

One of the great beauties of the Torah is that its language is often terse, leaving room for questions, discussion, and even imagination. Thus, it is no surprise that the Creation account in Genesis did not fully satisfy the questions of those who held to ancient Greek or early Muslim philosophies and science, nor the questions of those in modern times. What we find, through time, are attempts to marry the Torah's sense of truth with that of contemporaneous philosophy and science, so as to ensure that in a world where thought is often based on what actually makes sense, religion remains strong and reasonable.

In this study, we will look to an early mystical text which engages in this very endeavour: *Sefer Yeẓirah*. After exploring the text's origins and what it has to say, we will jump ahead to a later commentator, Saadya Gaon, who attempts a similar effort, using his own religious belief and scientific knowledge to explore ideas of cosmogony from a different context.

We will first look to *Sefer Yeẓirah* proper—what it has to say, its style, composition and structure, its influences, and its textual origins. We will then turn to Saadya Gaon, first looking at who he was and what he set out to do, followed by exploring what text of *Sefer Yeẓirah* might have been available to him and the role it would have held in ninth and tenth century Babylonia. Finally, we will examine Saadya's commentary: his method of argumentation, and how his presentational choices might be shaped by what he is trying to teach and to whom he might be teaching. This will be done in five chapters, the first being the introduction and the final, the conclusion.

Through this study, not only will we learn about what *Sefer Yeẓirah* and Saadya have to say about the universe around them; we will also learn how Jewish thinkers throughout time have struggled with foreign influences and found ways to integrate them into their own systems of thinking.

This text immersion uses primary and secondary materials, in both Hebrew and English.

A Few Reasonable Beliefs on Creation

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the great beauties of the Torah is that its language is often terse, leaving room for questions, discussion, and even imagination. Thus, it is no surprise that the Creation account in Genesis did not fully satisfy the questions of those who held to ancient Greek or early Muslim philosophies and science, nor the questions of those in modern times. What we find, through time, are attempts to marry the Torah's sense of truth with that of contemporaneous philosophy and science, so as to ensure that in a world where thought is often based on what actually makes sense, religion remains strong and reasonable.

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II. SEFER YEẓIRAH

A. What is *Sefer Yeẓirah*? What does it say?

Sefer Yeẓirah (SY) is a treatise that explores exactly how God went about creating the universe. It does not seek to retell, in a rabbinic-midrashic manner, the steps by which God brought about Creation as we know it. SY does not overtly explain how the great lights (the sun, moon, stars and planets) came into being, nor how the plants, swarming things, flying things, or even people were created. Joseph Dan observes,

> This is not a description of Genesis I but a *scientific statement*, that a certain combination of these thirty-two paths [which we will soon discuss] brings about the creation. This is not an exposition or a description, but a *formulation* which seeks to find the *scientific truth regarding the way that the world was created*.[1]

SY does, in a midrashic manner, branch from Genesis I, but this midrash is limited to one statement from the Torah: Gen 1:3. In asking how the universe came into being, SY hones in on one statement: ויאמר אלהים יהי אור — God said, let there be light. Divine speech is the tool by which Creation occurs, and it is from here that SY, favouring empirical observation over revelation,[2] begins its conversation and attempts, in Dan's words, to "formulate scientifically a Jewish cosmogonical view."[3]

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[1] Joseph Dan. *Ancient Jewish Mysticism.* Tel Aviv: MOD, 1993. 202.

[2] A. Peter Hayman. *Sefer Yeṣira: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary.* Tübigen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004. 34.

[3] Dan. 211.

SY begins with the heading,

> שלשים ושנים נתיבות פלאות חכמה חקק יה אדני צבאות אלהי ישראל אלהים חיים אל שדי רם ונשא שוכן עד ודקוש שמו. ברא את עולמו בשלשה ספרים: ספר וספר וספר.
>
> Thirty-two wondrous ways did God carve [with ten different names for God, as per Saadya Gaon's commentary]. [God] created His world in three manners of communication: speaking, counting, and telling [saper vesepar vesipūr]. [4,5]

The significant question for SY is, what is the process between God's speaking, and the world as we know it coming into being? The answer ultimately is that letters come forth from God, and these letters, among with basic spatial, temporal, and ethical dimensions, become the fundamental building blocks for reality. Gershom Scholem writes,

> Its chief subject-matters are the elements of the world, which are sought in the ten elementary and primordial numbers—*Sefiroth*, as the book calls them—and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These together represent the mysterious forces whose convergence has produced the various combinations observable throughout the whole of creation...[6]

SY first describes the thirty-two paths of Creation in §2:

> עשר ספירות בלימה ועשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד: שלוש אמות ושבע כפולות ושתים עשרה פשוטות.
>
> Ten sefirot, without limit [belimah], and twenty-two foundational letters: three mother letters, seven double letters, and twelve simple letters.

We shall first discuss the ten sefirot, and following, we shall explore the twenty-two letters.

It is important not to confound the term ספירות (sefirot) with the later associations from the Kabbalistic tradition. In this work, the exact meaning is unclear; it may refer to dimensions,

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[4] Ithamar Gruenwald. "Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓira*." *Israeli Oriental Studies* I (1971). §1. All SY quotes are from Gruenwald's edition.

[5] All English translations in this work, from *Sefer Yezirah* and Saadya's Genesis Commentary, are done by the author, David Vaisberg.

[6] Gershom Scholem. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.* New York: Schocken, 1995. 76.

elements, spectra, or simply, numbers. It is most probable that in addition to whatever connections SY's author will make, the text is invoking the ten fundamental digits alongside the twenty-two letters of the aleph-bet. These numbers, unlike the Western zero through nine, were one through ten, as Jews at this time along with Greeks and Romans had no knowledge of the digit zero, later introduced by the Arabs.[7] SY discusses far more in connection to the sefirot than simple numbers, as pointed to by the term בלימה. Unfortunately, for the modern reader, rather than giving a clear meaning, the term בלימה only seems to confound the author's original intent; the term appears only one other time, in Job 26:7, which puts it at two words. Indeed, there are several manuscripts[8] that write it as such— בלי מה, meaning "without anything," or translated by JPS as "emptiness." While this is helpful for developing a literal definition, it does little to elucidate the intended meaning.

Scholem considers the various possibilities:

> The second word *belimah* which may be taken to denote or to qualify the specific nature of these "numbers" has been explained or translated in accordance with the theories of the several writers or translators: infinite *Sefiroth*, or closed, abstract, ineffable, absolute *Sefiroth*, or even *Sefiroth* out-of-nothing.[9]

One definition that we might build, from Scholem's possibilities and what is contained in the written text, is that these sefirot represent the different dimensions of the universe. The theory of these dimensions would be similar to modern theories, which posit three spatial dimensions, a fourth time dimension, and other complex possibilities of which this author lacks the technical understanding to explain. §7 reads:

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[7] Dan. 201.

[8] Gruenwald. Commentary on §2.

[9] Scholem. 77.

עומק ראשית, ועומק אחרית, עומק טוב, ועומק רע, עומק רום, ועומק תחת, עומק מזרח, ועומק מערב, עומק צפון, ועומק דרום.

> Depth of beginning and depth of ending; depth of good and depth of evil; depth of high and depth of low; depth of east and depth of west; depth of north and depth of south.

These "depths" show that the sefirot may be intended as the limits of the dimensional spectra (of which there are five: time, morality, and three spatial). There are other parts of SY that suggest different meanings for the sefirot, identifying them directly with elements of Creation,[10] but since these elements are already linked with the twenty-two letters (as we shall soon see), this discrepancy may be accounted for by the varied textual traditions and scribal errors.

It is within these dimensions that the twenty-two letters act as the source matter for constructions of all aspects of the universe—as elements, in contemporary language. The products of these elements are divided in this work into the "three realms of creation known to [the author]: man, the world of the stars and planets, and the rhythmic flow of time through the course of the year."[11] For example, let us look to §41(1):

המליך את בית: וקשר לו כתר, וצרפן זה עם זה, וצר בו שבתי בעולם ושבת בשנה ופה בנפש.

> [God] gave rulership to the [letter] Bet, and wove him a crown, fusing this with that, and created in him Saturn in the universe, Shabbat in the year, and mouth in the human being.

Thus, we see one basic element connected with aspects of the cosmos, of time, and of humanity.

The letters are divided into three different categories: אמות, or mothers, כפולות, or doubles (those whose sound change with or without a dagesh), and פשוטות, or simples (those with only

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[10] For example, see §11.

[11] Scholem. 76.

one kind of sound). The text of SY, for the most part, is organized according to these divisions. The first segment deals with the ten sefirot, the second with the general role of the letters of Creation, the third with the mothers, the fourth with the doubles, and the fifth with the simples. The work concludes with an attribution of authorship to Abraham, which we will soon reach.

The letters referred to as אמות are most important, as they represent the three major realms of the universe, described in §25 (Long Recension only):

> שלוש אימות אמ״ש: תולדות השמיים — אש, תולדות אויר — רוח, תולדות ארץ — מים. אש למעלה, מים למטה, ורוח חק בינתיים.
>
> Three mother letters are א, מ, ש — the births of the heaven from fire [ש], the births of air from wind [א], and the births of land from water [מ]. Fire above, water below, and wind fixes a divide between them.

As can be seen, while all aspects of existence are sourced in the letters of the aleph-bet, there are still some fundamental elements, represented in three letters, from which all else is derived.[12] And even with the fundamental elements, SY posits an order of evolution for the elemental manifestations of these letters. For example, §17 discusses water's being created out of wind — "מים מרוח". As essential to Creation as the elements may be, however, they along with the realms of the universe are not the sole affiliations with the mother letters. Rather, manifestations of these three letters can be found in all major creative tools. §32 reads in regard to א,

> המליך את אלף ברוח, וקשר לו כתר וצרפן זה בזה, וצר בהן אויר בעולם, ורווייה בשנה, וגיויה בנפש זכר ונקבה.
>
> [God] gave rulership to א through wind, and wove for him a crown, fusing this with that, and created for him air in the universe, and the penis, both male and female.

[12] These elements—fire, water, and wind—might be compared to those of the Empedocles: earth, water, air and fire. See David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science.* 2nd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007. 39-40.

We may learn from this example that the mother letters are connected with those things which permit everything else to exist; they are linked to the different areas in the cosmos: the heavens, the ground, the sea, and that which is between; different aspects of meteorological phenomena necessary for life: moisture, heat and cold; and, the most important parts of the human body: the head, the heart, and the genitals.

Ultimately, SY is a work that attempts to formulate scientifically God's building blocks in constructing the universe. To connect this to the Judaic tradition from which it was born, the author posits that this sacred information was that which Abraham contemplated in his realisation that there was but one God. Dan accordingly observes that the framing of this work is the path of reason that Abraham followed toward his understanding: "*Sefer Yetzirah* is, between its opening sentence and its concluding sentence, a review of the process by which Abraham went through and which brought him to the first person to believe in the one God." [13] While this statement attributing SY's authorship to Abraham is unlikely, from a critical standpoint its point is telling. SY seems to be intended to communicate a science of the cosmos to the Jewish believer—one that should not lead him astray to foreign philosophies, but one that will give him a better idea of how the world came to be in a familiar philosophical manner.

From here, we will turn to an exploration of SY's ties to different textual and philosophical traditions.

B. To which traditions is *Sefer Yeẓirah* connected?

[13] Dan. 203.

As noted above, SY evades typical classification for Jewish texts. Though it displays the occasional rabbinic elements, it is not midrashic and does not sync, for the most part, with the rabbinic tradition. Rather than textually exegetical, it is scientifically exploratory. Dan notes,

> ...the author of *Sefer Yetzirah* was a lone thinker, without a school and without disciples, who left no mark on his surroundings. Only hundreds of years after his work was written was it taken up and did it become influential. . .
>
> The writer felt that he had the right to completely reexamine some of the most basic assumptions of Jewish thought, both those in the Bible and those in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature, to offer substitutes for them, and to follow his own individual path without taking into account the fact that hallowed sources such as these had adopted different positions.[14]

Nonetheless, there are ties to Judaic traditions. For one, there are some biblical citations (including Ezek 1:14, Ps 104:4, and Eccl 7:14) and allusions (Job 26:7, Ezek 1:14, Isa 45:7, 57:20, and 64:3).[15] Rabbinically, there are no explicit references made to SY,[16] and correspondingly there do not seem to be any references from SY to rabbinic literature. Mystically speaking, however, SY seems to be marginally connected to the Hekhalot and Merkavah traditions. Hayman points out that SY has often appeared on the same manuscripts as other Hekhalot literature,[17] and Scholem comments that it is connected to Merkavah literature in terminology and style.[18] Scholem writes,

> ...the author appears to have searched the Merkabah for a cosmological idea, and not without success, for it seems that the *hayoth* in the Merkabah described by

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[14] Dan. 199-201.

[15] Hayman. 34.

[16] Dan. 199.

[17] Hayman. 8.

[18] Scholem. 75.

> Ezekiel, i.e. the "living beings" which carry the Merkabah, are for him connected with the *Sefiroth* as "living numerical beings."[19]

Hayman, however, is less enthusiastic about the Jewish mystical connections. In fact, he sees little that is in any way Jewish in this text.

> Apart from the fact that it is written in Hebrew, that it alludes to the Temple... and that it refers allusively in the final paragraph to Abraham's strange experience recorded in Genesis 15, there is little on the surface which is Jewish in our "earliest recoverable text" of SY. As Ithamar Gruenwald has well said, "the book occupies a kind of spiritual isolation, that is positively unique in the history of Hebrew literature" (1973: 477). It does not mention Moses or his Torah, the Messiah or life after death, and it does not claim any pseudonymous authority. The people of Israel are not mentioned; the author's concern is with human beings as such (נפש), men and women, not Jews in particular. For him the number twelve conjures up the twelve signs of the zodiac, not the twelve tribes of Israel.[20]

In other words, SY is non-rabbinic; it incorporates almost no rabbinically Jewish ideas, and might only be called Jewish in that it stems from the biblical tradition.

Interestingly enough, there is another tradition quite prevalent in the text; that of the Pythagoreans. Alexandar Altmann,[21] Gershom Scholem,[22] and Tzvi Langerman[23] all agree that this late Hellenistic numerological mysticism seems to be paired with the Hebrew thought inherent in the text. Indeed, the Pythagoreans used mathematics and mathematical objects [e.g. numbers, equations, permutations, sequences, etc.] for contemplative purposes, in a manner very

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[19] Scholem. 76.

[20] Hayman. 34.

[21] *Saadya Gaon: The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs.* Abridged Edition. Translated by and introduction by Alexander Altmann. Oxford: East and West Library, 1945. 16.

[22] Scholem. 76.

[23] Y. Tzvi Langerman. "Sa'adya and the Sciences." *The Jews and the Sciences in the Middle Ages.* Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1999. 11.

similar to how one might make use of SY. One line in particular suggests that it might have been used for meditative purposes. Close to the introduction, the author writes,

> ואם רץ ליבך שוב למקום שיצאתה ממנו וזכור שכך נאמר: והחיות רצוא ושוב.
>
> And if your mind runs [read wanders], return to the place where we came from, and remember, as it is said, the [divine] beings ran back and forth.[24,25]

The text is telling us that SY is meant to be contemplated because it is offering a means for focus and telling us that really, we as readers should be focused on the holy. When our minds wander, we should think about Ezekiel's angels running back and forth in front of the Holy One, in His Temple abode. And like the Pythagoreans with their numbers, SY argues for the use of letters (along with numbers) for this sacred contemplation.

SY's fundamental understanding of the cosmos—the sefirot and letters are the backbone to Creation—is reflective of the Pythagorean cosmogonic system. For the Pythagoreans, not only were numbers concrete and evident in reality,[26] they were also the source for all that is present in the universe. Christoph Riedweg writes,

> To understand Pythagorean doctrine correctly, one must always keep in mind that numbers and their elements represented for the Pythagoreans not merely a kind of analogy (different from perceptible reality) by means of which the structure of things can most easily be described. On the contrary, numbers *are* the existing things themselves. Like other pre-Socratics too, the Pythagoreans considered everything that exists to be likewise material, perceptible through the sense. Water, the "unlimited" (conceived as matter), air, earth, and fire are merely replaced amongst them by number.[27]

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[24] Ezekiel 1:14.

[25] §5

[26] Christoph Riedweg. *Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching and Influence*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Ithaca: Cornell, 2005. 22.

[27] *Ibid.* 87.

This is remarkably similar to SY's system, which connects the world's three elements to the three mother letters, with everything else attached to a particular letter or combination of letters. Even abstract concepts like life, death, love and war are connected with specific letters (see §48), in a manner similar to abstract concepts in Pythagorean theory connected to certain numbers.[28]

It seems that SY is as much Hellenistic as it is Jewish, and it is possible that the work may have served as an attempt marry Jewish tradition with the sciences and mysticism present in the Hellenic world.

C. When was Sefer Yeẓirah written?

The short answer to this question is that no one is sure. Joseph Dan states rather bluntly that SY's "background, era and place of origin are all unknown to us."[29] He does however, based on the kind of language used, narrow the date down to sometime between the second and sixth centuries.[30] Likewise, Gershom Scholem, because of SY's association with Hekhalot and Merkavah literature, suggests that it was written sometime between the third and sixth centuries.[31] The suggestion that SY was born alongside the Hekhalot texts is plausible considering its having been transmitted with them in the same documents, as Hayman pointed out.[32] At the same time, we cannot be sure when it was first written, and all that Hayman is comfortable saying is that the "earliest recoverable text"—that is, the "one which can be

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[28] *Ibid*. 80.

[29] Dan. 198.

[30] *Ibid.* 199.

[31] Scholem. 75.

[32] Hayman. 8.

ascertained from the manuscript information we have available, using the standard techniques of textual criticism"—comes from some point before the first half of the ninth century.[33] Thus, it will have to suffice to say that the text was written at some point between the second and ninth centuries.

D. Sefer Yeẓirah Manuscripts

There is no common text for SY. Rather, there are three major recensions: the Short, the Long, and the Saadyan (which falls somewhere between the long and short in length). It is likely, according to Hayman, that all three recensions predate any of the known commentaries,[34] especially since the Short Recension seems to be used as the basis for Dunash ibn Tamim's commentary and the long for Shabbatai Donnolo's, and it is also clear that Dunash already knew of Saadya's commentary by the time he wrote his.[35]

The lack of a common text makes studying SY challenging, as the original intent and language are always left unclear. There are huge inconsistencies in the Long Recension, which, among other problems, offer varying definitions for the ten sefirot.[36] In addition, because the text was largely transmitted in commentaries without decent formatting, it often unclear "where the text ends and [the] commentary begins."[37] It is even possible that early interpreters deliberately revised the text to better match their philosophies. Hayman writes,

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[33] Hayman. 41.

[34] *Ibid*. 2.

[35] Gruenwald. 133.

[36] Dan. 209.

[37] Hayman. 4.

> The predominant image in SY of God as creator is that of the artists working on pre-existent materials. This is clearly presupposed in the constant use of the verbs חקק and חצב and also יצר/צר. We know that this was a problem for its early interpreters [along with its later interpreters]. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that a layer of glosses can be detected that attempt to correct SY's view of the creative process in the direction of *creatio ex nihilo*.
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> This is directly observable in the text of §20 where we will see that many scribes have had a hand in rewriting the text Less overtly it can be seen in the attempt to insert the verb ברא throughout the text and allow it to qualify חקק, חצב and יצר/צר. In no paragraph in SY is the verb ברא attested in all recensions and manuscripts.[38]

Ultimately, Hayman's words ring true when he says that "the manuscript tradition of SY is too varied and inconstant for anything like a definitive edition to be produced."[39] Thus, any study of SY will require a selection of a particular edition, with its benefits and flaws. For this study, we have used Ithamar Gruenwald's "Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓira*." This work attempts to bring together a significantly representative sample of "the best manuscripts prior to the first printed editions,"[40] using the Long Recension as a base text. Gruenwald chose to use the Long Recension since "the three recensions differ one from the other mainly in their length"[41] and therefore the Long Recension will be most inclusive of the various manuscripts, as it is what is in the oldest manuscript on hand, and it will provide "the most comprehensive lexical data" for SY.[42] When reconciling the different recensions is impossible, Gruenwald presents the Long and Short in parallel columns.

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[38] *Ibid*. 35-36.

[39] *Ibid*. 4.

[40] *Ibid*. 3.

[41] Gruenwald. 133.

[42] *Ibid*. 134.

Gruenwald's work was the most accessible with some useful comments and footnotes. While the "earliest recoverable text" produced by Hayman may have given us a better picture of the original SY, this author is more interested in the SY transmitted through the Jewish tradition and used by its many Jewish commentators. As we will be looking at Saadya's commentary, it is far better for us to see a text that will more closely resemble what he was looking at, and similarly, Gruenwald's text may prove more useful for any future studies of other commentaries, like those of Shabbatai Donnolo or Abraham Abulafia.

III. SAADYA GAON

We shall now turn from the source text in question to one of its major commentators, Saadya Gaon. We will look at the intellectual climate in which Saadya lived, his goals, his efforts and writings, and his perspective on SY.

A. Who is Saadya Gaon?

Saadya ben Yosef Gaon was born in Fayyum (Egypt) in 882, and spent his younger years learning in Egypt, Ereẓ Yisrael (primarily in Tiberias), and Aleppo. It was likely during his time in Tiberias that he became significantly acquainted with linguistic, biblical and rabbinic studies. By the 920s, he had arrived in Babylonia and risen to fame, becoming Gaon of Sura in 928. His life as Gaon was not without political turmoil.[43] Saadya died, in Babylonia, in 942.[44] We shall

[43] For a more detailed account, see Robert Brody's chapter on Saadya, "Se'adyah Gaon, Revolutionary Champion of Tradition," in *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture.* New Haven: Yale, 1998. 235-248.

[44] Brody. 235-239.

focus here on the Babylonian intellectual climate, the religious and philosophical tensions Saadya faced, and an introduction to his responses.

Saadya, living in the tenth century Abbasid (Muslim) Empire, was immersed in a world of varied and often conflicting philosophies. Altmann observes,

> The tenth century began to absorb the rich and variegated heritage of classical Greek and Hellenistic philosophy which had been made accessible by the translations of the ninth... many of the works of Plato and Aristotle had been rendered in the Syriac and Arabic vernaculars by Hunayn ibn Isḥak.[45]

With Hellenism, Baghdad's geographic location (centre of the known world), and Arabic mathematics and philosophy came a strong scientifically exploratory culture that was flourishing in Baghdad and throughout the Muslim empire. It seems that the "major scientific texts produced by Hellenistic civilisation, and some notable representatives of Iranian and Indian science as well, had been available in Arabic translations for a century."[46] Langerman notes that the sciences in particular were held in high esteem by Jewish communities in Muslim lands:

> Scientific ideas penetrated into almost every branch of Jewish learning; an acquaintance with the principal scientific doctrines, if not a rather intimate knowledge of them, was requisite for anyone who desired intellectual recognition. Philosophical treatises almost invariably contain rather detailed, usually up-to-date and accurate (in terms of the science of their day), discussions of scientific report.[47]

The Jews of the Abbasid empire were not, however, safe from conflicting ideas. Jews were bombarded by non-Jewish and pagan philosophies, many of which were entirely contradictory of Jewish teachings, and others that were similar enough to Judaism to cause concern for those

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[45] Altmann. 12.

[46] Langerman. 1.

[47] *Ibid.*

capable of recognizing the dangers.[48] Haggai Ben-Shammai observes that Saadya's "activity should ... be seen against the background of increasing numbers of Jewish intellectuals being attracted to the general culture to the degree of challenging the authority of the faith of their ancestors and even turning against it."[49] Among those challenging rabbinic Judaism were the Karaites—Jews whose anti-Rabbinite teachings were of great concern to the rabbinic establishment and particularly to Saadya.[50] Indeed, Altman notes that "a considerable part of Saadya's literary activities were devoted to combating the Karaite and other sectarian views."[51] Given all the intellectual challenges of this period, it is clear why there was an evident aversion to non-Jewish learning in Eretz Yisrael.[52] Some, however, used Islamic culture's philosophical innovations to their advantages, and Saadya was tremendously successful in this endeavour.

Saadya was a student of the Muslim philosophical school Kalam. Kalam is, according to Sarah Stroumsa, "a generic name for Islamic dialectical theology. Common to all *kalam* schools is the formulation of a system based on the dual basis of rationality and Scripture and on the assumption that the two complement rather than contradict each other."[53] While Kalam was predominantly Islamic, it was a philosophy that was both heavily influenced by Hellenistic thinking and complimentary to Jewish thought.[54] Using logic to defend religious principles in the

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[48] Alexander Broadie. "The Nature of Medieval Jewish Philosophy." In *Routledge History of World Philosophies: History of Jewish Philosophy*. Vol. 2. Eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman. New York: Routledge, 1997. 89.

[49] Haggai Ben-Shammai. "Kalam in Medieval Jewish Philosophy." In *Routledge History of World Philosophies: History of Jewish Philosophy*. 127-128.

[50] Altmann. 14.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] David E. Sklare. "Yusuf Al-Basir: Theological Aspects of his Halakhic Works." In *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity.* Ed. Daniel Frank. New York: E.J. Brill, 1995. 249.

[53] Sarah Stroumsa. "Saadya and the Jewish *Kalam*." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman. New York: Cambridge, 2003. 71.

[54] *Ibid.* 72.

face of intellectual and religious challenge had the potential to be a great boon to the rabbinic endeavour, and Saadya, while not the first one to align Kalam and Jewish thought, "creatively and systematically, shaped, smoothed the rough ends, and consolidated the foundations laid by his predecessors, and presented the outcome as 'Jewish philosophy,' with an authority that his predecessors lacked."[55] With this method, Saadya found himself in a unique position to argue Judaism on a level that was not only religious but more importantly, philosophical. This would prove tremendously useful in the great intellectual marketplace of the Islamic empire, as the Rabbinites required a defence that would stand in the face of rational (or seemingly-rational) critique. Thus it is no surprise that, according to Stroumsa, "all of Saadya's literary output is directed toward the establishment of a system that demonstrates the agreement between rationally based knowledge and biblical revelation as interpreted by Talmudic (rabbinic) tradition."[56]

Not only did Saadya use their overall system of logic, he also held true to the five primary Mutazilite (a major Kalam school) principles. These principles are quite prominent in his work, particularly in *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt*[57] (translated in Hebrew as *Sefer Emunot VeDeot* and in English as *The Book of Doctrine and Beliefs*). Their five principles, which a person would have to fully believe to be considered a Mutazilite, were (1) the unity of God, (2) divine justice, (3) divine reward and punishment, (4) a classification of all human actions into ethico-religious criteria, and (5) the necessity to enjoin good and prevent evil.[58] Though Saadya

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[55] *Ibid.* 79.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Arabic transliteration and English translation by Alexander Altmann, 16. Hebrew by Yehudah ibn Tibon.

[58] Ben-Shammai. 118.

did not hold all Kalam beliefs (like Aristotelian Atomism), he did share in these principles and their "logical methodology, philosophical terminology, and conceptual vocabulary."[59] With these ideas, Saadya would produce several commentaries, legal handbooks, and philosophical works, all with a primary goal in mind.

B. Saadya's Goal and Style

Ultimately, Saadya saw himself as the religious and spiritual leader for the Jewish people. He thus believed that he was "responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of an entire nation and sought ways to bring his message to the broadest possible Jewish audience."[60] This meant that he had to reach, with his writing, two different groups of people: the intellectuals in his community who "needed a clear and credible Jewish perspective on troublesome issues,"[61] and those who were less adept at philosophy and science. For the former group, Saadya worked to address the controversies in ways that "would satisfy his readers that the Jewish stance on the question at hand was demonstrably correct according to universal standards of discourse,"[62] namely, through rational argument, science and philosophy. We should take note of Brody's position here, that while Saadya used innovative techniques, he was actually quite conservative in his outlook, as he enlisted these new argumentative tools simply as means to preserve and promote "an idealized version of [the] Jewish, and specifically Rabbanite, tradition."[63]

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[59] Ben-Shammai. 129.

[60] Brody. 248.

[61] Langerman. 2.

[62] *Ibid*. 7.

[63] Brody. 244.

For the latter group, for whom philosophy was less appropriate, "Sa'adya undertook to transform certain forms of Jewish literature, particularly Biblical commentaries, into educational vehicles."[64] At the same time, these commentaries may have served more than one purpose. Brody suggests that "one of his reasons for engaging in systematic biblical commentary is likely to have been the undesirability of leaving a clear field to schismatics (e.g. the Karaites) and freethinkers, who had been writing on biblical topics for several decades."[65] We will see with his commentary on Genesis that he incorporates his own particular philosophies into the textual narrative.

Overall, Saadya's writings all have some kind of polemical nature, and many use, principally, biblical verses and rational argument to further his points. Brody notes in regard to *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt,* Saadya's philosophical masterpiece,

> The most notable structural characteristics of the book include the massive use of biblical verses, from which the author ingeniously extracts theological propositions by a sensitive and imaginative reading. In contrast, talmudic sources play a limited role throughout most of the work, with the exception of the treatment of eschatology. This may be a function of Se'adyah's desire to reach the broadest possible Jewish audience...[66]

We end up regularly finding in Saadya's work logical, philosophical arguments bolstered by sources that are often biblical, defending Saadya's mainstream Jewish perspective. Additionally, we may find, as per principle four of the Mutazilites (a classification of all human actions into ethico-religious criteria), an effort on Saadya's part to classify human behaviors and miẓvot. He was the first one to draw a distinction between laws and knowledge that are reasonable and

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[64] Langerman. 2.

[65] Brody. 311.

[66] *Ibid.* 290.

rational, and laws and knowledge which can only be accessed by revelation (these are discussed in both *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt* and his commentary on SY).[67] This drive to classify may be simply a result of his Kalam environs, but it seems more likely, especially given Brody's position on Saadya's rationale for using Hellenistic and Arabic methods, that Saadya saw classification as a particularly useful educational vehicle for teaching the miẓvot, as well as a philosophically palatable way for explaining the logic of the entire miẓvah system.

C. Saadya and *Sefer Yeẓirah*

Aside from Saadya's own commentary, and those of his contemporaries, we know very little about SY in Saadya's time. Fortunately, however, conclusions about its prevalence can be derived from his treatment of the text. In his commentary, Saadya walks a fine line between supporting and contradicting SY's text, which is unexpected given Saadya's often polemical nature. Something that could have been more appropriate would been sharp statements similar to one at the beginning of *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt*. He writes:

> ...as I saw in my time many of the believers clinging to unsound doctrines and mistaken beliefs while many of those who deny the faith boast of their unbelief and despise the men of truth, although they themselves are in error.[68]

Clearly, Saadya has no qualms about openly criticising those he believes to be wrong, which in *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt* means calling out those who believe something wrong or who spread these wrong ideas among others. In SY however Saadya does not take this kind of a

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[67] Ben-Shammai. 129-130.

[68] *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs.* 29.

polemical approach. He does state that the theories in SY are not entirely correct, as they only approach in validity Saadya's own "truthful" understanding of Genesis and Creation.

> והשטה התשיעית, היא השטה הרצויה אשר השביעית והשמינית מקצתה, והוא דבר התורה אשר פתחה בו בתחלת הבריאה שהאש והאויר והמים והעפר וכל אשר בהם מן הרכבות והחבורים והציורים ברא החכם בבת אחת, שנאמר בראשית ברא אלהים את השמיים ואת הארץ (בראשית 1:1), כפי שבארנו שיסוד הרוח והמים צמודים לארץ.

> And the ninth system, it is the preferred system to which the seventh [Pythagoreanism] and the eighth [SY] come close, and it is the Torah teaching that opens at the beginning of Creation, when the fire and the air and the water and the dust were all made in one moment, from the movements and connections and carvings, which God created in one glance, as it is said, in the beginning created God the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), and we have already clarified that the foundations of wind and water are connected to the earth.[69]

Instead of bluntly stating SY's lack of validity, Saadya gently informs the reader that it is close to the truth, which is that there are in fact four elements (Empedocles), and these are what Genesis 1:1 is actually referring to when it speaks of the heavens and the earth. Throughout his SY commentary, we find instead of even going to the extent of explicitly writing that SY is close to but not actually at the truth, he will coax the reader to his perspective. He appears to support SY's text with biblical verses and logical inferences, while in the reality, he is gently guiding his readers towards his own—the correct—ideological, philosophical, scientific and religious standards.

I posit that Saadya is walking this fine line between critique and support because he is writing for a Jewish audience that is familiar with and appreciative of SY, and this audience is one that is exposed to many challenging philosophies with countless opportunities for departure from rabbinic Judaism. As with the rest of his work, Saadya writes his commentary on SY with

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[69] *Sefer Yeẓirah [K'tav Almbaadi] im Perush Hagaon Rabeinu Saadya Berav Yosef Piumi zal*. Trans. Yosef bkh''r David Kaapaḥ. Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Studies and Sifrei Rasag, 1972. 31-32.

the purposes of leading Jews reading popular, “dissenting” work back to his “mainstream” rabbinic and scientifically valid Judaism. We will find this by exploring why Saadya takes a moderate approach in this commentary. Following, we will look to an example of his gentle guidance towards “truth,” and conclude with discussion.

First, if the assumption that Sefer Yeẓirah was popularly read by the Jewish population is correct, Saadya has good reason to write in a more pacifying manner. With so many conflicting ideas and groups out there, as long as Jews remained among the accepted minority groups in the Islamic empire (in which groups like the Karaites were welcome), a writer had to remember not to antagonise his readers. Menahem Ben-Sasson notes that the Jewish communities had “adopted a deferential attitude towards the Yeshivot by the beginning of the 11th century.”[70] From this, we may infer that this attitude had not yet been in place during Saadya’s time, and the Geonim were likely working towards this goal. A sharp polemic would be far more appropriate against a self-defining intellectual opponent than against one of your own, who may or may not be exploring philosophical alternatives.

Second, in addition to desiring to appease his constituents, it may be that Saadya did not find SY to be so toxic. Langerman proposes that rather than being a contrary and potentially dangerous text, SY was simply a member of the regional corpus of scientific literature. While it should not be taken as truth, it also does not pose the same danger to the tradition that other more theological positions would. Langerman writes,

[70] Menahem Ben-Sasson. “Internal-Communal Relations in the Geonic Period.” In *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*. 27.

> First of all, note must be taken of Sa'adya's fundamental position concerning scientific assertions found in the Jewish tradition[71] and those in non-Jewish writings. The key phrase, *'ulamā 'Banei Yisra'el wa-'ulamā al-falāsifa*, in which the two groups are linked together, indicates Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers are to be placed on an equal footing.
> . . . Moreover, in the exposition of the various schools of thought concerning the fundamental principle of the universe, the view of *Sefer Yeṣira* is not taken to be entirely correct; its author is one *sāhib madhhab* among many, that is to say, the proponent of a theory which, though less problematic than those previously listed, is not free of error. The only completely correct doctrine is found in Torah.
> . . . His decision, therefore, to present the Hebrew text as simply another theory—on a par with non-Jewish expositions, but, like them, falling short of the truth—must be understood as a statement to that science is a universal human quest in which Jews participate just as do non-Jews; both achieve some knowledge, both err.[72]

To Langerman, it is quite possible that since Saadya acknowledges other theories without explicitly naming them (and instead, just numbering them one through nine in SY, as we saw above), in a way that one might today cite different ideas in passing on any given subject, he is considering that of SY to be one of those many theories. If this is the case, one then needs to ask why this text of all scientific texts warrants a full-fledged commentary. The answer to this question is that since people are reading it, and possibly believing it, the text would make an excellent vehicle for Saadya's educational message, be it scientific truth (to correct a scientific error or to add to knowledge) or biblical support (since there are so few citations in SY). In some cases, he states why the source text, which says one thing, actually says something different, and in other cases, he explains a single word or phrase in great detail—perhaps to the length of several pages—giving the text biblical support or scientific backing. And sometimes, he notes that certain terms or phrases are actually representations for larger scientific or religious ideas.

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[71] Exemplified in our case, of course, by *Sefer Yeẓirah*.

[72] Langerman. 12.

To demonstrate this, we'll look to Saadya's discussion of פלאות חכמה in his commentary on §1 (which in Saadya's numbering is 1:1).

There are many questions to ask about the first verse of SY, one being, what exactly is פלאות חכמה—mysterious wisdom? Saadya takes on this question as a means to teach his readers about his own brand of epistemology, namely, that there are two kinds of wisdom. One is accessible for humankind to grasp, and the other is completely inaccessible and should not be sought after. Saadya begins by explaining that knowledge of the initial step of Creation (a topic often addressed in the Hellenic world)—that points between nothing and something, or what happens prior to the creation of the letters and numbers which lead to the elements, and that which is the very topic of SY—is impossible for a human being to grasp. To substantiate this point, Saadya uses biblical proofs. He cites Isaiah (6:6) and Job (28:23-25) to explain how this divine information can only be grasped by that which is completely above and beyond us. Isaiah 6:6 discusses the seraphim that fly overhead (higher than a person might reach); Job 28:23-25 speaks of God being the One who understands the way and the One who "fixed the weight of the winds and set the measure of the waters." In one step, Saadya brings biblical passages into a work almost devoid of biblical quotes and enforces the notion that some questions should not be asked by intelligent people—something to potentially guide his constituents away from certain contemporary ideas.

Following his biblical exposition, we find Saadya promoting his Kalam views on God's unity and his contemporary view of Empedocles' elemental science.[73] In connection with the verses from Job, Saadya writes,

[73] Lindberg. 39-40. Here is described Empedocles' four elements, earth, air, fire and water.

אמרו על ה' שהוא ידע דרכה ומקומה, אין הכוונה בכך שהחכמה עצם מסויים עומד במקום, ושהבורא יודע אותו המקום, כי בטל הוא שתהא החכמה ומקומה שני דברים זולת הבורא, אלא כיון שאמר על בני אדם שהם אינם יודעים לה דרך ולא מקום, הפך אותו על דרך המשל ואמר אבל הבורא יודע זאת, וענינו שהיא לו והוא מקורה, ואינה דבר זולתו. וכלל בפסוקי כי הוא לקצות הארץ וגו' לעשות לרוח וגו' ארבעת יסודות. לפיכך הזכיר ארץ ושמים ורוח ומים להודיענו כי המצאתו את היסודות הללו והטביעו לכל אחד מהן טבע מיוחד, בחכמה עשה זאת שלא יעמוד עליה אף אחד מבני אדם. ואמר אגור בדומה לזה ולא למדתי חכמה ודעת קדשים אדע.

It is said about God that He knows its way and its source, and the intent is not that wisdom exists of its own accord, in its own place and that God knows where to find that wisdom in that place, since God revoked the separate places for Wisdom and its place apart from the Creator; rather, since it was said about humankind that they do not know the way and they do not know the place, we understand it as allegory, and we say, that the Creator does know it, and that she [wisdom] is for Him and He is her source, and it is not separate from him. And this is a general principle in the verses [allegory being the principle], as He spread out the land... and made the wind... with the four foundations. In accordance with this, mentioned are the land and skies and wind and waters to make them known because these are the four foundations and He affixed in them each their unique properties, and in wisdom He did this, upon which none of humankind can stand. And Agur said, "I have not learned wisdom, nor do I possess knowledge of the Holy One (Proverbs 30:3).[74]

There is a great deal of which to take note in this paragraph. First, he mentions a conflicting group who considers wisdom to be separate from God (implying that there was something additional to God in the beginning) and that this could be an alternative reading to the proof text he brings forth. In his article "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam, " Daniel Lasker writes,

According to Saadya, the Christians misunderstand God's attributes of wisdom and life as separate hypostases, arriving, thereby, at a belief in a divine trinity. Saadya responds that God's attributes should not be understood as separate Persons, since God's incorporeality assures that His unity is absolute.[75]

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[74] *Sefer Yeẓirah [K'tav Almbaadi] im Perush Hagaon Rabeinu Saadya Berav Yosef Piumi zal*. 37.

[75] Daniel J. Lasker. "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam." In *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity.* Ed. Daniel Frank. New York: E.J. Brill, 1995. 167.

Given this perspective on Christian beliefs, it makes sense that Saadya would cover his bases and make sure to remind his readers, since the opportunity arose, that wisdom is part of and not separate from God. When the text says “wisdom and its place,” Saadya explains that this is just allegory for describing how the Creator made such a complex universe. Ultimately, Saadya makes sure to remind his readers that, as the Kalam say, God is One.

Saadya also does not resist the opportunity to promote scientific truth, as we see in his teaching the four elements. What is particularly interesting however is that he is not actually highlighting something written in SY; rather, he is commenting on the book of Job, which he used to elucidate a point made in SY. This makes perfect sense when we understand that his goal was education rather than commenting on SY, since SY does not in fact suggest that there are four elements. Actually, it only refers to the three mother letters— אמש, which stand for fire, water, and wind.[76] Earth, the fourth element, is never mentioned as one of SY’s foundational elements. Without explicitly bringing to light SY’s “erroneous” nature, Saadya slyly corrects the reader’s scientific learning.

Last, to conclude his shrouded scientific and philosophical lesson, Saadya brings in one more biblical verse (Proverbs 30:3, see above). By explaining that Agur had never reached this unattainable wisdom, he makes clear that no one will be able to.

Ultimately, we find that with two words—פלאות חכמה, Saadya teaches Torah, philosophy, and science, and works to guide his followers along the right path. Why would he go to such lengths to turn this text, with which he clearly disagrees, into an educational tool? The two most plausible answers are that (a) SY was significant enough in the Jewish world that he was

[76] See *Sefer Yeẓirah* §12-14.

required to comment on it, and (b) there was enough potential for learning misinformation from SY that Saadya felt the need to turn it into an education vehicle.

There's one additional answer to the question of why Saadya might have chosen such a text as his vehicle. Saadya's prime goal was to promote Judaism and its principal of God's unity, and the most logical way of proving God's existence was to prove that the world was created *ex nihilo*, as this would logically require the existence of a creator God. Indeed Saadya emphasises this point throughout his work by referring to God as the Creator. In addition to this argument being present in his commentary on SY, we will see its presence in Saadya's commentary on Genesis and even more strongly, its influence on the very structure of *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-' I'tiḳādāt* (we will explore these texts in section IV). SY is a treatise on the very processes of Creation, and thus a perfect tool for promoting belief in God, faith, or religious truth.

D. Saadya's Manuscript

As discussed before, we know that the text from which Saadya worked was different from the Short and Long Recensions. Aside from being somewhere between the Short and Long in length, Saadya's material is arranged in a different order. Many theorists including Ithamar Gruenwald have posited that Saadya arranged this text according to his logic and organisation from the Long Recension.[77] After all, Saadya notes that the text is erroneous and has changed through the ages:

> ואינם אומרים שהוא [אברהם, בעל הספר הזה] קבע מלות הספר הזה כפי הסדר הזה, אלא אומרים שהוא הוציא את הענינים הללו בשכלו, ונתברר לו כי המספרים והאותיות ראשית הדברים וכפי מה שנבאר, ולמדם לעצמו ולימדם למיחדים שהיו עמו. ולא חדלו להיות נמסרים בתוך אומתנו בלתי

[77] Hayman. 39.

> כתובים, כמו שהיתה המשנה נמסרת ובלתי כתובה, ואף מקצת המקרא נשאר שנים רבות מסור לא כתוב כגון משלי שלמה אשר העתיקו אנשי חזקיה מלך יהודה. וכאשר היה הזמן אשר נתקבצו בו חכמי האומה ורכזו עניני המשנה והלבושים מילים משלהם וקבעום, עשו בו או במה שהוא קרוב לו עניני ספר זה בדומה לכך, ולפיכך נשתלבו בו מקצת מפסוקים הללו וסדר הדברים הזה.
>
> And no one says that he [Abraham, alleged author of this work] held that the words of this book were according to this order; rather they say that he brought these issues from his mind, and clarified that the numbers and letters were the first things, as described, and they were taught and made special since they were with him. And we did not desist from transmitting them among our people without writing, in the same manner that the Mishnah was transmitted without writing, and even part of the Bible remained for many years transmitted without being written down, like Solomon's Proverbs, which were only fixed by the people of Hezekiah, king of Judah. And when the time came that the wise of the nation gathered together and focused on the issues of the the Mishnah, and its words that adorned it, and they fixed them, they did this, or something close to this with this book, and because of this, some of these verses were fit together and ordered as done here.[78]

Saadya clearly understands that what is received in writing is not necessarily exactly that which is transmitted orally, since only after years and years were such texts as the Mishnah actually compiled and ordered. Thus, it is possible that he would have no qualms in reordering a non-canonical text to make more sense. At the same time, Saadya does not directly state that he rearranged them, and along with Israel Weinstock, who suggests that the text was already reordered before reaching Saadya,[79] Hayman suggests that given Saadya's treatment of other texts that would themselves benefit from reordering, it is unlikely that Saadya did such significant edits to the actual text of SY.[80] Arguments for both are equally strong and therefore we cannot say, in this paper, whether Saadya's recension should be named so because of its editor, or simply, its most famous commentator.

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[78] *Sefer Yeẓirah [K'tav Almbaadi] im Perush Hagaon Rabeinu Saadya Berav Yosef Piumi zal*. 33.

[79] Hayman. 39.

[80] Hayman. 26-27.

IV. SAADYA'S SEFER YEẒIRAH AGENDA: CREATION

We saw in exploring Saadya's goals that Saadya tends to reshape the text's message for his own purposes of edifying the Jewish population towards the "correct" rabbinic understanding of truth. We shall focus on one example of Saadya's work: his thoughts on Creation as argued in the introduction to his commentary on SY. For an accurate image, we will first look to Saadya's ideas on Creation as demonstrated in his commentary on Genesis and in *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-' I'tiḳādāt,* and at the content and form he uses in making his arguments, and we will discuss what the goals for such works may be. We will then look to his method of presentation in explaining his cosmogony in the SY commentary introduction, comparing his content and method to the two previous works. In this comparison, we will gain a better perspective on his technique specific to the SY commentary.

A. Saadya's commentary on Genesis

Brody comments, "in addition to numerous interpretations of biblical verses scattered throughout his other writings—especially his philosophical magnum opus, the *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*—Se'adyah wrote a number of works, in Judeo-Arabic, devoted exclusively to biblical interpretation."[81] It is to the Hebrew translation of Saadya's work on Genesis that we shall now turn.

Saadya begins his commentary with a series of questions, and one can better discern Saadya's priorities by focusing on his first questions asked and answered. We will look to the

[81] Brody. 301.

first four major questions for insight. Answering the first question is how Saadya begins his commentary:[82]

> והא ההודעה (הכפולה) מרמזת למה שהיה בתכניתו וחכמתו (של הבורא). והיות ואמר כאן: את השמיים ואת הארץ ואמר מקום אחר: קורא אני עליהם יעמדו יחדו והודיע ששניהם נבראו יחד בחלק היותר קטן מן הזמן בטל מה שעלה על דעת טועים שמי שברא את השמים לא ברא את הארץ. ואין זה רחוק שהמקיף והמרכז נבראו שניהם יחד כי כך אנו רואים בהתהוות הגשמים (הצמחים ובעלי החיים). בצמחים אין הקליפה קודמת לגוף הפרי ולגרעיני וגביעיו, אלא הכל נעשה בבת אחת. ובעיבור, אין העצמות קודמות לבשר ולאברים אלא הכל מתחיל בבת אחת ונשלם בבת אחת.
>
> The definitive hey [the letter] that is doubled hints at what was in His plan and wisdom (of the Creator). And the two הs (heys) are said in "the heavens and the earth" [Gen 1:1], and it is said in another place, "I called upon them and they stood together" [Isaiah 48:13], and this announced that the two of them were created together in the smallest moment of time, and this contradicts the ideas of those who claim that He who created the heavens did not create the earth. And thus it is not so far off that the encirclement[83] and the centre were created, the two of them together. Because this we see in substance formation (the plants and the animals). In plants the bark does not proceed the fruit and its seed and its calyx; rather all is made at once. And in pregnancy, the bones do not precede the flesh and the limbs; rather all start at once and finish at once.[84]

In his commentary, Saadya first asks why the text says "the heavens and the earth," and not just simply "heaven and earth." Presumably, both would mean the same thing and therefore there must be an additional reason for the הs. His solution is that the הs' presence is a hint—one meant for those in Saadya's time—to point out that despite what readers might be hearing on the street, both were created at the same time. Unlike certain theories that say that one area was created first and the others spawned from it, or that one of these areas were in existence with the

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[82] The actual commentary on the verses, and not his introduction to the commentary.

[83] The outer celestial spheres.

[84] *Pirushei Rav Saadya Gaon Livreishit*. Comments and trans. Moshe Ẓukar. Jerusalem: Beit Midrash Larabanim BeAmerikah, 1984. 209-210.

Creator and gave rise to the rest of Creation,[85] here, everything was put together in that smallest moment of time at the dawn of the universe.

To demonstrate this, Saadya turns to two types of knowledge:[86] knowledge transmitted through the rabbinic tradition, and logic based on observable events. First, he provides his interpretation with validation from a reliable source—the Torah. In Isaiah the text discusses the heavens and earth being created at the same moment in reference to Gen 1:1, and therefore, this interpretation, hidden in the two הs, is the correct answer. Second, in case this received tradition is not enough, Saadya in his typical manner provides a logical verification. Since plants and animals do not develop one part at a time, how could we expect that the world would develop one part at a time?

Based on what we have already learned, Saadya's rationale for this first presentation is quite clear: to give his two primary audience groups the tools to grow stronger in their Jewish belief and confidence. To the more educated group, Saadya offers the tools to defend Judaism in the face of philosophical contradiction, and to the others, he provides the teaching needed to understand God's role in creating the universe.

Additionally, by arguing for the Creation of all parts of the universe at one time, Saadya posits that nothing can precede created matter. If there's no matter that began before everything else, one cannot say that one substance is more sacred or empowered than other. And given that *creatio ex nihilo* requires the existence of the Creator, by making this argument, Saadya is very

[85] These theories are all discussed in Saadya's introduction to his commentary.

[86] The Kalam propose three kinds of knowledge, and Saadya adds a fourth. They are "(I) The knowledge given by sense perception; (2) the knowledge given by Reason; (3) inferential knowledge," and (4), "the truth of reliable tradition," as demonstrated by the rabbinic tradition. Altmann. 36-37.

subtly reinforcing the idea of the all-powerful Creator God. We will see more on this in *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt.*

Saadya's second and third questions are simpler in scope, and serve to clarify certain opaque issues. This second question is, how is it that God could have created the skies first if God did not create the lights in them until later? A valid question for the literal reader, which Saadya responds to by saying that you do not need the lights immediately for the skies to exist, just as you do not need plants and animals for the earth to exist.[87] On one hand, this seems to be a simple issue of clarification, but on the other, in Saadya's world everything seemed to be targeted by questioning, and validation was therefore always necessary.

Likewise, Saadya answers the third question that asks how the earth could have been created at the beginning, by saying that this first line is using the name of the final product; while earth would initially be covered by water, it would eventually become the ארץ יבשה—the dry land we would come to expect. Rather than using logic, as with the previous question, Saadya uses biblical analogue (Deut 11:30 and Josh 5:15) to show that this is not the only time that this kind of naming occurs, but that there are other points where something is anachronistically referred to by the name it will receive in the future.[88] For Saadya. We may infer from his answers to these two questions that indeed, logic and received tradition (in this case, the Torah), are equally valid as argumentative sources.

The fourth and final question that we shall address here demonstrates Saadya's desire to connect scientific knowledge with biblical truth. He writes,

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[87] *Pirushei Rav Saadya Gaon Livreishit.* 210.

[88] *Ibid.*

ומאחר שהיו הארץ והשמים עיקר כוונתו בפסוק הראשון... הבריאה שיזכיר אותה בפסוק השני, ואמר והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וגו'. והיתה כוונתו בפסוק השני להודיע שאף המיים והאויר נבראו, לפיכך הזכיר אותם במפורש וייחס אותם לארץ. ומן הפסוק הראשון בלבד, לפני הזכרת בריאתם (של המים והאויר) בפסוק השני היינו יודעים בהכרח (שנבראו), כי מצד השכל אי אפשר שניטל ספק בידיעה ברורה זו. כי לו אמר רק בראשית, ולא אמר והארץ (היתה תהו ובהו) היינו יודעים שמכיון ששני התחומים (השמים והארץ) הם ברואים, מן ההכרח שכל מה שביניהם הוא נברא, הואיל ואין לו קיום אלא בתוך הנברא. אבל הכתוב לא הסתפק בזה ואמר: והארץ וגו' כדי לרמז אל הארץ, שהזכיר קודם את בריאתה לא נתכוונתי בה לעפר בלבד, אלא לעפר ולמים והאויר והרוח ולכל מה שבין השמים והארץ.

> And from after that the earth and the heavens were the principle intention of the first verse...[89] the Creation that is brought up in the second verse, when it says, "and the earth was *tohu vavohu*..."[90] And the intention of the second verse was to make known that also water and air were created; accordingly, they are mentioned in exegesis and they are connected with the earth. And from the first verse alone, before mentioning their creation (that is, of water and air), in the second verse we knew of them by necessity (that they were created), from the perspective of reason, since it is impossible to cast doubt upon this clear knowledge. Since it was just written "in the beginning" (בראשית), and since it was not written that land was *tohu vavohu* [in the first verse], we knew that since there were two depths (the heavens and earth) and they were clear, by necessity did all that exists between them need to be created, since they exist between the created entities. But the writ does not stop here, and said, "and the land was...[*tohu vavohu*]" to hint at the land, to remind us that first Creation was not intended to be dust alone, but dust and water and air and wind and to all that was between the skies and the earth.[91]

Saadya is addressing a rather significant question: if the Torah is true, and so is science, how is it that science teaches us of four elements, while the Torah only mentions two? After all, it seems at first glance that only fire (represented by the sky) and earth are mentioned. If there was indeed a discrepancy, then one might have to make a choice between the Jewish tradition and rational truth.

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[89] Genesis 1:1.

[90] Genesis 1:2. I left these terms untranslated, since translations vary in specific meaning. One common translation is "unformed and void."

[91] *Pirushei Rav Saadya Gaon Livreishit.* 210-211.

Even more so than the first question, this fourth question is of prime importance, as the answer is not so easily discerned. Saadya seems to recognize this, as he does not have a clear solution offered by the rabbinic tradition, in contrast to the first answer. Rather, he immediately turns to a long-winded argument of reason, supported by his statement that the "solution" is apparent through exegesis. In other words, he says that you can find the answer through applying logic to the text, and if you do so, the text will not disagree. The entire paragraph above, in fact, is a well-constructed argument based upon the assumption that the Torah *must* be in line with science, an assumption with which his readers may not be starting. He thus seems to be offering his readers the structure by which to come to this conclusion, since they certainly, by lack of textual support, would not be able to come to it by their own accord. Unlike in the earlier questions, where textual support is readily available and thus quickly mentioned, it is only later[92] that Saadya brings in verses from the prophets that mention these elements, which by necessity would have had to be created. Ultimately, rather than using the verses to shape his argument, as with the first question, Saadya uses them to seal in the message that water and wind are indeed present in the Torah's cosmology, and if this is the case, it must be that they were created with their counterparts.

It is evident that in writing his commentary on Genesis, Saadya is ensuring that the Torah's cosmogony matches up with modern science and philosophy to edify both parts of his audience. For the educated, he is bolstering their faith in the Torah's cosmogony as reasonable truth, and for the general populace, he is letting them know that they may believe in scientific truth as it does not contradict their religious beliefs. In terms of his method, Saadya will use

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[92] *Ibid.* 211-212.

rabbinic proofs first when appropriate (as we saw in the midrashic exegesis for the first question), thus reinforcing the Rabbinites' position as the legitimate stewards of the Jewish tradition. When there is no obvious rabbinic proof, rational arguments or biblical citations are used in whatever manner will best support his argument for bringing science and religious truth into alignment.

B. Saadya's *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-' I'tiḳādāt*

Referred to as "the most comprehensive and influential of Se'adyah's theological writings,"[93] *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-' I'tiḳādāt* is a direct philosophical treatise on epistemology, Creation, the existence of God, and other religious conversations, with an overall organization built upon the five Kalamic principles. We will first here look at an overview of the first part of his writing, which after establishing where knowledge comes from (a conversation necessary for any treatise on truth), looks to how Creation happened and accordingly argues for the existence of a Creator. We will then discuss his method and his reason for writing it.

Saadya's argument in this section ultimately says three things: (1) the universe is created, (2) the world is created from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), and (3) the world is created, in its entirety by God alone. In saying these three things, as mentioned above, Saadya is convincing his readers that the only logical conclusion is that there *is* a Creator God, and he is giving them the means to argue God's existence in the face of dissent.

In favour of Creation, through his combination of reason and biblical support, Saadya presents four arguments, with one addressing the issue of time, one noting that there must have

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[93] Brody. 289.

been someone to assemble all the parts of all the wholes, one on the nature of qualities and substances (influenced from Kalamic Atomism), and one on the impossibility of having material substance reside in the world of infinity (as everything is finite). Let us look to his introduction and first argument to better obtain a sense of the method particular to this work.

> From these introductory remarks I go on to affirm that our Lord (be He exalted) has informed us that all things were created in time, and that He created them *ex nihilo*, as it is said, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' (Gen. I.I), and as it is further said, 'I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretched forth the heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by Myself' (Isa. 44.24). He verified this truth for us by signs and miracles, and we have accepted it. I probed further into this matter with the object of finding out whether it could be verified by speculation as it had been verified by prophecy. I found that this was the case for a number of reasons, from which, for the sake of brevity, I select the following four.[94]

Saadya, to bring in the reader, begins what may be the most important argument of his career—for the fundamentals of religious beliefs—by citing the first verse of the Torah and subsequent relevant verses. His first step, before going into what is then anticipated to be a series of highly rational arguments, is to cite familiar biblical texts that state his point explicitly. His argument therefore, is clearly directed towards those who would recognize the Torah as religiously valid—those for whom these verses would provide an entry point into what will come. And it is from here that Saadya dives in to arguments based in reason, which do not so much look to the text for verifiable support.

> (1) The first proof is based on the finite character of the universe. It is clear that heaven and earth are finite in magnitude, since the earth occupies the centre and the heaven revolves round it.[95] From this it follows that the force residing in them

[94] Altmann. 51-52.

[95] The מקיף, or encirclement, which we saw earlier in his commentary on Genesis.

> is finite in magnitude. For it is impossible for an infinite force to reside in a body which is finite in magnitude. This would be contrary to the dictates of reason. Since therefore, the force which preserves the heaven and earth is finite, it necessarily follows that the world has a beginning and an end.[96]

Saadya begins and continues beyond this paragraph (for another page), using reason to argue why the universe is limited, implying that the world is *not* eternal, and thus must have had some manner of beginning. He continues by didactically questioning possibilities he will demonstrate to be incorrect,[97] and in doing so, he empowers his readers to refute all similar arguments that come their way. Finally, he concludes his argument with biblical proofs, reminding us that the truth is Jewishly verifiable and that Judaism is philosophically valid: "I found that Scripture testifies to the finite character of the world by saying, 'From the one end of the earth, even unto the other end of the earth' (Deut. 13.8), and, 'From the one end of heaven unto the other' (Deut. 4.32).[98] The other three of the four proofs all follow this pattern—a lengthy logic-based discussion followed by concluding biblical citations—and indeed, his next argument, entitled "The Transcendence of the Creator; Arguments for the Creatio Ex Nihilo"[99] follows suit.

All in all, what is discernible from Saadya's method in *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt* is that his readers are already convinced of the veracity of Torah and need a strong rational argument to fight off the polemicists and intellectual competitors. We see this in that the biblical reinforcements are not as prevalent and central to his arguments as they are in his commentaries on Genesis and SY. He does include biblical citations, with the effect of bolstering Jewish truth from within to support his co-religionists, but it is reason that is more central to his arguments. It

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[96] Altmann. 52.

[97] See Altmann, 53.

[98] Altmann. 53.

[99] *Ibid.* 58.

may be that the biblical verses are more stylistic than anything else. After all, when he cites the bible, it is certainly not to make his case, as he has already spent ample words doing so; rather, they may serve as stylistically reinforcing his points: not convincing but instead reminding the reader that this rational argument is rooted in the tradition.

C. Saadya's Sefer Yeẓirah Commentary: Cosmogony in his Introduction

Saadya's commentary on SY functions in a manner different from the previous two texts. *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt* is an argument-based philosophical treatise and polemic, and his commentary on Genesis is an edifying tool for both average and educated Jews. His commentary on SY though seems to fill a different function: to make sure that the readers of SY, who are educated and interested in both external thought *and* Judaism, remain in the Jewish aisle of the intellectual marketplace.

He begins his introduction with a firm statement of belief that the world *was* created *ex nihilo*:

הוא היוצר אשר ברא יסידי הנמצאות לא מיש.

He is the Shaper who created the foundations of the world from nothing.[100]

Just in case the reader was not sure if there was a God, or if anything existed alongside this God at the instance of Creation,[101] Saadya puts forth the ultimate statement of belief. God exists, and God created everything from nothing, and everything that the reader will encounter following this statement exists within that intellectual parameter. It could be that this statement is simply an

[100] *Sefer Yeẓirah [K'tav Almbaadi] im Perush Hagaon Rabeinu Saadya Berav Yosef Piumi zal*. 17.

[101] Note the earlier section of this paper that discusses the possibilities of the later inclusion of ברא to what was originally יצר—that is, the inclusion of "created" to what was originally "formed."

introduction, but it is also possible that Saadya is ensuring that the reader does not confuse his words, especially since he is about to introduce a number of philosophical systems that differ from this creed. First, however, he brings the reader in by speaking about how difficult it is to understand the processes of creation—how it has evaded the most "industrious" of observers,[102] which include those respected among the prophets and the philosophers. Following that, he invokes nine different philosophical schools that hold different opinions on cosmogony, and with each one, he explains what they believe and then uses rational argument and biblical verse to knock them down. For example, Saadya writes in connection to the fourth system,

> והשטה הרביעית דבר מי שקבע שהדברים מחודשים, אלא שהוא עשה ראשיתן יסוד המים. לפי שאנו מצאנו אנשים שסברו כן מהכרע הדעת, ואחרים סברו מן הכתוב, והכל טעות, אבל מה שנדמה לאומר דבר זה מדרך התבונה, הרי כאשר ראה כל בעלי החיים אינם מתהוים אלא מן היסוד הלח דוקא, סבר כי הויית הכל ממנו ושהוא הנעלה ביסודות, ונעלם ממנו בעיונו שאינו נמצא יציב בעצמו, ואינו עדיף שיהיה סבת ההויה יותר משאר שלשת היסודות השותפים לו, כי כולם סבת היות החי. אבל מי שנדמה לו זה מן הכתוב, הוא דבר התורה והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וגו, דמה כי אמרה והארץ היתה, כוונתה כי מקום הארץ היה מים מלפני שנבראת הארץ, ובא לכלל דעה כי המים לפני הארץ. וטעה בכך, לפי שמאמר התורה והארץ היתה אין כוונתה אלא לאחר בריאתה, לפי שכבר הקדימה הזכרת שני היסודות הקיצוניים כלומר המקיף והמרכז בפסוק הראשון. ונשארו שני היסודות האמצעיים כלומר האויר והמים לא ידוע אם הם צמודים אל השמים או אל הארץ, ולפיכך בארה בפסוק השני שהם מתיחסים אל הארץ, ולפיכך יהיה אמרה את השמיים ואת הארץ במקום אמרה ואת הרוח ואת המים. וכמו שנדמה לאומר דהר זה שיצירת הכל מן המיים כך היה אומר שהתפרקות הכל אל המים. ובסור תחילת הדבור יסור סופו.

> And the fourth system is that of he who holds that things are created but that everything stems from one foundational element: water. And since we found people who think this as necessary through reason, and others who think this from the writ, and they all err; what they have in common is that they have all come from the way of perception, since they see that all living things cannot live without basic moisture, and they think that life of all comes from it, and that this is the highest of the foundational elements, and it was concealed from them, in regards to this matter, that they are completely wrong, and they do not prefer that there would be a reason for existence that is greater, with the remaining three foundational elements paired with it, since all these three are relevant for life. But for he who comes to this conclusion from the Writ, that it is said in the Torah that

[102] *Sefer Yeẓirah [K'tav Almbaadi] im Perush Hagaon Rabeinu Saadya Berav Yosef Piumi zal*. 17.

> "the land was *tohu vavohu...*" [Gen 1:2], and they consider that even though it's said that the land was there, the intention referred to the place of the land, which was water before dry land came, and therefore, this person believes generally that water was created before land. And he errs in this, since the words of the Torah "and the land was" only discusses the state following its creation, since two foundational elements, the extremes [earth and fire, as represented through sky], as to point out the outer realm and the inner, in the first verse [Gen 1:1]. And the middle two foundational elements remain—the air and the water—and its not known where they stand on the side of skies or of earth, and because of this it is clarified in the second verse that they are connected to the land, and because of this, it is said *the* skies and *the* land instead of saying the wind and the water. And as they imagined that it was said that all of creation came from water, so too can they say that everything became separate towards the waters. And in turning aside the beginning of the argument, we turn aside its end.[103]

Saadya's polemices against the early theories mentioned above by turning what he anticipates to be their logic on its heads. Interestingly enough, he anticipates from them both kinds of arguments that he might use—one from knowledge derived through perception, and one through biblical exegesis. In both cases he refutes the arguments, using corrected reason against the perceptive one and corrected exegesis against the biblical one. Finally, he concludes by teaching his reader how one should interpret events correctly; namely, that all four elements were created at once, and this can be determined through both rational thought and biblical study.

One must note that Saadya is consistent in his comments. We saw the same interpretation of *hashamayim veha'aretz* in his commentary on Genesis. It seems, therefore, that he does not simply come up with explanations to counter his arguments. Saadya has a set belief, which he derives from the Torah, and he uses that which he has already figured out to fuel his polemics.

As Saadya proceeds through educating his readers in what is in correct, he uses the same method, turning whatever mode of argumentation used on its head—exegesis against exegesis and reason against reason, always finishing by making his own point and/or by pointing out how

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[103] *Ibid.* 26-27.

they are misled in their conclusions. Saadya's method changes once he reaches the eighth system — that of SY. Instead of refuting the text, as per his habit, he points out the small flaw at the end and beforehand gives a great deal of explanation to SY's cosmogony, presenting it against the seventh system of the Pythagoreans,[104] and giving it a sort of imprimatur and saying that it is much closer to the correct way of thinking. He writes,

> לפי שהוא עושה ראשית מה שברא הבורא יתברך ויתעלה ל''ב דברים, עשרת המספרים וכ''ב האותיות, ואינו טוען שהם מופשטים מפורדים, אלא אומר שהוא ברא את האויר והפקיד בו אלו הל''ב דברים.
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> Since He made the beginning, the holy and lofty Creator created thirty-two things, ten numbers and twenty-two letters, and they do not claim that they were abstract and separate, rather that He created air and assigned into it the thirty-two things.[105]

In this statement at the beginning of his description of SY's method, while pointing out what he sees as incorrect (that air was the source of the thirty-two things), he is at the same time subtly pointing out how this theory is better than the previous one. While this improvement is not entirely evident in this statement alone, it *is* demonstrated by the fact that his next page of commentary on SY, instead of pointing out its flaws, simply elucidates its points. There are two potential reasons for this change, both equally valid. One is that he knows that the reader cares about this work and will thus not want to see it torn apart, like the previous theories, and two is that this theory is close to Saadya's philosophy and thus Saadya benefits from its explanation.

Indeed, this second reason is demonstrated in the description of his own system. As noted in Section III, Saadya writes that his own system is approached by those of the Pythagoreans and SY, and the only place where he suggests a difference between the two is that he firmly believes

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[104] Explained earlier in this paper.

[105] *Sefer Yeẓirah [K'tav Almbaadi] im Perush Hagaon Rabeinu Saadya Berav Yosef Piumi zal*. 30.

all the elements to have been created at the beginning, and together. Interestingly, his method of presentation here differs only slightly from this same argument at the beginning of his commentary on Genesis. Saadya writes,

> והשטה התשיעית היא השטה הרצויה אשר השביעית והשמינית מקצה, והוא דבר התורה אשר פתיח בו בתחילת הבריאה שהאש והאיור והמים והעפר וכל אשר בהם מן הרכבות והחבורים והציורים ברא החכם את כולם בבת אחת, שנאמר בראשית ברא אלהים את השמיים ואת הארץ, וכפי שבארנו שיסוד הרוח והמים צמודים לארץ. ובארו הנביאים את זאת שהם כולם ברגע אחד נבראו, כמו שאמר החכם בספרו אף ידי יסדה ארץ וימיני טפחה שמים וקורא אני אליהם יעמדו יחדו. ובארו חכמים כיוצא בכך כאשר נתוכחו בית שמאי ובית הלל, ואמר אחד מהם השמים נבראו תחלה ואחר כך הארץ, ודברי הרוב והחכמין אומרין שניהם נבראו כאחת. ולפי שבארנו בפירוש בראשית ונשארו לכך משל מן החי ומן הצומח ומן הדברים אחרים.
>
> And the ninth system is the best system, to which the seventh [Pythagoreanism] and the eighth [SY] come close, and this is the word of Torah, which opens at the beginning of the creation that the fire and the air and the water and the dust and all that is in them from the compositions and the fusions and the formations; the Wise One created them all in one moment, as it is said, “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth” [Gen 1:1], and since we have clarified that the foundations of the wind and the water are connected with earth. And the prophets elucidated this, that they all in one moment were created, as the Wise One said in his telling, “My hand alone founded the earth and my right grasped the sky; I call to them and they stand together” [Isa 48:13]. And the sages elucidated on this topic, as Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel reproofed each other, and one said that the Heavens were created first and the other the Earth, and the words of the masses and the Sages said that they were created as one. And because we explained this in our commentary on Genesis, there remains for us an analogue from living beings and from plants and from other things.[106]

The paragraph continues with text that matches the text from the Genesis commentary, explaining how with the plant and with the fetus, it is not just one segment that develops before the others; rather, they all develop together. In this case, however, Saadya adds an additional analogue: the flame with its redness and heat and body and light.[107]

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[106] *Ibid.* 31-32.

[107] *Ibid.* 32.

It is fascinating that almost everything mentioned in his commentary on Genesis 1:1 is mentioned here in his statement on all of the world being created at once. The only thing missing on this end is his exegetical approach, of deriving meaning from the two הs. The textual reference from Isaiah is present, using one biblical source to validate another, and the rational argument is here too. It differs however in two respects. With the first (though not in order of appearance), Saadya introduces rabbinic thought into the equation, explaining that while there were two respected schools that erred in judgment, mainstream rabbinic Judaism stands with the truth. The second point is actually connected with that which is missing—the exegesis on the הs. The reason why he starts with that exegesis is that when one is commenting on the Bible, one uses the language of bible commentary to introduce ideas. Likewise, Saadya begins this exposition by invoking SY's linguistic style. While his word choices differ, the meaning is similar. Note the language in §19 of SY:[108]

> עשרים ושתים אותיות: חקקן חצבן שקלן והמירן וצרפן וצר בהן נפש כל היצור ונפש כל העתיד לצור...
>
> 22 letters: [He] engraved them, cleaved them, weighed them, converted them, fused them, and formed in them a soul for all of creation and a soul for all that is formed and a soul for all that will be formed.

While not the same in all the word choices, the meanings of one certainly bring to mind those of the other. Saadya uses fewer words to discuss God's forming, assembling and transforming the foundational elements into the many facets of Creation.

Essentially, we see that Saadya's arguments in SY, as demonstrated in this particular spot, begin with an introduction based in the language of SY, continue with biblical citations as

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[108] In Saadya's edition, this line is 4:4.

evidence of his thoughts (which are sometimes in line with those of SY), include rabbinic commentary where helpful, and conclude with arguments based in reason. From this method, we might conclude that his aim is to reconnect the reader with biblical information first, since SY while claiming to be a Jewish text does little to actually connect its readers with the Torah. It seems then that he finds it appropriate to bring in midrashic exegesis for his audience, since they are those who could use a positive thrust of rabbinic Judaism. Finally, he brings in rational truth to reinforce the message to his educated audience, who want to see a proof from outside the fourth category of knowledge (transmitted truth).

V. Conclusion

Saadya's educational method shifts depending on the kind of work. We saw in *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-'I'tiḳādāt*, a polemical philosophical treatise where he used primarily rational argumentation with a bit of Bible for little more than style to give his educated readers fuel for fighting their polemics. In his commentary on Genesis however, Saadya instead used textual exegesis, only later supported by reasonable argument, to carry across his points. And unlike his commentary on SY, Saadya did not bring in the rabbinic method. It could be that rabbinics were not relevant in this case, but what is more likely is that more people than the Rabbinite followers were interested in studying Genesis, and his message would carry more weight if he were able to get it across without antagonizing his readers. This way, the Jews who were undecided in the conflict between the rabbinites and the Karaites could read Saadya's work and take everything from it as valid, and consequently come that much closer to Saadya's understanding of truth. Saadya is well aware of his audience and writes in the manner that will best reach them.

Thus, we see in his commentary on SY that Saadya uses every option in his toolbox: biblical proofs, rabbinic midrash and logic, to convince his audience of his truth. Further, he does not use these tools haphazardly; he orders them according to what may be most necessary. As stated above, SY is a Jewish text that has very little that is Jewish about it. Before anything else, Saadya needs to bring his readers back to common Jewish language, by invoking the Torah. It is only after going through "safer" texts that Saadya begins the secular approach, thus ensuring that his readers will come to truth from a primarily Jewish perspective.

Ultimately, through his work, Saadya teaches an important message. When teaching, be it through writing or speaking, it is not enough to present what you know in the most basic of language. Rather, a person must shape his or her work for his audience. Draw them in with the images that will resonate most, as Saadya did with his *Sefer Yeẓirah*-like language at the beginning of his SY commentary, or with his grammatical play in the Genesis commentary. After that, a person should determine which arguments will be most helpful, if not most interesting, for the audience. Depending on the issue and the recipient, rabbinic ideas or biblical proofs may not be as helpful as simple logic and rhetoric.

This entire study has been directed at efforts to marry philosophical thought with religious belief. SY used contemporary understandings of cosmogony (Pythagoreanism) to give additional meaning and relevance to the Torah's ideas of Creation. Likewise, Saadya brings his tenth century Kalamic reason to the field to better enable Jews to understand the truth. We thus receive a message of prime importance: religion does not exist in a bubble; it is a part of life. If we are going to keep religious truth alive, we must keep it relevant, by connecting it with contemporary truths in presenting it to our audiences in the most palatable of presentations.

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