

Israel and the Occupied Territories

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1. Israel

It was always so affecting this building, dedicated to the children of Yad Vashem. Every thing goes in the dark and being traversed by a handrail, while we can see many lighted points around us in this space: the stars that remind so many missing children. There is a different set up and different things but I also found another beautiful and touching museum dedicated to the children, including those in the museum Yad Lailed opened in Kibbutz Lohamei He Ghettaot, founded by survivors of Warsaw Ghetto. The section devoted to children, in 1994, intends to make them understand the Holocaust without too much trauma. The shape is a spiral. The children and their families had been sucked into a spiral of violence. But here we want to bring a message of life. The final room is devoted to the children that have been survived. During the path they can be worked to reconstruct through didactic materials, you can set in a circle, the other groups present stories with their characters. Let's start with the round room with colorful windows, copies of drawings of the children that speak about the time in the camp, what it should be the room at the end of the route. Above, there is a figure of a butterfly that reminds you of a well noun poem about a butterfly in the ghetto. And together with the Sun means the hole of life. The blue sky always is present in the drawings. The real Sun threw the first to the last room can enter into darkness recesses of the Warsaw ghetto. We can read sentences or phrases of the children of that time: "I want to take with me my clown, but my mother says - the case was already closed". We can pass through the dun sacks made with the gray old clothes that keep inside them all their memories when they were ready quickly, a reason to talk about how many people lived every day life In their homes in the past. Then we are walking into the tracks that break: and there are images of Jews pushing each others by the trains. There is a crowd of people whose faces cannot be seen; people without identity. Other people with the recovered memory you enter in the darkness. There is a round dark room. Even in a spiral shape. In the center, there is a lighted candle. You can start from the dark even though there is so little light of the Sun that it is drawn by the children. Our guide explains that it isn't necessary to tell about the tortures. This, we can learn later. The message here should be positive. At the end of all there is the Sun, the Light. The life begins again. You can release from drama. For this reason it is necessary to insist for theatre and sculpture, and drawing on research. The children have the possibility with the help of these instruments, with the help of the narrative to be free from drama.

Interesting and well design too, the museum itself was set up in 1949. It was founded as we said before, by the survivors of the rebellion of the Warsaw Ghetto from socialists.

We arrived after a short road in the sun, the road full of many young soldiers, men and women, with their baggage and arms : later we will be explained that a visit to this museum is part of their training. The approach to the issue is of course modern, advanced. They explain us that the aim is on the value of resistance, humanism and on Zionism. This is an interactive museum, where can enter groups one by one; a guarantee of the opportunity to live it, to feel it better. We enter the Hall of Remembrance, which is also the archive. Sit and look at the wall where the letters are moving constantly. English and Hebrew letters that slide from the bottom to the up, and together form a name of a Jewish community, of an interesting zone affected by deportation. For a few moments, the stream continues and breaks, to tell us, to form a village you need so much time but to destroy it you don't and here was destroyed an entire culture.

Along the other walls are appearing faces, objects mostly found and brought here by Miriam Novitch, one of the founders, another of the survivors of the Warsaw ghetto. And then appear paintings, textiles, photo: you can remember people threw by their things that they have left them. One of the first that grasps the importance of art created by victims. There are approximately 4 thousand documents all of them originals. Each of object has a number, which has a homolog name in Hebrew, French and English: just touch the keyboard.

Two visits, touching and unique enough. This second story continues while we are climbing up the hill to another kibbutz, in the middle of pines and cypresses, rocks and olive trees. Now we are in the Upper Galilee. We cross the village, walk through the rosemary bushes and tufts of daffodils in bloom. The green of the Galilee is remarkable, after the desert of Judah from which we come.

Here we are in Sasa: We are nine hundred meters above sea level. It is a windy day. This kibbutz goes back to '49 . About 400 persons lived there in the past and now in the present, including two hundred who are adults. Starting with an agricultural economy, producing about three thousand tones of apples a year. They have a herd of cows and fields for grain, cotton, etc. Thirty miles from there they have a plantation that grow up avocados. There is a chicken farm, and various activities connected with agriculture. But they also have two factories: one, of detergents such as aerosol sprays. The other, designed to armor. Armor? Yes, resources for military purposes, such as Americans for Afghanistan, or for the buses using in the occupied territories. A protection factory that has thousand employees. That there will be explained later. It produces about 800 million dollars a year. So that they, the kibitzes, the owners are in the highest income group in Israel.

We walk, climbing to the top of the hill at the place from which you can see Lebanon. We ask: where does the Lebanon begin? -“ where the green finishes”- is the answer. So the Lebanon is closed. From there arrive the fire rockets on cities: “Haifa is threatened all the time. All the Israel is under the sight, under the fire“-explains our host. We walk on lawns, including marigolds and roses, olive trees. We visit the school, we are shown the library, the theater with 400 seats. The hill contains various archaeological layers, there are the remains of the Paleolithic which is a problem for the new houses, each finding implies a warning to Cultural Heritage, which will perform research at the expense of the kibbutz. Often it was preferred to hold the first excavations. We walk among daffodils and rosemary, olive trees, wrapped in scarves against the strong wind and cold. In front of us there is Meron mountain, the top of which is the base for the Israeli of the air traffic in order to monitor the situation, to give early warnings in cases of attacks. We pass in front of the farm, with animals that the children look after.

We eat in a large room full of people, with seven euros per head: there is hot soup with vegetables, rice, chicken, vegetables, salad, cakes, a lot of fruit, including oranges and melons. And then, a meeting on the history of the kibbutz (again, the children were brought together to limit the influence of families, even the names were chosen by the community, some of them remember that traumatic period). Currently it is important to say that around 20% of young people leave there. The others go elsewhere, in other places although there is “good quality of life.” Sure, they go on the suburb, if they want high level studies they need to go elsewhere. Many go to Tel Aviv but then returning is very hard. Often partners do not like the idea of living on a kibbutz.

He still talks how is the division of labor, facilitated by the Human Resources Department, the Board of Directors, which decides on the percentage of the profits to reinvest again, figures, Kibbutz personal bonus. The kibbutz is not publicly traded, so it is not obliged to bring the budget, it has a greater autonomy. Let’s talk about community life but also any trade union, but for now there is no union, but it seems there are many activities for employees, who have higher salaries than the minimum wage. Two or three times a year they discuss for the business, there are questions on the treatment of workers. We ask what was there before the Kibbutz. An Arab village that was abandoned in ‘48. The most of older people live today in Lebanon. Yes, they were evicted from Syria and Lebanon so they were forced to leave. According to the agreements, actually, this area has to be Arab. They thought that Arabs would be able to get more. “But it didn’t happen so”- says our host. In his view there were so many errors and extremism. So until ‘67 the Gaza Strip was in Arab hands. They, the residents of this kibbutz, try to have good relations with their neighbors, in the theater the Palestinian children are participants, as well as Circassians. Here since 2000 there haven’t been riots, during the second Intifada.

I think those were more interesting, meaningful meetings held in Jewish circles, except the famous 'Wailing Wall'. But of course we have had many others meetings, with representatives of Christianity, with people from various associations. And we visited Arab villages, historical sites, etc.. we have passed many check points, and been controlled by militant young soldiers.

2. Christians

In the holy Christian places are not the ones that we have appeared more credible and exciting. Today certainly it does not mean the Holy Sepulchre have mystical experiences or increase the faith. More exciting and impressive is a ride on the Lake Tiberias, with old boats¹ that remind older boats, or climbing on the Beatitudes mountain, we do not see it thronged by the tourists, where there is proposed a reading from Matthew, including roses, jasmine, rosemary flowers, purple bluebells, tall shrubs and standing among them you can remember the stars of the Christmas. There is an interesting Church of the Primacy of Peter, on the shores of the lake (one of the possible sites identified as such because there are others), which is reached through an alley surrounded by cypresses and acacias, palms and eucalyptus trees. Driving out, admire the lake, with shores of pebbles filled with birds and ducks, with gulls that they are frequent inhabitants of the shores of this lake. Here, perhaps, is the rock that we remember it as the place where Christ and Peter were sat. Here, perhaps Jesus said to Peter, 'Do you love me, sincerely? "'. Three times, indicating disturbance on his friend.

But it is much more interesting for us the meeting of December 30, 2009 with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Fouad Twal, the successor of Michel Sabbah, I remember whose previous visit, in 2007, the author of important theological texts².

His Beatitude Fouad Twal, whose motto is 'Paratum cor meum' speaks for a 'Church of Calvary'. A church so uncomfortable, however, accepted. As he says, it is accepted and why you can't understand it. "We feel that this cross will never end". Still you would have the reason of rejoice, by pilgrims and the solidarity of friends. "We- says he- will have peace and justice. One day, we hope that do not have the distances between the people. We have taken the wrong road for 60 years. There can be no peace for a people without the others, you can put all the walls that you want. " Have you seen the wall? Certainly, but you can not avoid it. He talks of a "construction of the wall in the hearts of men." But he explains: "Israel is frightening. It is more secure in war than in peace. " His Beatitude recalls a recent visit of the Pope, although I understand

¹ Even the boats are still held: At rise we saw the flag with the colors of Italy, and played the anthem of Goffredo Mameli, in our honor. Then we bought the boat, maps of the area, as well as stones on a lake with small fish, on the neck strap. Remember the fish, of course, the ancient Christian symbol.

² I see Israel and the Occupied Territories, criticism Sociology, XLI, nos. 162, Summer 2007, pp. 103-121 and 163, Autumn 2007, pp. 71-91

that the reasons for emigration (sixty years without peace) discouraged Christians to stay. It is treated as a massive escape. Sure, he says, if you compare with four hundred and twenty Christians permits from Gaza to Jerusalem, to pray, do not forget that in Gaza there is a million and half people who can not get out. Of course, Christians see the Jews as their 'big brothers'. But it is true that "there is the word occupation that weighs hard on everything. Territories occupied by Israel. You do not have the courage to say: Occupants. (...) in those settlements, no one can enter. Fear reigns, this is the only dialogue." Perhaps in Rome- he adds, there will be attempts at dialogue between theologians, but here no. There are many associations with Israelis and Palestinians members, agreements or understandings between the parts, but the government ignores them. He says-" I was in Gaza recently, just before Christmas and we need just to get inside. There I remained there would be three hours to deliver a new ambulance to the Anglican hospital, to inaugurate a center for handicapped children with trauma. He kept a low profile saying: " Hamas³ is there and I hadn't intended to be officially received by Hamas".

Although during our visit, there was a machine that has monitored closely. Their children go in Christian schools in Gaza. They are those who defend the Catholic Church. He also talks for the excavation of the tunnel, in his opinion, it is well known in Israel. He says: "They must live (the Palestinians)." He adds- that in this land, we manufacture terrorists. Who can face with the life, turns into guerilla in terrorist. Moreover it is foresighted seven hundred new settlements on Palestinian land, what should we do? Speaks, and feels strong and conviction in his words, for the people that live as "living stone". A phrase that none of us can forget, that consoles us to the situation of so-called 'holy places'⁴. Living stones: an shared idea, a real pulsation thanks the visit we made in the December 29 Caritas Baby Hospital.⁵

Then we visited the place of Mosques an impressive and intensely feeling place, lived enough not only by the tourism, but also it was monitored carefully by Israel. It is a vivid memory of desecration, when Ariel Sharon entered with Israeli soldiers (it was 28 September 2000), which excited the Second Intifada or 'al-Aqsa Intifada'. Then we passed "The door of the lions", we admired the closed door from which it is assumed that the Messiah had passes threw it. We have seen it from the Gheenna. We passed the wall that surrounds a piece of the Arab⁶ territory (including inside of it the tomb of Rachel) and then we passed by the check point (one of many that we overcome in this

³ Hamas, the word can be translated with enthusiasm. This organization was born Palestinian in the Gaza Strip where it is rooted precisely because of the conditions of poverty and extreme poverty exist. Hamas was funded by Iran, has recruited fighters and with Hezbollah, launched the first intifada. It is considered a radical organization with widespread support in Gaza.

⁴ You can not even see them properly for the crowd, for files and daunting expectations due to the failure of any recollection.

⁵ Here the word is not about Caritas International Catholic organization known but indicates an attitude.

⁶ On the wall around Rachel's Tomb are depicted faces with crooked smiles, toothless mouths, but also decapitated trees, which happens in reality. The wall reached these lands quatrocentocinquantas km. about.

journey, in which the control were more often than in the past by the armed young soldiers who stopped the bus to control), until we arrived in Bethlehem.

There we talk to an Italian nun, one of five nuns that care about this structure, established by a Swiss priest, Father Ernst Schydrig. He reconstructed it and established it as a hospital, inspired of the death of a Palestinian child, from the cold and starvation, in Christmas Eve of '52. Today, he says, it is the only pediatric hospital that operates in all territories⁷, with about 30,000 patients a year. But everything was made more complicated, of course, from the wall. Whenever you need permission it is not always quickly guaranteed: you have to wait for hours, days, and weeks. The Palestinian ambulance can not cross the wall; it has to be Israelis one. Sometimes, we must do something by ourselves without medicine or instruments, cases that occur frequently and repetitive.

The sisters explain our interlocutor, there are four years protesting for the peace in the Check Point, where they're going to say the rosary every Friday⁸.

The main diseases? Seasonal ones. The rule does not exist, there isn't any possibility of heating in homes. In addition there is an electric heater near the table where you are eating: and the temperatures reach under the zero degrees. Bronchitis and pneumonia are presents. Gastro-intestinal problems during the summer and also, the lack of water in May is often an emergency. Sometimes the water is given two times a week, from midnight to two o'clock. Other diseases arising from the marriage between cousins. Metabolic diseases may become chronic. And then, disability from birth, as well as psychological disorders and behavior, especially among children who have experienced the Intifada or immediately the siege. And, of course, cases of domestic violence, especially because of the wall: some fathers have lost their jobs, as due of it they persecute their wives and children. Together with the wall are increased other diseases such as alcoholism and drugs. There is AIDS, even if you prefer not to say it publicly. And fundamentalism advances have increased women with burqas.

Staff? In this hospital 15 doctors, nurses. The staff faces with the all problems. There are also two hundred employees Muslims and Christians, with much mutual tolerance: Do Latinas want to celebrate Christmas? The Orthodox that are present at the moment they have all the roles, work, and then they reverse. Patients? Today, children are eighty-two. In principle, 98% Muslim children, are mostly cared free. In fact Christians are leaving the Holy Land. The sisters say: "Sometimes we feel abandoned." but they continue their hard work and commitment so today there is a school of nurse for two years, opened for training purposes. The graduates are also great demand even

⁷ It seems that Tuscany is opening a surgical hospital where this doctor is. There would be a Ramallah hospital, but is closed due to lack doctors and nurses.

⁸ Next to the depiction of a lion (the lion of Judah) eating Palestine

from government hospitals. The hospital also provides a degree of health education for mothers, often girls of seventeen, eighteen, who have no concept of how a child should be raised, how to recognize the most common diseases. Moreover, in many villages there isn't a doctor, so prevention is especially very important problem. It is worked with full-time surgery, with a hundred children a day.

How does the hospital survive, being deprived of state funds? There's money and materials from Europe but we have to wait long to get a permission of instruments from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

Not only there is a school, now frequented by males, because of the wall has increased unemployment.

What about problems with the authorities? Please tell us. With the Israeli authorities, to applying permissions, or clear facilities, each time a document is requested more. If there are medical conferences in Jerusalem, doctors are often given a permit to visit the hospital until the last day. Relations with Palestine are quieter, Abu Mazen came here, he didn't hinder the sisters to go to Palestine.

How does your medication come? Mostly in small packages by pilgrims. But it happened the bishop's suitcases were seized for a year while the doctor with his child ended up in jail.

During the following days commenting on the visit in the hospital, let us round in a corridor to see the spaces where the incubators of babies were placed and different monitored decease make us easier to recall the message of love of Jesus Christ that the Church of the Nativity or the most famous of the Catholic faith.

A third important meeting completed this process: the one with Geries Sa'ed Khouri, a Palestinian Christian. We meet him in Nazareth, January 3, 2010, in the evening. He was presented to us as member of the Centre Liqa, seeking dialogue. From his words and also by carrying the cross, we learn of his study at St. Joseph's School, belonging to the Greek Catholic church in Nazareth. Back home (not in the village of their ancestors, lost in 1948) in the Galilee in the north, during the Six Day War (June 1967.) Unfortunate the Arab side, which lost the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, Sinai and the Golan Heights, and if the child does not understand exactly what is happening, it includes the other hand, feels very well the terrible suffering of his people of his own family. Then he were sent to Rome to study philosophy and theology, and this would be an event for the whole village, since it is only the second inhabitant of that part. However, after an intensive course in Italian at Perugia he went in Rome at the Pontifical Greek College. His comrades didn't know much about the situation of Palestinians. Even someone told him how many hours by camel is from his village to airport. They put him the nickname of fedayeen, that means terrorist.

In the war of 1973 living apart from his family he took the news for danger of the situation⁹ of his family. Then 1977 and then the Camp David accords of 1978, which provide the peace between Egypt and Israel and in this way undermine Arab unity, leaving unresolved the issue of Palestinians not involved in the peace process. Not only in the late seventies with the Likud wins Israeli Menahem Begin¹⁰, from which an extremely conservative government strongly encourages settlements, more or less the same time when the Islamic revolution triumphed in Iran of Ayatollah Khomeini. Sa'ed Khoury in 1980 when he left Italy, where he taught at the University of East Naples, returned to his country between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It was a very difficult return, because of the situation where harassment, bullying, torture in prisons, beatings against the Palestinians seemed to be normal.

However, he is a believer in Catholicism, as well as a Palestinian and then distinguishes between the first and second Intifada. The first had the honor to bring the Palestinian cause in the eyes of the world. The second, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, in his view has two faces, one beautiful and the other not.

The beautiful face of the Intifada is symbolized by a sincere desire of the Palestinian people to get rid off the occupation and settlement activities from our land, to deal with the usurpers for our properties, our human rights such as education , housing, employment, medical care, freedom of movement, freedom of worship and the establishment of social services (...) We have said openly and without fear: we are against the occupation, its policies and its projects, and Jewish settlers leave sooner or later from our land, our homes and our holy places¹¹.

But there is another Intifada with another face in his eyes:

The other face of the Intifada is not serving the cause of our people in their struggle for an independent Palestinian state. This face is the irresponsible and reckless behavior that put the intifada into a military confrontation with Israel. The Palestinians did not have a military force to fight Israel, and the militarization of the intifada has put public opinion on us, turning the resistance for the liberation of Palestine in a move that works with bloody attacks and destruction, denounced by the whole world¹².

This is the man with whom we speak on the evening of January 3, Nazareth, returned from visiting two kibbutzim. He remembers his learning of the Christmas Gospel accounts, the announcement of the angels to the shepherd: they should not be afraid because there was born a Savior for all. Glory in heaven and peace on earth. But is

⁹ In the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Israeli army is able to repel the Egyptians, however, loses its solid reputation as invincible army, as was done by surprise by events.

¹⁰ Menachem Begin held power from 1977 to 1983.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 45

¹² Ibidem, p.45

it a Savior for All? Don't be afraid, but the holy family fled by the fear and returned only after the death of Herod. Peace? What about peace, the people talk? We do not speak of refugees forced to leave their homes, their villages, but twenty or thirty other churches there? No peace among Christians, there is a disunion. He sings, "Peace on earth ... but meanwhile around shooting guns. There is a wall. There are barbed wires. Magi wouldn't probably be able to enter Bethlehem this year," he adds. He is one of Palestinian Arab wonders and he doesn't know where is this peace. Every day the Palestinian children are starving (we have seen, tattered in the dust, in Hebron). People are afraid. There is no peace here nor glory in heaven. Even Mr Netanyahu¹³ said he wanted peace, perhaps it is a concept of the context. In his view the Palestinian tragedy began just before the Nakba¹⁴ of 1948, dates back to Balfour¹⁵, before the Zionist congress in Basel¹⁶. "We want a state in Palestine, the promised land"?! Promised land?! It is, in his opinion, a great falsehood and a lie of the politicization of religion. It would be fair, a God who promises Palestinian houses to the Jews? The Palestinian land to Jews? The descendants of Abraham?!

In the nowadays world, it is made clear that the Palestinians are about ten million, six million of them are refugees. In '48 they were forced to leave their homes, in order to the Israelis not to bomb them. In '48, the 60% of Christian Arabs, left the country. Twenty-three villages were destroyed; many were also in attendance Christian. Two near Lebanon were totally Christian. There are two hundred thousand Jews in Jerusalem, three hundred thousand in the West Bank. Nearly half a million! And they continue to stretch the walls: and the Palestinians can not build in the distance of two hundred and fifty meters from the wall!

Since 1993 there have been voted the resolutions that have not been followed. Clinton, Obama could not change this situation. Rabin has been killed¹⁷. The Road Map, that has done nothing. We have to be careful, the lack of peace feeds extremism. If all Palestinians now accept a drastic reduction of their borders, you should know ,after

¹³ Israeli leader of the right. Took power in 1996

¹⁴ Term for the Palestinian tragedy, the expulsion from their lands, their homes following the arrival of Israeli troops.

¹⁵ The reference is to note the letter of 2 November 1917 Arthur Balfour sent to the Zionist leader Lord Rothschild, the same who had purchased lands in the Palestinian territories for Jewish settlement. In this letter Balfour is in favor of the formation of a Jewish state. It is true that, paradoxically, it also spoke of a Jewish settlement that was to be without bias towards civil and religious rights of non-Jews in Palestine: a clear contradiction, which will be fraught with great difficulties, since both are recognized by British control over Palestine to the leaders of the Arab Revolt.

¹⁶ Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) is considered the founder of modern Zionism. Assimilated Jew, journalist, first in Vienna and in Paris, responded to anti-Semitism inherent in Dreyfus case and published *The Jewish State*, 1896, which assumed as the only solution to anti-Semitism prevalent the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. To this end established the World Zionist Organization, whose first meeting was just in Switzerland in 1897.

¹⁷ Yitzhak Rabin was the government twice, the second from 1992 to 1995. In 1994 there was recognition of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) as a representative of the Palestinian people and had reached the acceptance of a Palestinian self-rule area, to begin in Gaza and Jericho. Rabin fell at the hands of an Israeli, convinced that the prime minister had improperly transferred these territories to the Palestinians, who were making too many holes in them. In Rabin's successor Shimon Peres (1995-96) and then in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the right, that not only will continue the Gaza-Jericho Agreement but, rather, is to approve the creation of many new settlements in the West Bank, by in the Intifada of 1996

that is Hamas. The West ignores much more, than what happens in these lands. We know that there is a problem only when there is a terrorist. Few know that there is a Christian union in the Middle East, perhaps, he says, we aren't able, our cause is not well communicated, it is not well presented. The result is that many Palestinians believe the West is a protector of Israel, an enemy that gives Israel weapons and support ... Ignorance makes enemies.

What could you do? Information, meetings like this. He believes a lot of information. Here are one hundred twenty-five, one hundred twenty-seven thousand Arab Christians. 52 thousand in the West Bank¹⁸. About two thousand in Gaza. Do you need money? Of course, but it isn't enough. "We do not want charity," he explains. "But his political position for the justice is clear." I would like to have a clear position pro human dignity," he adds. We need more people supporting this cause: you know. So, the meetings in the local church are good and we have to continue. Being present the Christianity in the Middle East,- adds he, It depends on your attitude and your politics. This is why the Christians leave the Middle East going to other places.

We hear these words concerned already expressed by the Roman Pontiff to the Latin Christian bishops that are afraid and tired of living in tension, seeking other shores. Once there were at Jerusalem twenty-four thousand Arab Christians. Today they are reduced to Seven thousand. Their presence was greatly reduced in Iraq, where they were and are today one million four hundred thousand, even in Lebanon, where once there was a majority Maronite, today it is in minority. Are less than thirty percent in Jerusalem ! There is no peace, but can it be assumed the development? Without the Christians, without peace, there will not expansion in the space of Hamas. It is says: "The God has done a little of it. The problem is not between religions but between the followers of three religions." American evangelicals are intensifying the military service in the occupied territories, in the local buildings...

People are so discouraged, he explains, that has no voice. "We lost the voice; we neither listen, nor see. It is known that supplies of medicines don't reach to the hospitals. There is only thanks to the internet and nothing more. "We have the courage and say: you're wrong. But the West does not address the truth. You do not want to be accused of anti-Semites. Today, he continues, the Arab-Palestinian attempts to communicate never end, but the Arab countries will use these problems no to want to end. Moreover, Obama have said: "No, to the agreement"? While today he says: "It has a possibility." The Holy See", the government of Catholic Roman Church has a clear position for the peace. Do you support a Palestinian state? That is, today, the twenty-percent of what it once was: the seventy-eight percent now it has taken Israel. Will the Palestinians be satisfied yet...

¹⁸ Includes Judea and Samaria.

3. Arab cities

Two visits to the Arab towns: in Sachnin on the 4th of January, and that of Jenin, on the 1st January. I do not speak ill on Sachnin, looking from the coach, no news, apparently, compared with my previous visit, always in trouble for the high unemployment rate, loss of territory, but always welcoming to visitors. Instead focus on Jenin, the city of the 'divine wind', we located in the northern West Bank. This time we pass by the Check Point where it is easier to enter than exit. We are in the real town of suicide bombings martyrs. Today is Friday so it is impossible to meet the mayor. Turning to the city, we saw the refugee camp, rebuilding after its destruction. A city that feels pain because the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are about ten thousand, a good portion of them are from Jenin. What is still punished siege, the difficulties in access and exit, the lack of work outside the borders and then induce high unemployment punished still them.

We see their homes under construction, apparently left half unfinished: the cement, we have told, must come from Israel. Today there are forty thousand inhabitants in Jenin and fifty mosques. Around, there are about ninety villages. The refugee camp providing accommodation for nine thousand people arrived in '1948, after the expulsion from their villages, their homes. A "UN" agency takes care of them.

We have so much work to do but we haven't enough time because we must return to check point in seventeen. The time, of course, is decided by irresponsible persons in the border. It is also a relatively new city, rebuilt after 2002, and they tell about unemployment that it is as high as the difficult life in Jenin. There is even the depiction of a gigantic Pumpkin: a remembrance of the crops in the past, that now it is made impossible.

The bus travels through the rough roads where on each of its side there are old tires and debris. Small cranes move easily. Rooftops, the inevitable black water tanks, but also a variety of materials. There are also homes under construction, some claiming, in the garden in front of us, but it does not appear complete, as they are working, you can't find the moment to interrupt them. We know that the cement comes from Israel and it is therefore not so simple. Later in the morning we meet the military commander in Jenin, in the military zone, in the lower part of the city. We meet a military man of about fifty, friendly-looking, with mustache, holding his granddaughter, and when he gets off the bus, he greets us very cordially. We stand in front of the building, full of

Palestinian flags, portraits of Arafat¹⁹ and Abu Mazen²⁰. The hall has a stone floor and wooden ceiling. The crevices of the walls, everything inside is old but outside it looks well constructed.

We set in front of him and other military polices, (in fact, the Palestinians can not have an army), drank coffee, juice, nibbled cookies offered by young soldiers. He begins with greetings for the New Year. 'Greetings of peace and love, because we trust'. He continues: "We have done for many years agreements, rejecting many of them, that speak of two nations, Israeli and Palestine. Israelis have taken Palestinian land, you see the wall. If we survived many wars it would do in the name of the Palestinian cause. Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran wars are related to the Palestinian cause. Israeli speaks for peace with them, only with them. They have signed agreements with us, we accepted many things, giving them more than 70% of the land ... If this case is not resolved there will be wars. The Israelis want our land, our peace! A Holy Land for all religions, Bethlehem, Jerusalem Al-Aqsa, the place where Jews make their prayers, a ground for all religions! There was an Intifada in previous years, we always wanted the peace if the Israel did it too. We are always for peace! Many Palestinian cause are used in the war against the Europeans and Americans. A few years ago have been destroyed this place! Symbol for Turkey, Jordan, they wanted not to leave any trace from anyone, just they wanted to be them. Many Palestinians have emigrated to Jordan to make an army, but we did not have our weapons. Israelis treat us like criminals!"

First, he explains, there were three areas, and the Palestinian security is under their jurisdiction, as you can see, there is a Palestinian security force. The U.S., send aid, he adds. The Israelis do not. In their eyes, all Palestinians are terrorists. "Almost Israelites are every night in the Palestinian areas, which is a shame of us" He adds: "We want to hear our voice."

Raining questions: what are the relations between Fatah, Hamas and Jenin? "Hamas says the commander, is in Gaza. We are forbidden go down the street with weapons, we do not want criminals either Hamas or others. We are already a Palestinian army, have only one authority and one Palestine."

What was the role of the army in the last Palestinian intifada? "As an army we have nothing against the Israelis, we are neutral ... There were people against in the Intifada, not the army (fighting Israel)."

¹⁹ Yasir Arafat was a well-known Palestinian leader, one of the founders of Fatah, a prominent component of the PLO. Although some political mistakes, such as support for the coup of 1990 in the USSR, much loved by the Palestinians. Arafat was a key player in the Oslo Accords and the Gaza-Jericho Agreement, received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1994, with Rabin and Peres. His leadership has been weakened by the presence of forces radicals of Hezbollah and Hamas, the Palestinian side, the advent of a right wing government in 1996 in Israel. In the previous trip to Israel we had gone to visit his grave after his remains were brought home from France, where it was repaired and died.

²⁰ Current Palestinian leader

Since we are talking about the police, the commander tells us: "Our first role is to protect the Palestinians, there are laws and prisons, against thieves and criminals. We have a role to justice. Come from the Red Cross come to see the prisoners. We have nothing to hide, he says to the Americans: "We have nothing to defend."

How many cops? Are there in your military service? Are 20 thousand; the service is not forced. The Palestinian police is only used for internal orders. Of course, Israel wants coordination, cooperation. There are meetings twice a week ... Sure, there are also women, but they work mainly in the center of the police, not on the street. There isn't any problem with women. Our guides point out that in the late hour, they let them go. He explains that if you had had more time we would have been happy to stay in your disposal.

At the end of a small marching platoon comes to us. It is presented us with weapons. An embryo of the future army? But the Palestinians have no guns neither ships nor planes. They are used to keep public order: they are in an uncomfortable situation, between two fires. The master is in the picture with me and another woman from the group. Salute, thank and while we return to the bus we see peering trailer full of blankets, clothing, maybe the army is sleeping there.

Then we go to visit a theater on the edge of the area of refugees. We are welcomed from a leader of Fatah, "Welcome, he says, in the Liberty Theatre. Before it was called the Stone Theatre. Then, in the second Intifada, the Israelis have destroyed it, as many schools. Then it started to be set up for the children. " A woman cared about it, who then died living a son. They called him Zachary, yes, the leader of the Palestinian guerrillas and very soon it will be four years, we are having a party .. Making a theater here, was difficult, of the mentality both Israelis and Palestinians. They do not accept it. Even Palestinian children are not educated for the theater in schools. They don't give them anything to school on Palestine. The first show was Animal's Farm and the boys (from twelve to fourteen years) would not do the roles with animals! They helped for the show decorations. It was called Fragments Palestinians which was brought in Germany for fifty days. It led the Palestinian cause in Germany. A young German woman who is with us is obviously very concerned to inform the German cities where the show was taken. He explains that the boys actually in Germany have felt the importance of the show. Not only that, later German journalists came to Jenin to learn about Palestine.

Then, we'll continue our party. They are trying to pull out a magazine, making movies, but the obstacles are numerous. You must move one step at a time.

We left the theater convinced to go into the camp: and actually we cross the narrow dirty roads, with coach: our guide explains that it is better not to go, for security reasons. In fact a week ago a group came to see a center for local women: three days after visiting, this center has been set on fire. Something obviously was not pleased.

Although we are regretted very much (in 2007 there were easily to pas, threw its streets, once people were brought there by confrontations, they had stayed a few nights, in different guest houses) so we give up without any protest this is the measure of safety: no one would want for the cause more internal problems and no fires.

And here we are eating in “Ali Baba Restaurant”, where they severed us vegetables, diced, mashed chickpeas, zucchini and yogurt, chicken, various meats, fruit and honey cake too. So many sweets aren’t enough to sweeten a great disappointment that comes from discussions with several boys both Palestinian and Izraelis, for years have over come to Italy with the initiative of “Flowers of Peace”. We are told, that after Gaza all had had worm discussions with each other on Facebook but now they haven’t more relations among them. Basta the largest and beautiful girl, eighteen years old, is shocked from the idea that her correspondent went to do military service²¹. Both were used as protagonists of a video in previous years, just to show their prejudices were passed between two girls. Not only Cuocci Lucia, the organizer of these initiatives, explains she had to give up on having children from Jenin. Their parents do not understand the sense to send their children to meet young Israelites, after what has happened and after that is happening in Gaza.

On leaving they asked to get off the bus, and so we have to be controlled one by one. The bus is controlled by armed soldiers, with police dog. Used long sticks with mirrors at the end, below the bus to see if there is maybe a bomb.

Going away from Jenin discuss among ourselves how the situation has changed for the worse, from the years where Jeremiah met in the street people of confrontation, as the operation ‘Melted Iron’ in Gaza had made it more difficult to over come obstacles. How many hopes have vanished.

4. Civil society

We had the chance, thanks to Lucia Cuocci and Luigi Sandri, our companions, to meet leaders of some of the many organizations in this region who work at least until now for peace. Among those, members of the Parent’s Circle, who now have known and followed the activities for several years. Two of them, Mazen, a Palestinian recently returned from a month in the U.S. and Rami, a professional on graphics from Israelis. That, he was locking his Palestinian friend, and says: “We are blood relatives of the victims.

“ His story says he, starts on a particular day of the Jewish calendar. It was October 7, 1973, and it was the fest of Yom Kippur²². He was young, was a soldier at the division of

²¹ What is also required.

²² See Isaac Leib wall unit of Sholem Aleichem, the Jewish holidays. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Turin, Editions Pauline, 2000. Kippur this is the day of atonement, Jews dedicated to fasting and penance is probably the deepest among the Jewish holidays, when even the least observant feel part of a community, the living link with its identity.

the Suez Canal. Firstly they had eleven tanks, from which survived three. He says, " At this time he was very angry. At that time he had few human relationships. But then he married and have four children. And twenty-six years ago was born Smadar, precisely on the eve of Yom Kippur. Smadar, bunch of grapes. And she was happy, bright and called "Princess". She was a dancer and a swimmer. So, continuing with the children lived happy, protected and apart from the outside environment. Then about twelve years ago, this bubble burst. It was September 4 on Thursday afternoon before a cold night,. two Palestinians blew themselves up and were killed three girls including his daughter. "At first, says Rami, do you think these things will never touch? Then you are turning from hospital to hospital by the police station to police station, until you feel you aren't forgotten. You can turn home and see the house full of people who make you their condolences for seven days. Then just stay in this moment of solitude and you must choose what to do with this terrible burden on your shoulders? With the new personality that you are being? What would you do with this anger that makes you blind? When someone kills your child of fourteen years you can only want to revenge. But this is an obvious choice. This is the way of repetition of the violence. But then you start thinking. We are human beings. If someone kills your daughter will you come back? If I hurt someone else, my pain will diminish? Is it better to try to understand what has happened and why, because you can? What do a person lead in a position to blow up and kill other people? "

At this point, he says, that he met Isaac and told him his story. The Isacc's son was kidnapped and killed by Hamas but Isaac speaks him for a group that wants peace, so he invited him to a meeting. Rami said: "Firstly I did not want to insult him, on the other hand I was curious. Eleven years ago, the house of the president, I saw people getting to the bus. Legends of unreal people. People that I admired immediately. I never imagined that I would have become one of them. For the first time I met Palestinians as human beings getting off the bus, I have embraced them and they wept, I was shocked. I a forty-seven years old and had never met a Palestinian as a human being. I decided to dedicate myself to this cause, with a simple message: that in this land we are not destined to kill each other. We can break this cycle of violence that always continues. It is not said anywhere that we have to kill. If someone listens you he is able to understand you. It's a long road, that of reconciliation, no shortcuts, with many curves, but it is the only way possible. The other way leads to destruction, in the obscurantism. "

Now the association says he-, is made of five hundred families. "We try to put cracks in the wall that divides us, the cracks of hope. We say to our people, to the world that the blood, the tears are always bitter. The blood is still in the same color. " It concludes: "If we can talk to each other, then anyone can do it."

Then took the word Mazen, who starts with a classic invocation: “Peace be always with you. Thanks for being witnesses in this conflict. It is important to listen to these voices and spread it out. I was born and raised in a refugee camp near Bethlehem. “ Which means all of them had a room living together, mostly without electricity and in the summer, without water. “Why we should be deprived of everything? To understand better Abbas says-“I tried to tell you the stories of my grandfather, my father, the story of the catastrophe, the Nakba. I am thirty years. The history of our village has happened to my family when it was leaving his home in 1948. My father had been only six years. They thought for a brief period and then it lasted for sixty years. After that we tried to have a normal life, to reclaim our lives. We had to react. When I was fifteen I took part in the first Intifada²³. We started to throw stones on soldiers,. It was our way to say that we had the right to exist, to have our dignity. I was fifteen years in prison for three and a half years. Just because I tried for my liberty and my rights so i lost the opportunity to study.

When you want to study and grow, you must stay in jail. When, the Oslo²⁴ agreement was signed we were happy! They promised us, after five, six months, our state. But we had neither state nor freedom. The settlements and settlers are gown and the check point, too. Promises! The second Intifada²⁵ has arrived and so we began again to fight. It what was the most violent one, more people were killed, in any place at any time-go on Mazen- I never thought that the violence was good, so did my family. But despite that my father was killed while he was returning home from Jerusalem, by the Israelis soldiers, for no reason. “ They receive a phone call from the hospital, but there is a curfew and the Israelis deny them permission to go. ‘We are not autonomous, we haven’t be free for sixty years living under the heel of the Israeli army. “ It was this time when he decides to enter into Parent’s Circle. Rami begins to speak of his daughter. The two feel connected for their losses. Abbas continues: “I’m next to Rami and I’m happy. Not because I enjoy talking about this tragedy, but I want to show that there is a human face in this conflict. I believe that between my case and our cause; the most important is our cause. The cause of justice, a message of reconciliation from the base of these two peoples. In Oslo it was an agreement between leaders: and now we are in the same circle of violence. The most important dialogue is to understand each other, of course we have, different stories, but the fact that you are trying to understand is important. We try to talk with students. Life certainly is complicated. But if you try to understand the others, it is a way to begin the dialogue. And it happens. There are

²³ The uprising known as the first Intifada (intifada or children, or intifada broke out of the stones in Gaza on September 9, 1987. It will last more than three years and will attract world attention on what happened and the Palestinian cause.

²⁴ The first Oslo agreement of 1994 and includes autonomy in Gaza and Jericho. In 1995 the Oslo II Interim Agreement on the West Bank with the Gaza strip. Following these agreements will return PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and its Chairman Yasser Arafat. However, the situation will deteriorate quickly.

²⁵ Born after the entrance of Ariel Sharon to Al Aqsa Mosque on September 28 by 200, with a military body. A fact seen as a desecration of the Mosque.

Israeli children who begin to understand what has meant the Nakba. And we begin to know and understand the fears of the Jews”.

Finally, he tells us some of the initiatives taken by their association, as events in Tel Aviv, during the Camp David and in Rabin Square: bringing shapes designed to show the number of people killed in the conflict. The same happens in Gaza. A delegation of U.S. parents went and demonstrated outside the UN building with the flags of both countries. Today there are seven thousand. Seven in ten years. Parent’s Circle Association went to Ramallah to donate blood for the Palestinians. It is very important in the summer to work and do meetings, especially in schools on youth, on teachers. There is a radio program you’re trying to multiply initiatives. Even though about one billion three hundred million Muslims do nothing to resolve this conflict, that is not a religious conflict, “Religions are used to cover the other things”, they are convinced.

To add their voices to Nico Pelez, an American head of a new foundation, returned to bring medicines from Gaza to Egypt. They did not allow him to Israel because Israel in theory should worry about his safety. One and a half million people, of which eight hundred thousand are children live under siege!

A second meeting realized with an association that strives for peace, with the Interfaith Encounter Association²⁶. According to a tried and tested sketches there are a Palestinian and an Israelite and the basic theme of their interventions: the need of peace that don’t requires a reconciliation between the peoples. How do you ménage? Today have no communication. They have chosen to proceed with small groups, through active dialogue. Only then, they say, can reach deeper conversations. The analogies are sought, they develop friendships with people who have disagreements. They explain their association operates in Israel and the Palestinian territories but also in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, countries of great interest to Israel.

In those meetings the politics isn’t included. The thing that they appear as very positive, it leaves many of us skeptical. Is it possible, in a such situation of inequality so strong, so dissimilar situations, to exclude the politics? The exclusion of politics means not address the main problems. They are organized in the women groups, educators, professionals. Organizing retreats for weekends. Essential to them, open the bilateral reports. The language can be a challenge, but it is certainly not an irresolvable problem, knowing that many Arabs speak Hebrew or English. Certainly, among them the recent events in Gaza were significant negative effects, but they were not discouraged, only a few groups have interrupted operations while others have intensified the confrontation and dialogue.

²⁶ On December 29, 2009, in Jerusalem. E.mail: office@interfaith-encounter.org. The website: www.interfaith-encounter.org.

Everything looks not so persuasive. Speeches seem superficial, but I will not intervene. There are the lawyer and writer Michael King, expressing their distrust of the possible positive outcomes, from this method. But the site does not allow a real debate, it only allows an exchange of information. The meeting closes with a certain discomfort by many of us.

After dinner, an interesting encounter with the group Combatants for Peace. We have some members of the association, all former soldiers, all males. Of both parts. The association, they explain, was born in 2004, with two militants had been previous possible attempts for their cause of peace, decided to review it again. The Palestinians involved in early meetings, belonged to a group prepared to murder Israelis. The Israelis were already in Bethlehem, but uniformed and well armed. There was hatred between the two groups and confrontations begin with the story of their lives. The confrontation lasts three or four hours, in the end everyone thinks they feel better. There is also the possibility to be conscious, to have responsibility for the future. After three weeks, the members are much more numerous. Soon twenty-five people are on each side. You arrive at an agreement after several meetings: they want to give a clear message about the existence of an occupation by Israel threw their joint efforts against this occupation . The idea is a return to the previous boundaries laid down in '47, to have a new Palestinian state. The chosen way is that of non-violence, something new for both parties. We can remind the notable examples such as India and South Africa.

In April 2005 then we had a great gathering to publicize this association, and its purposes. 22 participants by MEPs led by Luisa Morgantini, whose name we have been mentioned many times in this journey. Immediately after that, on June 5, 2007, a further opportunity for a large public gathering: the number of participants were around twelve thousand Palestinians and a few Israelites because have been blocked on borders. But meantime, the work went on, we proceed in small groups in Jerusalem, Hebron, Tel Aviv, Ramallah and elsewhere. Some groups have significant names that means 'in West Jerusalem / Hebron North', 'Jerusalem Est-Ovest/Ramallah.' In the continuation of the works is provided the group 'Haifa-Jenin'. The program is also a demonstration against the wall and against check point. The association also holds conferences at school, and sometimes also acts in Europe and the USA. There are used three languages every Palestinian in jail had learned a bit 'of Hebrew.

Another partner, Ronnie, tells his personal story. He was born in Jerusalem, from refugees parents came from Europe and Romania, arrived here after the Second World War: Israel was for them the only place in the world that promised salvation. He accomplished military service regularly and later entered into a special group of police. He worked for eleven years in Israel intelligence. He has fought against the Arabs for a long time and so he speaks their language. He changed his thoughts gradually, during twenty years. The first moment that can detect him was the occupation in Gaza

in 1967. He says-“I believe to define my country. He belonged to the secret Shabat service. Then, the first Intifada changed his perspective. The Israelis were convinced, until then, they have against the terrorists, but with the intifada they realized that all the people were really against to fight them, not only suspected terrorists but also men, women and children who throw stones upon them. For the first time, says Ronnie, he understood that he is used for political service of his country. He is used as an arm of government, to expand the spaces and territories. It was the first shot. The second occurred later. His parents had emigrated in '48, after the Second World War: the result is that Israel occupies West Jerusalem, where many houses were built by the Arabs. “The Israeli government says Ronnie, systematized my parents in an Arab’s house. Because of a serious internal conflict: they have been helped, it is true. But at the expense of other people. “ In '67, when the West Bank was occupied, knocked on our door, “were the Arabs, they wanted to understand that, first, it was their home. After ten years: ‘This house was ours’. ‘We want to see the house,’ they said. And we have not been kind with them, we just tried to get them out quickly”. Then in 2006, Ronnie continues, “I went in Romanian village where my mother was born. We have not found the house, we could not knock at the door. The Romanians wanted to kick on us. I told my son that so did we”. Until '48 we lived together, Jews and Arabs. Then the Jews fled and there were only Arabs. One kilometer from here there are families that have been thrown out, without compensation. With the same way, the Arabs could ask my parents their house. A complex situation indeed! “The only way you talk is to reach the dialogue and common objectives without violence”. Their association is relatively small, it is true, but full of courage. There is no fear, it will be found the right compromises.

After him, an Arab boy interrupted to be published first in English and then in Italian. Salami was born in North of Hebron²⁷. His story says he, is similar with that of many Palestinians. He has not experienced the life as many children around the world, “as Palestinians are living under great pressure. You learn to grow quickly. “ comments he. He went to school at fourteen and did not understand well what was Israel, where he was growing , he was too young, to realize the first Intifada, when the Israeli army was presented in the entrance of the school. Every day the kids were supporting near the wall, controlling them by solders: “Remember, you are under occupation and we are here!”(words of the solders). This was the only meaning ... “So I understand, -continues Salami,- what does it mean ? So I had to resist or to object them. So we started to work in the small groups to fight the military occupation, to organize against soldiers who humiliated us every day. For six months the school was closed because

²⁷ In late February, the newspapers reported a battle occurred in Hebron for two holy sites, the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel’s Tomb, heritage sites declared by Netanyahu of Israel, to be preserved by Israel. The tombs are in reality in the Palestinian territory: hence the rebellion of the Palestinians (throwing stones), the reaction of the police, throwing rubber bullets, tear gas, followed by protests from Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Syria. Netanyahu, since the worsening of the situation, talks of ‘misunderstanding’.

the military had decided so. The school was a place where it was born the resistance against them. " There have done many arrests and he was arrested too. "Prison is very hard to live in a humane way. I was fifteen years. There was a lot of torture. I spent two years in prison, away from my family. I want to play, have some love ... I lost my rights. I suffered tortures and pressures of all kinds. For example, in short: sixty-two days without being able to wash the face, there was no water. " And again: "I'll tell you how can the soldiers used us in prison. For a year, no visits except the parents only once. A very sad situation, every day. I grew up and used to hate Jews. I saw these soldiers throughout Israel. And I decided that I would never talk in future with the Israelites. I was convinced that I would fight more strongly against Israel. There was also my brother in prison. Yes, in the same prison. But we could never meet, for two years. "

Finally, he was released. Begin to work again with his group, though he was no longer the same guy as before the arrest and imprisonment. After he realized the war, occupation, and everything what Israel have done he says- "I was convinced to defend my land and hunt these people. Until '93. After the Oslo accords, I thought we would have a state. But the Israeli government did not believe in these agreements. " In the meantime, Fatah had understood the need to abandon the violence. Salami was connected with a friend called Hunau, who speaks for the group of Combatants for Peace. Firstly, Salami refuses to have a such connection with him. In prison had been killed a dear friend of him, and was insulted one of his sisters- in low, two reasons more enough in his eyes, not to want to meet any Israelite.

The friend insists, in order to persuaded him to attend some meetings but he didn't convince him. "I had confidence I could not believe in this idea. We were in the same prison, that sent me in the prison and occupied us. The same people. " Then, after six months on dating, Salami discovers that the Israelis are not all the same: "I speak, he explains, about the people around him, I understand that there are also Israelites who want to end the occupation, and we can regain our rights. I felt relieved, I felt that something changed inside me so I started working for the Combatants of Peace, coordinating a small group near Hebron. Today he is the coordinator of the meetings on the Palestinian side. And he believes he will continue to work with them until he lives.

The questions are many, we all want to know more. Someone asks if there is between them anyone with high position.

An Israelite answered- "Yes, the Palestinian side, probably there are, but no one knows them or should. In Al Fatah is believed much in the Combatants for Peace. One of the representatives for the movement in South and Al Fatah gives a great support. On the Israeli side the situation is different from the Palestinians. In Israel there is a

different situation, the government does not love us at all or doesn't help us in any way! Especially after the recent events in Gaza there is pressure not to be active. "

A former magistrate speaks now: "In each conflict sooner or later there is an agreement. The road to peace is long and hard. Are the Israelis people willing to give the others part, by the material side? ". The reply is: "For the Israel I want to understand that I am active because I want to help my people. The occupation is negative for us. But it is very difficult to convince them that this occupation is bad for us. Israel can not be a democratic country and there are three million people with their rights deprived. I do not think that majority of Israelis want only the peace. But there is fear.

I believe that we would be able to let them the West Bank to live in peace. But they fear."

Responds to one of these Palestinians: "I know the Israelis when I was three years. They came and arrested my father. In seven years I went to see him but I could not touch him. From '69 to '96. When the first Intifada began, my father came to visit me in the same prison where he had been. Now I have a son, in the second intifada I did not want the reciprocal visits! For all the experience I feel really the need of peace. It's easy to choose the path of the war but easier than not to choose that of peace. Even though we found the Israelis soldiers are human beings, they have in their heart the humanity. " What can Europe's role be in all this? Ask one of us. "We all said, you may have a role in resolving this conflict. We need a European and U.S. pressure. Keep strong the pressure. "Write."

The evening ends with the exchange the visits cards, with cordial greetings, promises of contacts.

5. Balance (summarize)

Before we left we tried to make a review of all we have done in our trip. A trip that had had different types of visits, in the old cities of Jerusalem, where we spent with small purchases of necklaces and bracelets, stuffed small animals, made of nativity olive wood, a half day in the Dead Sea but to swim in those waters were very difficult. We saw Masada, Qumran and Jericho too (where we spent one of the rare rainy day there and the next day the desert was in bloom), where we were greeted and offer datary and fruits of the sycamore. We also made a short and quickly break in one of the places where Jesus is supposed to be baptized (Jordan has returned often in the discussions with Sandri in our eyes). We saw Capernaum that is supposed to be home of Peter and Golan Heights too, that in fact there were a place of wars and tensions. We spoke with the director of the Jewish school in Galile, one of the members of the organization Hand in Hand, who directed and four other schools where the teaching is in Hebrew and Arabic. There are two teachers for various classes and two ways of

presenting things both parts in order to compare them, to exist different alternatives and present everything as well as they can, in fact it seems as you slide into a spiral by the words of a former pupil and a parent Arab. But here also feel the heavy weight of Gaza, where he went to fight with the Israeli army, a son of the vice-director. We have the possibility to spent a few hours to visit Haifa, a beautiful and charming city, with well-kept garden Ba'hai. In Nazareth we visited a lovely shop built on ancient Roman baths²⁸ assumed to date back two thousand years ago, at the epoch. When a young Mary and Joseph her husband with a son lived there.

Certainly, all the visits have been interesting.

I think the basic message was given by the Latin Patriarch Fouad Iwal in his homily for Christmas 2009:

"How to live the joy and celebrate the fest of the first anniversary of the war and the tragedy of Gaza? Employment city is stifling the freedom of movement and transport is hindered. Many families are forced to live apart ... This Christmas Eve, we want to pray for peace with all men of goodwill. Let us pray for peace that would be different than of the peace that the world promises us. The peace which the world offers us is based, in fact, in force and violence. We seek peace in God, founded on justice and human dignity. Considering the ills that afflict the world, including conflicts of interest, hypocrisy, the arms race and possession of destructive weapons, we ask the Child of Bethlehem, together with all the homeless and abandoned children, left on the streets, refugee camps, in order to, in our world to be born "the sun of justice" (MI 3.20), the Love and Life, to dispel the shadow of death and destruction. Having the possibility, our children and the children of Gaza to enjoy the taste of the fests and have the joy to light and decorate the Christmas tree, symbol of life and hope to live ..."

A message that is summarized in his words about the importance of 'living stones' the personification for the kids of the hospital Caritas Baby Hospital. His predecessor, Latin Patriarch Fouad Iwal had noted those lands needn't for someone to be on one side to another. This is the right message during our trip, in those tortured lands. In return, I have many e-mails of my friends who speak with a deep nostalgia and desire to return there, in Israel, the Palestinian territories. I have to say, I haven't this feeling. I hope I'm wrong, but to compare this visit with that of 87 it seems that the horizons are closing, and the hopes dwindling. Although I hope can germinate 'seeds of peace'²⁹, bloom the 'Flowers of peace'³⁰, even in the Jenin desert, perhaps why not in Gaza.

²⁸ It's Cactus, Piazza della source of Mary, owned by Elias and Martina Shama-stop, a mixed couple because she is on the outskirts of Antwerp. See the www.nazarethbathhouse.com

²⁹ This is a project that unites, in Italy, both Israelis and Palestinians, such as writers, journalists, peace educators, members of civil society organizations. The project is funded with 8 per thousand by the Waldensian Church. etc..

³⁰ This is a project that goes on for many years, that has and compares, in Italy, children and young Palestinians and Israelis, until recently, one of the sources was Jenin. This is a program designed by the monthly comparisons, funded by some Protestant churches and other institutions and Italian organizations.