Jewish Tribune – Re’eh

**Safe Deposits and Yiras Shomayim**

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells the story of a bank robbery that took place in a Montreal bank, some years ago.

One weekend, the bank was burgled, and the contents of many safe deposit boxes were stolen. The victims of the crime were informed, and many people submitted claims of their loss to the bank. Although not responsible by law, the directors of the bank wanted to compensate their customers. However, as for some reason they did not have records of the contents of the safe deposit boxes, they had no way of determining if the claims were honest or exaggerated.

The directors of the bank came up with the following idea. There were seven deposit boxes that had not been broken into. The directors randomly selected one of these seven and wrote to them to say that their safe deposit box had been burgled and they should file a claim listing all the items in the safe deposit box so that compensation could be organised. The directors would check to see how honest that person was and would use this as a test, projecting this as the norm for the other customers who really did suffer a loss.

The person they called was a Mrs Bluestein, who happened to be a frum Jew. Mrs Bluestein named the things taken without listing even one extraneous item.

Concluding that people were basically honest, they awarded their loss suffering customers the full amount of their claims. The story featured prominently in the city’s major newspaper, creating an enormous kiddush Hashem.

What has this to do with our parsha? The answer is …. everything.

Sefer Devorim is possibly the longest speech in history. Moshe Rabbeinu sets out to the Bnei Yisroel our national and personal objectives. Namely, to remain loyal to HKBH by living a life of Torah and Mitzvos.

Interestingly, the Chizkuni in our Sedra, (Devorim 11:26) notes that although sefer Devorim repeats many mitzvos, it is not until parshas Re’eh that the repetition of individual mitzvos appear. Before this, Moshe Rabbeinu first clarifies our mission statement. He speaks to the Bnei Yisroel about yiras Shomayim which is the base for Torah and mitzvos.

Just like a string of pearls. You can have the most precious and beautiful pearls but if the string snaps, the pearls will scatter and become dirty or lost. Yiras Shomayim is the string that holds all the Torah, mitzvos and middos tovos together. If the yiras Shomayim goes, the Torah, mitzvos and middos tovos will disappear.

Indeed, this is how HKBH ordered proceedings at Har Sinai. First the thunder and lightning to instil us with awe and yiras Shomayim and then we receive the mitzvos. Even the mitzvos we got before Har Sinai were preceded by yirah inspiring yetzias mitzrayim and yam suf.

The Gemoro in Berachos (33b) describes yiras Shomayim as an “oitzar” – a storehouse. Perhaps the analogy is that just as a storehouse contains merchandise, and without a container, the goods will be ruined, so too a storehouse is needed to hold the Torah and mitzvos that a person accumulates. Without first building this framework of yiras Shomayim, the Torah and mitzvos will not endure.

That is why Moshe Rabbeinu stresses the importance of yiras Shomayim and spends the first three sedras of sefer Devorim doing so. It is only after that, in the beginning of our sedra, that Moshe Rabbeinu begins the repetition of individual mitzvos.

This critical message of our sedra, taught by Moshe Rabbeinu, sometimes takes a bank robbery and an honest and holy woman to remind us of.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**