

The prophet Nehemiah

Le-olam va-ed

BARUKH SHEM KEVOD MALKHUTO LE-OLAM VA-ED "Blessed be His name, whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever" (based upon Nehemiah 9:5) This is the prayer that you can hear time and time again in the synagogues.

The problem is the correct meaning of *le-olam va-ed*. In Latin it was translated: *in secula, seculorum*. And in Aramaic it became: *lalmey almaya*, literally "from the eternity of eternities", while in Greek it was translated : "εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων" (*eis toùs aionas ton aiṓnōn*), to the aeons of the aeons.

What is the correct translation of the Hebrew : le-olam va-ed ?

These are the problems that usually occupy the mind of a Kabbalist.

The problem had its root in the concept of Infinity and the question was one of mathematical logic. Wasn't enough to say: forever ? Why did Nehemiah had to add *va-ed* ? The solution was of course linked to the correct translation of that famous expression.

Fortunately Leon was reading the mysterious book of the Serb Milorad Pavic : *Dictionary of the Khazars*, that opened his mind to a new possibility. Here is what Milorad Pavic had said:

Yabir ibn Akshany, the namesake of the Devil, one year after having been buried in Trnovo, by the Neretva river in a place called Satan's grave, became a shop keeper in Thessalonica and was selling knives, forks, sabers and all sorts of dangerous tools that could be counted but not weighed, presumably because the Devil, having become a ghost, could no longer utilize gravity. To a Christian buyer who had entered his shop to buy a two-pronged fork for piercing two kinds of meat, pork and beef, and who, having recognized him, had asked him what the Hell he was doing in Thessalonica when he had been buried in Trnovo a year ago, the Devil replied:

“ Well, my friend, I died, and Allah condemned me (to live) forever and a day, and so here I am, a merchant....”

Eureka ! The answer of the Devil contained, according to Leon, the correct translation of *le-olam va-ed*: i.e. *forever and one day*. Perfect!

This wasn't the first time that Leon had found in the book of the Serb Milorad Pavic the answer to some of his questions. On a different occasion, to explain why a character of his book had become crazy, Milorad used the expression: *the Devil had pissed on him*, that better than any other explanation, describes insanity. A second time, on a different occasion, Milorad has used the expression: *the Devil had pissed in his pocket*, to explain the strange behaviour of another character of the book.

But Milorad was not restricting himself to explain the tricky behaviour of the Devil in his relation to mankind, for he also wrote some example of profound philosophical wisdom. For example the Khazar princess Ateh, who took a decisive part in the polemic between Christian, Moslem and Jewish participants to convince the Kaghan, i.e. the King of the Khazars, using her powerful logic had managed to convince him to choose Islam, instead of the faith of one of the two opponents. But she was also a beautiful girl and a poetess who had written these famous verses: “ *The difference between two yes, can be greater than that between yes and no.* “

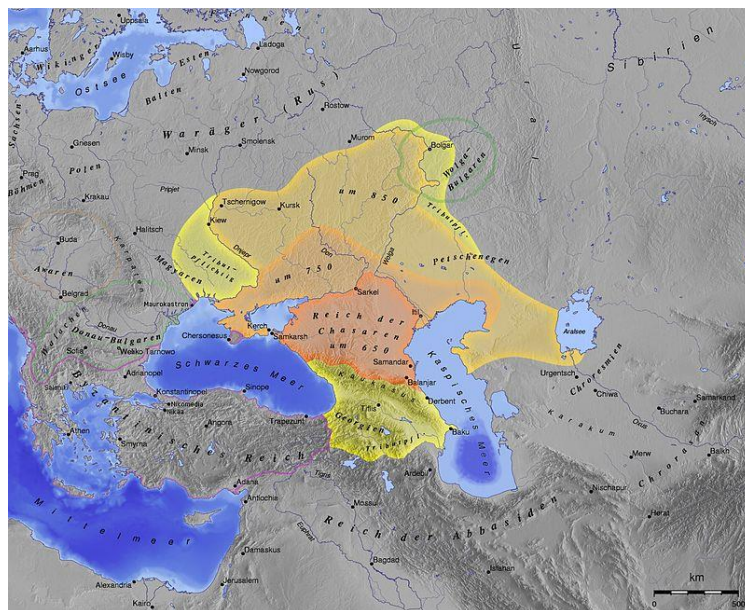
Being a man of this world, experienced with the mentality of women and their strange behaviour, Leon knew that this wisdom could be applied to describe most decisions taken by women...

Fair enough.

It was *forever and one day*, that according to Leon translated better the concept of *le-olam va-ed*, for two reasons, one of human and one of mathematical logic. Here is why.

First of all, *forever* was not enough when talking about God. The concept of eternity should be strengthened adding a reinforcement like *va-ed*, because God was above the simple human numerology. And Nehemiah knew that.

Secondly, the mathematician Cantor had proved that to the number : ∞ (the infinite) you could add any number and it remained ∞ , unchanged. Therefore adding one day to an infinite number of days, would not change anything !



The Khazars Kingdom

The conversion of the Khazars

But Leon's main motivation for reading the book was not the exegesis of the words of Nehemiah, but the history of the mass conversion of the Khazars to the Jewish religion. Leon had read long time ago the book of Judah ha-Levi, *Al Khuzari*, that described the story of the famous conversion to Judaism of the numerous Turkish tribes of the Khazars, counting many millions, that had occupied a vast area of Southern Russia, between the Black sea and the Caspian sea. He had made the usual mistake to lend that book to a friend (never to be seen again). By now he had even

forgotten who that friend was. So he had forgotten all the important details of that famous mass conversion of the Khazars, that were Turkish tribes, completely unrelated to the semitic Jews.

The reason for his interest was to solve the enigma of the real origin of the Jews. When people used the expression: antisemitism or antisemitic, relative to a Jewish question, most probably they ignored that the majority of the Ashkenazi Jews, that made up the majority of the surviving modern Jews, were in fact Turks, i.e. Caucasians and therefore Arians, and not Semitic related to the Arabs. Only the Sephardi Jews, descending from the Jews from Spain (Sepharad) were mostly semitic, so to speak, because who knows who their real fathers were ? Some could be Spaniards and a few of them could be Berbers, as many Berber tribes had converted to Judaism, after the exile to Babilon, as early as 500 BC, that is during the times of Ezra the Scribe, who had written down the Torah in the Hebrew alphabet.

The Jews were not a race, but a culture, based on one book, the Torah.

Leon was however interested in documenting the difference, if any, between the story of Judah ha-Levi and the story of Milorad Pavic, that was derived from Serb legends and from ancient documents preserved mostly in East Europe. Was it true, that the Kaghan had converted to Judaism ? The first part of the book suggested that in fact he had converted to Christianity. The middle part of the book said that, thanks to Princess Ateh, he had converted to Islam. Leon had not yet read the third part, so he didn't know the end of the story, but it was possible that the Kaghan had converted also to Judaism. This would be a classical *trilemma*, with a typical unspecified result.

Leon ha told me : “ It would be interesting to continue reading, if I could avoid being interned into a mental institution before the end of the book.”

So I don't know how it ended. I will tell you the end of the story next month, after my usual visit to Leon when I will return to Sicily...