

"Behind the Checkpoint: A Child's Dream Deferred"



At the Qalandia checkpoint in the West Bank, Palestinians await entry to Jerusalem. June 2003.[/caption]

On the morning of Wednesday, April 23, 2025, my son Yazan, only 14 years old, set out toward Jerusalem, hand in hand with his mother.

At Checkpoint 300 the cold concrete barrier that has separated Bethlehem from Jerusalem for over three decades his hopes were halted.

Since the events of October 7, 2023, life at the checkpoint has become even harsher.

95% of permits issued to Palestinians from the West Bank had been revoked, and for a time, the checkpoint was completely sealed. Later, it reopened under severe restrictions: even those holding valid permits could only pass on foot, and only until 10:00 AM a window recently extended slightly to 1:00 PM.

And often, without warning, the checkpoint would close earlier than the announced hours, leaving people stranded, their hopes crushed against locked gates.

It was within this suffocating reality that Yazan stood, only to be told he could not enter.

The reason? A technicality: his return from Jerusalem the previous Friday had not been confirmed, though he had gone with me to pray during the solemn Good Friday procession along the Via Dolorosa.

We had asked beforehand about the confirmation process, knowing that Yazan, being under 16 and without a biometric ID, could not access the crossing application. We were reassured that my confirmation of return would suffice for both of us.

But at the checkpoint, the truth was sharp and merciless.

A long and painful argument unfolded. One of the officers coldly suggested that my wife could cross alone, leaving Yazan behind. He would have to wait; perhaps tomorrow the system would resolve the issue.

As they stood there, stunned and heartbroken, an even darker scene unfolded before them:
A young man in his twenties approached the soldiers, holding a simple sheet of paper that read,
"I want to migrate."

After a brief and bitter exchange, the soldiers attacked him without mercy. They beat him with a violence that seemed almost otherworldly.

Terrified, shaken to their core, my family turned back, their dreams of Jerusalem crushed, their spirits bruised.

The next morning, Yazan rose early, waking his mother with eager hands. In his heart, he still clung to hope.

Surely today, he thought, the gates would open.

He imagined walking through the Old City, touching the ancient stones, praying at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

But again, he was turned away.

Denied.

Despite holding a valid permit, the door to his dream remained closed.

We later learned that the Israeli authorities had issued a limited number of Easter permits for Christians from the West Bank. The rules seemed clear: children over 12 needed a permit; those younger did not.

Yet, in reality, even the youngest were not spared. Parents with permits could cross, but not their children.

The children were left behind, stranded behind concrete walls and broken promises.

And so, Yazan's heart was shattered twice in two days.

He returned home carrying a heavy question in his small chest:

How can a child be seen as a threat simply for wanting to pray?

How can the gates of a holy city close so tightly against a child's innocent dream?

Jerusalem was only a few kilometers away.

But for Yazan, it became a distance greater than any map could measure, a distance stitched together by occupation, fear, and injustice.

In two days, Yazan aged years.

He learned that even the most basic human rights the right to pray, the right to move freely, the right to simply be a child are luxuries denied under the weight of occupation.

And yet, somewhere deep inside, a stubborn light still flickers in his heart:

The light of hope.

The belief that one day, the gates of Jerusalem will swing open, not by the orders of soldiers, but by the love of those who refuse to stop dreaming... and who refuse to give up.