

If we have seen the pictures and the videos – and we must see them – they should shake each of us to our core. “We are witnessing starvation as a weapon of war,” [says one Canadian doctor](#), serving for the third time in Gaza. I cannot think of any situation like this in my entire lifetime where one country is causing a people to starve while trucks laden with food are sitting at the border, literally minutes away from the people who need it. Yes, the Israeli government is allowing a tiny trickle more of aid to flow in, in response to international pressure, but it is nowhere near enough. The world has been warning of the hunger crisis in Gaza for months, and now, over three months after the Israeli government imposed a blockade on all food and medical aid into Gaza, children are dying before our eyes, in real time, broadcast to the world.

We have also seen the recent [headlines](#) of the hundreds and hundreds of people desperately seeking food for their families killed by the IDF, or dying in stampedes. We cannot blame Hamas for this situation. When one country completely controls a territory, they are responsible for the basic well-being of the people in that land.

And so out of my feelings of deep sadness, powerlessness, and profound moral outrage, I joined 26 other rabbis and Jewish clergy on Tuesday to engage in an act of protest and to petition Senate majority leader John Thune at the Dirksen Senate building. We targeted him because he is one of the most powerful Republican legislators and could have some pull with President Trump in changing the situation on the ground in Gaza, if he wanted to. At least another 25 rabbis were outside the office, offering support. We were part of the [Jews for Food Aid for the People of Gaza](#) campaign. Reconstructionist rabbis were very well represented, as we usually are in justice work. We were well-organized and our action was [live-streamed](#).

We filed into Senator Thune’s office, with a big buffalo head looking down at us – Thune is from South Dakota after all. Most of us wore tallitot, some carried shofarot, and we were dressed in black as though we were officiating a funeral. We held banners that said “Rabbis Say: Protect Life!” and “Jews Say: Stop the Blockade!” After declaring our purpose in being there, one of us began to chant from the book of *Eicha* (Lamentations) which the Jewish people will read from this Saturday night and Sunday for the holy day of Tisha b'Av. We chanted, in Hebrew and English, "The baby's tongue cleaves to his palate out of thirst. Little children beg for bread; none gives them a morsel," and "Raise your hands to God for the souls of your babies who are weak from starvation at every street corner." (Lamentations 4:4 and 2:19)

These words are the Jewish people's gut-wrenching lament following the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC. I have been present to the chanting of these words for almost three decades as I have observed Tisha b'Av. Never in my wildest nightmares

would I have imagined I would be chanting them just days before Tisha b'Av in the midst of a real-life famine, enabled by Jewish people. Just take that in for a moment.

We then began to chant Psalm 23, traditionally associated with Jewish funerals. As our voices rose, there was a sense of *kedusha* (holiness) in the room. I felt the tears come through my body as we raised our voices in song and prayer in that Senate office. I now have a deeper feeling in my being of what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel meant when he said that at the march at Selma, he felt like his feet were praying. And I am 100% sure that Heschel, were he alive today, would have been sitting with us in that office.

I was the first to be [arrested](#). It was a real arrest, zip ties and all—those things are not fun to be in! We were then in Capitol Police custody for about 7 hours. I can't say much more because there are legal charges pending, although rest assured: our actions were completely nonviolent. And we have a good lawyer.

Thank God, there has been a lot of press about what we did: [JTA](#) (I am on the left in the picture), [the HuffPost's Instagram](#), the [Times of Israel](#), and even [Swiss Jewish](#) media! If you only click on one thing, check [this](#) Instagram post out; it really gives you a sense of what we were about.

A couple of things you can do: sign the petition from [Jews for Food Aid for the People of Gaza](#) and donate to [their campaign](#) raising money for the Gaza Soup Kitchen.

Jewish teaching is clear: if there is a hungry person, one must feed them. No matter who we are, no matter where in the world, we are all created in the image of the Divine. We are heading into the High Holydays, where we ask forgiveness for our wrongdoing. If all of Israel is responsible for each other as the [Talmud says](#), how can we ask forgiveness for the crime of letting children starve? I don't know the answer to questions like this, but unfortunately, we have to ask them.

In peace and blessing,

Rabbi Josh