



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE  
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## The Twilight Zone / By the book

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There's no question about it - everything was done by the book. The gate was locked at 7 P.M. and 16,000 people, residents of the villages of Beit Furik and Beit Dajan, were imprisoned behind it until 6 A.M. That's the procedure. A woman who wants to cross the checkpoint at night has to go on foot, to wait until a female soldier comes to do a body check, even if she is about to give birth; that, too, is procedure. And only cars with permits are allowed to enter Nablus, even if dying people are sitting inside them; that is also according to procedure. No soldier deviated from the procedure, everything was done by the book, the book of the occupation.

That is how it happened that a cancer patient was delayed for about an hour and a half at the Hawara checkpoint, until he died in a taxi that was not allowed to enter Nablus, a taxi in which he was trying to get from the hospital to his home, his final request. That is also what happened when the young woman in labor was forced to stand in the cold and the rain for about half an hour and to make her way on foot for several hundred meters while in labor. That's the procedure.

The death of cancer patient Taysir Kaisi was inevitable, but why in such pain, waiting endlessly in a "non-permitted" taxi at the checkpoint? And the young woman from Beit Furik who was about to give birth, Roba Hanani, finally arrived at the hospital in Nablus and successfully gave birth there to her first child, but why with such torture? Why did they deserve it? What would we think if our loved ones were to die or suffer labor pains at a checkpoint separating the city and the village? Life and death are in the hands of the checkpoint: The story of the death of Taysir Kaisi and the birth of Raghad Hanani, between the Hawara checkpoint and the Beit Furik checkpoint, during an easing of restrictions at the checkpoints, less than an hour's drive from Tel Aviv, is a story that should disturb our equanimity.

Taysir Kaisi worked in Hazem Samara's hummus shop in Nablus. He was 45 years old, with seven children, a hummus maker, with two bedrooms and a living room in a house in the Ain Bet Ilma refugee camp in the city. He fell ill a year ago; he was diagnosed with metastasizing liver cancer only a month ago. Dr. Hurani prescribed chemotherapy, which he received at the Al Watani hospital in the city.

His situation deteriorated, his pains increased, Kaisi wanted a second opinion. Someone recommended the Hadassah Hospital, but in the end he only managed to go to the Al Mutla hospital in East Jerusalem. On Monday, January 15, he went to Jerusalem accompanied by his cousin Hussein Kaisi. They had four permits, that is the only way one can travel to receive a second opinion, a permit for two days, one for each day, for two people, one for "the purpose of medical needs" and the other "for the purpose of accompanying a patient," all properly stamped, all after they showed the doctor's appointment from the hospital in Jerusalem, and that is also according to the rules. Kaisi was still in reasonable shape when he left his house on Monday, and he did part of the long trip to Jerusalem walking from one taxi to another, between the checkpoints. At the Qalandiyah checkpoint, they asked him to pull down his pants - security - and he managed that too.

At Al Mutla they decided to hospitalize the patient for four days. He and his cousin had permits for only two days. After several examinations the doctors recommended that Kaisi return home and continue to receive chemotherapy in Nablus, near his family and his children. On Thursday morning Taysir and Hussein left the hospital on their way home. That was Taysir's final journey.

We are now sitting with the cousin Hussein on a rock overlooking the improvised taxi stand at the Hawara checkpoint, exactly where he left Taysir to die in a taxi that was not permitted to cross. The taxi drivers that the two stopped when they left the hospital in East Jerusalem refused to take them, because their permits for medical purposes and for the purpose of accompanying a patient were no longer valid, because

of the hospitalization that had lasted two days beyond the permits. That is why the two, the patient and his cousin, traveled by bus to the Qalandiyah checkpoint, after waiting a long time at the bus stop. They crossed the checkpoint on foot, Taysir was still able to walk, and there they took a taxi from Ramallah to bring them to Nablus. Taysir screamed with pain during the entire trip, asking his cousin, "When will we get to Nablus already?"

When they reached the Hawara checkpoint, the checkpoint at the entrance to Nablus, Hussein asked the driver to enter the checkpoint and drive them home. The soldier at the checkpoint asked for permits. Hussein, who speaks Hebrew, explained to him that Taysir was a critically ill man who was returning to his home. The soldier asked for a permit from the taxi driver, but the taxi driver from Ramallah did not have a permit to enter Nablus. "Go back," ordered the soldier. Hussein tried to explain to the soldier that Taysir was incapable of going on foot, and that all he wanted was to get home, but the soldiers insisted. Those are the procedures. They said that Hussein and Taysir could enter Nablus, but only on foot.

Taysir was no longer in any condition to walk even one step. The pains in his stomach had increased during the course of the uncomfortable trip and he was no longer capable of standing on his feet. "This is a cancer patient," Hussein tried to explain, to no avail. The soldiers, he says, did not pay attention. For lack of any other choice, they turned back, doing the soldier's bidding.

The driver parked his taxi at the improvised taxi stand at the front of the checkpoint, Taysir groaned with pain and Hussein asked him to set out with him on foot. Taysir was incapable of doing so. So Hussein went out to look for a taxi with a permit to enter Nablus, leaving his cousin in the taxi. "Take care of my wife and the children," Taysir asked Hussein, apparently his last words.

The desperate Hussein tried to find a driver who would agree to take them through the checkpoint. In an UNRWA vehicle that just passed there was no room, no other car came. One of the taxi drivers suggested that he call the ambulance in Nablus. Only in an ambulance will you be able to cross, the driver advised him. Hussein called the Red Crescent in Nablus, another 15 minutes passed until the ambulance arrived at the checkpoint. The ambulance driver didn't find the two, Hussein ran to him and directed him to the taxi where Taysir was dying.

The paramedic got out of the ambulance and approached Taysir, asking him how he was, but Taysir didn't reply. He was sitting in the back seat of the taxi. The driver of another taxi that was standing at the taxi stand, Jihad Hareb, says that he saw Taysir sitting in the taxi for about an hour and a half, his yellow skin slowly turning black, "as though someone had

choked him." The paramedic checked his pulse and respiration and determined that Taysir was dead. Hussein also says that about an hour and a half passed from the moment they arrived at the checkpoint until the ambulance arrived. With the help of two taxi drivers, they removed Taysir from the taxi and carried him to the ambulance, and drove to the hospital in Nablus, where his death was determined. The doctors estimated that Taysir had died about 45 minutes before arriving at the hospital.

Hussein called Taysir's wife, Nawal, and informed her: "Taysir died at the checkpoint, on the way home." He says that it was hard for him to give the news over the phone, Taysir had so much wanted to get home. A B'Tselem investigator, Salma al-Debai, also took testimony from Hussein, in order to prepare a report about the incident on behalf of her organization.

The IDF Spokesman's Office, for its part, responds with a total denial: "An investigation regarding a claim that a Palestinian cancer patient was delayed at the Hawara checkpoint found the claim to be incorrect. An investigation carried out by the Civil Administration's coordinator of health showed that the Palestinian died on the way, during a taxi ride from the hospital in Jerusalem to the Hawara checkpoint."

Some people die at the checkpoint and some are born there: Wrapped in a woolen blanket, an electric heater warming her well-appointed room, lies the infant Raghad Hanani, 25 days old, in her bed. When she grows up, maybe her parents, Roba and Derar - he a Palestinian policeman and she a 25-year-old housewife - will tell her about her mother's travails when she was about to give birth.

It was Roba's first pregnancy. On Friday, December 7, she went into labor. An act of the devil - evening had already fallen on their village, Beit Furik, east of Nablus; an act of the devil - the IDF had locked the iron gate. The coordinator of ground operations of Rabbis for Human Rights, Zacharia Sadeh, says that for months this gate has been locked every night, from 7 P.M. to 6 A.M., imprisoning behind it the 16,000 residents of the two neighboring villages, Beit Furik and Beit Dajan.

It was 8:30 P.M., about an hour and a half after the gate had been locked; the couple ordered a taxi and drove toward the iron gate intending to reach the hospital in Nablus, a few minutes' drive away. There are two roads to Nablus; one is short and is open to Jews only, and one is longer and passes through the Beit Furik checkpoint. Access to both roads passes first of all through the iron gate, and it was locked, as we have said.

The taxi driver, Mahmoud Melitat, approached the iron gate and began to flash his car lights in the direction of the IDF guard tower, which is

located a few hundred meters from the gate. Derar says that it was cold and rainy outside. After about 10 minutes, a Hummer arrived. The driver, Melitat, tried to explain to the soldiers that there was a woman in labor in his taxi, but the soldiers insisted that she had to get out and cross the gate on foot.

The couple got out of the taxi, Roba was crying, holding her stomach, scared about her first birth, leaning on her husband's shoulders. They walked from the gate in the direction of the checkpoint, a distance of several hundred meters, and there the soldiers ordered them to wait until a female soldier came to do a body check on Roba - maybe she was carrying a bomb on her way to Nablus. On the other side of the checkpoint a Palestinian ambulance that had been ordered by Derar was waiting, and the soldiers did not let its driver pass to the other side of the checkpoint, which is closed at night. Derar says that the soldiers did not even allow Roba to get into the ambulance and to wait inside. They said that these were the orders.

So they stood outside until the female soldier arrived, Roba was examined and the permit to go to the hospital was finally given. The IDF Spokesman responded that he was not familiar with this case.

In the end, Raghad was born in the hospital in Nablus. Mother and baby are doing well. Grandma and grandpa, Roba's parents, have seen their granddaughter only once so far, in the hospital. The residents of their village of Salem, which can be seen on the opposite hill, are not allowed to enter Beit Furik.

And nevertheless the Hananis were lucky: Late in 2003 Rula Ashateya, who was also in labor, tried to cross that same accursed checkpoint. The soldiers prevented her from crossing at the time, and Rula crouched to give birth on the ground, hiding behind one of the cement blocks of the checkpoint, with her husband serving as midwife. The newborn apparently hit the rock and died. Her parents had intended to call her Mira, I wrote here at the time, since all their children's names begin with M. Then, too, the IDF Spokesman said that "the soldiers are instructed to allow crossing at the checkpoint in humanitarian cases, at any time and in any situation."

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