

## Jewish sources on obligation to feed the hungry

Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war.

In Jewish tradition, feeding the hungry is considered a profound moral and religious obligation. It's viewed as a mitzvah. Jewish texts and traditions over the generations— from Torah, to rabbinic literature, medieval law codes and contemporary ethics – emphasize that feeding the hungry is a fundamental Jewish obligation.

### Biblical

- **Isaiah 58:7-8, 10-11** Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily, your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Eternal shall be your rear guard. If you shall pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the eternal will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.
- **Psalms 136:25:** Who gives food to all flesh, His steadfast love is eternal.
- **Psalms 145:16:** You give it openhandedly, feeding every creature to its heart's content.
- **Deuteronomy 10:18-19** but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing food and clothing.— (19) You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.
- Resources on [Hunger and Jewish Texts](#) from Mazon - includes PDF downloads for references in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, as well as [this source sheet](#) on Judaism's ethical commitment to care for the hungry
- **Job 34:28:** So that they caused the cry of the poor to come unto Him, and He heard the cry of the afflicted.”
- Deuteronomy 15:7–8: If there is a poor person among you... do not harden your heart... but open your hand generously.

### Rabbinic

- **Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5** Therefore only one person was created to teach you that whosoever kills a single soul the Bible considers to have killed a complete world. And whosoever sustains and saves a single soul, it is as if that person sustained a whole world.
- **Ben Sira** A small bit of bread may be life to the poor; one who deprives them of it sheds blood.
- **Gittin 61a** Our Rabbis taught, “Give sustenance to the poor of the non-Jews along with the poor of Israel. Visit the sick of the non-Jews along with the sick of Israel. Bury the dead of the non-Jews along with the dead of Israel. [Do all these things] because of the ways of peace.”

- **Ta'anit 20b** When Rav Huna would eat a meal, he would open his door and say, "Whoever is in need, let that person come and eat."
- **Sifre on Parshat Re'eh** To one for whom bread is suitable, give bread; to the one who needs dough, give dough; to one for whom money is required, give money; to one for whom it is fitting to put the food in that one's mouth, put it in.
- **Midrash Psalms 118:17** When you are asked in the world to come, "What was your work?" and you answer, "I fed the hungry," you will be told, "This is the gate of Adonai, enter into it, you who have fed the hungry."
- **Pirkei Avot 3:21** "Where there is no sustenance, there is no learning."

### Medieval

- **Hilchot Isurai Mizbayach 7:11** When you give food to a hungry person, give him your best and sweetest food
- **Shulchan\_Arukh,\_Yoreh\_De'ah.250.1** How much is it appropriate to give to the poor? 'Sufficient for his needs in that which he lacks.' If he is hungry, one must feed him. If he needs clothing, one must clothe him. If he lacks housing utensils, one must provide him with housing utensils... To each person according to what he needs.
- **Passover Haggadah** This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come share our Passover.
- **Maimonides**
  - **Mishneh Torah Gifts to the Poor, Chapter 7, Halacha 2:** "If a poor person asks for food and you do not give it to him, you are transgressing '*do not harden your heart and do not close your hand*' (Deuteronomy 15:7)... You must immediately give him what he needs."
  - **Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor, 7:6** If a stranger comes and says, "I am hungry. Please give me food," we are not allowed to check to see if he is honest or not; we must immediately give him food.

### Modern

- **Chida** (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai 1724–1806) commentary Shaarei Yosef on Horayot 13a: Saving a life precedes over other obligations, interpreting "life" to refer to general sustenance. This interpretation underscores the critical importance he placed on providing for the needy, aligning with the broader Jewish value of tzedakah (charity) as a fundamental ethical obligation
- **Ben Ish Hai** (Rabbi Yosef Chaim 1835 to 1909) Halachot: not only is providing for the needy a central Mizvah but it must be done in such a way that ensures that the recipient maintains their dignity and feels valued.

### Liturgical

- **Ashrei Morning Prayer:** poteach et yadecha u'masbiah lekhol khai ratzon
- **Shabbat Morning (Sepharadi-Mizrachi):** שְׁוַעַת עֲנִיִּים אֲתָה תִשְׁמַע צַעֲקַת הַדֹּל תִּקְשִׁיב וְתוֹשִׁיעַ  
Meaning: you listen to the cry/plea of the poor and hear and respond to the cry of the dispossessed.

