



Free Words



“The year 5768 (2007-2008) of Hope for Peace between Palestinians and Israelis”

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The Fathers of the Synagogue teach us that the age of 60 corresponds to old age (*ZiKNaH* means wisdom). In fact, the rabbis play on the double meaning of the root *ZaKeN*, which they explain by: *The age when a person acquires wisdom.*¹

Sixty years have passed since the United Nations took the historic decision to create two states on the soil of Palestine: a Jewish state and an Arab state.

¹ Maximes des Pères de la Synagogue (Maxims of the Fathers of the Synagogue) V, 22

Without going back to all the tragedies that have marked the last sixty years, I would simply like to remember that forty years ago, after the Six Day War, the Israeli prime minister of that time, Levi Eshkol, speaking of the occupied territories, proclaimed and endlessly repeated, in the same way as his foreign minister, Abba Eban, that 'everything was negotiable'. Unfortunately, in Khartoum in 1968, the reply to this vision from all the Arab states was three times 'No'.

At the death of Levi Eshkol in 1970, it was, alas, Golda Meir who was elected to succeed him, *she who considered that the Palestinian people did not exist...*

After the Yom Kippur War, Anwar Al Sadat, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, had the courage to propose peace and make a brilliant statement before the Israeli parliament in Jerusalem, which resulted in the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty that has lasted for thirty years. Alas, he was assassinated by a fanatic who claimed to belong to the religion of Islam. This peace treaty was followed by a similar agreement between Jordan and Israel.

After the Oslo Agreement, we had hope that peace between Palestinians and Israelis was close. Alas, a murderer claiming to be an Orthodox Jew, killed hope by killing Ishaq Rabin, the prestigious Prime Minister of Israel. Since, murderous attacks, reprisals, and the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers on Israeli soil have succeeded each other in an infernal cycle.

On the eve of each Jewish year, an ancient tradition demands that religious leaders find a verse in the Hebraic Bible that will serve as a guide during the twelve months to come and which indicates the direction that the actions of the faithful should follow. In effect, everybody knows that the Hebraic letters have a numerical value. Therefore the object is to find a word drawn from a Biblical verse whose letters have a numerical sum that corresponds to the new year in the Hebraic calculation. The verse that I selected to mark the year 5768 is drawn from Isaiah². This passage is particularly important since it proclaims the advent of justice and universal peace: *People who walk in obscurity unexpectedly see a great light; those who live in a dark world suddenly see the light that shines over them. Lord, You raise this people, You give them great joy: they rejoice in your presence with the intense joy of the harvest...*

Intense joy: this syntagma is composed of the letters *K S M H T* the sum of which corresponds to the year 768 (20 + 300 + 40 + 8 + 400) of the fifth millennium. The prophecy continues to chapters X and XI that announce: *a surgeon will be born from the family of Ychai (Jesse; means the descendent of King David). Justice will be his belt and righteousness the sash on his side. The wolf will live with the sheep and the tiger will repose with the kids...*³ Under his reign, *no crime will be committed or misdeed on My Holy Mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord like water that covers the ocean bed...*⁴

It is more than a hope, more than a fervent prayer, almost a certitude that moves us and takes hold of us on the eve of the New Year and of Yom Kippur 5768.

However, to my mind a question remains: what will happen if the 30 September 2008 (= 1st Tichri 5769), peace between Palestinians and Israelis is not signed? Will we give in to

² IX, 1-2

³ Isaïe XI, 5-6

⁴ verset 9

despair? The answer is given by Rabbi Akiba, one of the great scholars of the Law of Talmudic, who died a martyr in 135. In his teachings: *Everything is determined, but freedom is given to man; the world is judged with benevolence and all depends on the action to be carried out*⁵.

Everything is determined: we have seen that the Prophet Isaiah makes a call for universal peace and that the sign of the New Year puts light into this appeal. However, the **freedom given to man** could go against this divine project. In a certain manner, it is the price for God to pay for having selected man as his chosen partner here on earth and for having given him the supreme privilege, which even the angels do not have: the possibility of choosing between good and evil. Alas the 20th century has shown us that man often chooses evil.

We count on the mercy of God so that the world be *judged with benevolence*, and we exhort all the actors in the present Israeli-Palestinian drama **to act for good** and to acquire the wisdom necessary, at a time when the two states, provided for in the 1947 decision of the United Nations should, finally coexist and live, with mutual generosity, side by side in justice, fraternity, and peace.

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⁵ *Maximes des Pères de la Synagogue (Maxims of the Fathers of the Synagogue)* chapitre 3, verset 5