

# ***Parashat Re'eh***

## **פרשת ראה**

### **Book of Deuteronomy**

What do the names Yoel Becker, Shmuel Reiner, Esther Al-alooof, Ze'ev Deravta, Yehuda Frankel and Miriam Yahav all have in common?

All six of them recently participated in heart wrenching protests against the government of Israel demanding that the government relate to their humane requests for financial support, and even more importantly, for simple decency and respect.

Three of them were involved in a particularly distressing demonstration on Jerusalem's Shazar street. Protesters brought traffic to a standstill by abandoning their wheelchairs in the middle of the road and sitting down on the street. They, and many others like them, suffer from polio. The government has agreed to provide them with financial support in the form of monthly stipends over the next ten years (with the expectation that they will not have to pay out the full sum as many of them will not survive to see the end of the decade). The protestors are requesting larger, one-time grants to enable them to better address their physical limitations. They are genuinely fearful that within a few years, many of them will no longer be alive, having succumbed to various complications from other diseases such as cancer, whose incidences are higher among polio sufferers.

The picture of these protestors is etched in my mind. Shame on the Israeli government and on our political leaders!

And as to the second group – what is their objection? In my opinion, they are protesting more about the humiliation and insult they feel over the very fact that they must dispute the measly sum that they receive from the government of Israel as Holocaust survivors. These are elderly pensioners who suffered at the hands of the Nazis in concentration camps. These senior citizens – who lost so much in their youth: their parents, their siblings, their spouse and their children – and survived the nightmare of the Holocaust to help build the Jewish nation and re-build their lives are forced to protest against the representatives of the very State that they helped form in order to receive a fair pension!?! This is simply heartbreaking!

The painful protest march of the holocaust survivors was greatly boosted by thousands of people from all across the Israeli political and social spectrum - strengthening the weakened voices of the elderly Holocaust survivors “screaming”

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their humiliation. Their protest echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah that we read in this week's Haftarah (Isaiah, chapter 54, verse 14)

בצדקה, תכונני; רחקי מעשק, כי-לא תיראי, וממחתה, כי לא-תקרב אליך

*You shall be established through righteousness, you shall be safe from oppression and shall have no fear. From ruin, for it shall not come near you.*

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How can we live in a society that ignores those that need us most? Those on the margins of society – those who especially need our strength, support and most importantly, our respect?

Isaiah's words (Chapter 54, verse 17) can provide comfort to the protesters:

וְכָל-לָשׁוֹן תִּקּוּם-אִתְּךָ לְמִשְׁפָּט, תִּרְשָׁעִי

*...every tongue that contends with you, you shall defeat*

and also (Chapter 55, verse 1):

הוֹי כָּל-צֹמֵא לֵכוּ לַמַּיִם

*Ho, all who are thirsty come for water*

We must provide the justice and the “water” so that the protesters can be comforted by the prophet's words (Chapter 55, verse 3):

הִטּוּ אָזְנוֹכֶם וּלְכוּ אֵלַי, שְׁמְעוּ וּתְחִי נַפְשְׁכֶם; וְאֶכְרְתָה לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם

*Incline your ear, and come to Me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you...*

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon

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