

***"In Israel, the suffering of the Palestinians is not seen. And on the Palestinian side, the Shoah (Holocaust) has never been understood."***

When we see the terrible images that arrive from the Middle East, we are struck by the look in the children's eyes: the children of Gaza, amputees, orphans, whose stares speak of the dispossession of all meaning; the Israeli teenagers released from captivity who return from hell with their eyes searching for meaning, a fixed point from which to rebuild themselves. I know this region. I was born not far away, in between the two Syrian rivers, in the land of Jezirah, which is first and foremost a desert. Relationships there are brutal, you can die for a glance, but you can also reach out to each other because adversity demands it. Almost without a glance. Like everyone else, I'm overwhelmed by these looks.



And I ask myself the question of ethics: how can so many children be killed? How can you kill young people who are dancing and take the survivors hostage? I remember reading a few pages of Levinas. He is an austere, dry philosopher, difficult to read and to understand. But I remember these words, which made an impression on me as someone who thinks about ethical issues in my day-to-day business life. 'Ethics is what disturbs the subject', he wrote. In the Middle East, we are confronted with this question, this disturbance, and we understand Levinas' phrase: because it is easy to kill, ethics is what disturbs, what prevents, what should prevent. 'A man is prevented', said Camus in his book *The First Man*. And he put this phrase in the mouth of his father, the father he never knew. And he continued: 'That's what a man is, or else...'. In the Middle East, men no longer prevent each other. And they are no longer men. Especially when they kill children. That's what I think we all feel. That's why we want this war to end, why we need it to end.

How can we silence the clash of arms? Perhaps simply by looking. Israelis and Palestinians don't see each other: in Israel, we don't see the suffering of the Palestinians. And the Palestinians have never understood the Shoah, the trauma it represented for Jews the world over and the role Israel played for them in the post-Shoah world: the refuge, the initial land, the promised land, the land of return for security. But to understand each other, we have to start by seeing each other. And accepting each other's right to exist: Palestinians today are Palestinians, not Arabs strayed by chance into this part of the Arab world, as many Israeli activists used to say and still say. The Palestinians have built a national identity out of adversity. This identity exists today, it must not be denied. And the Palestinians must consider the Israelis' need for security: it's tragic to write that when you see the situation in Gaza. But security, especially when you've been through the trauma of trauma, is not negotiable. So, on both sides, there are the extremists who want all the land, who deny the other the right to exist, to even have a face.

To those who believe that in the end they will have the earth without building peace, I would remind them of Victor Hugo's poem *L'Enfant*. The first lines are magnificent and speak to us today: 'The Turks have passed through. All is ruin and mourning / Chio, the island of wine, is nothing but a dark reef / [...] All is deserted But no; alone near the blackened walls, / A blue-eyed child, a Greek child, sat / Bowing his humiliated head.' The poem continues "What do you want? Beautiful child, what must we give to you [...]?" The poet thinks he wants a flower, a fruit, a bird. But no, none of that: 'Friend, says the Greek child, says the blue-eyed child / I want gunpowder and bullets'. War leads to war. And more war. Philosophers (Levinas), writers (Camus) and poets (Hugo) have mapped out the path of reason. Let us read them. And let us find the path to peace.