

THOSE WHO HELP WITH MITZVOS

by Rabbi Label Lam

Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women came out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam called out to them, "Sing to HASHEM, for very He is exalted; a horse and its rider He cast into the sea." (Shemos 15:20-21)

After all the spontaneous song over the destruction of the Egyptian army and the splitting of the Red Sea we finally are treated to a snippet of the small sample of the concert performance of Miriam and the women folk. It's a little curious why these specific words are chosen. Out of the entire grandiose experience of witnessing the amazing salvation of the entire Nation via the direct hand of G-d, Miriam's choir is caught up with the refrain about the horse and its rider being tossed into the sea. Why is that point in particular singled out by the female singers?

There is curious Mishne in Makkos that analyzes why the Torah needed to add that three witnesses are valid to put a perpetrator to death. If two witnesses do the job then what value is there in adding a third?

In order to properly appreciate Rabbi Akiva's solution it is first important to know that what a zomeim witness is. When witnesses give testimony, they are imposing a judgment on the person being testified about. It might cost him money or it might cost him his life, depending on the nature of the accusation. There is a reflexive clause in Torah that puts the witnesses themselves equally at risk. If it is found out that they, the witnesses were in place so distant from the event they claim to have seen that it is impossible for them to have actually witnessed anything of the sorts, then they are visited with whatever they are trying to do to the accused, whether it is money or lashes or life itself. The third witness is not necessary for the establishment of the testimony but his joining in puts him at risk and he shares the exposure with the first two claimants. There is an inherent and perhaps object lesson implied here.

About this "Rabbi Akiva says that the third witness in the group only comes to be stringent on him and that you would make him a zomeim (even though the third person in the group is not necessary for forming a valid group of witnesses). And if so the Torah punishes those that assist transgressors like transgressors. All the more so, reward will be paid out to those who assist in the performance of Mitzvos like those that perform Mitzvos." (Makkos 1:7)

The women who are exiting Egypt now are excited by the splitting of the sea because the seeing largest impediment has just been removed and they are one giant step closer to Mount Sinai and

the reception of the Torah. The only problem is that the men are absolutely required to study the Torah while the women are not saddled with that obligation.

The Talmud asks and answers: "What is the great merit of our women? That they educate their children, encourage their husbands to go out and learn Torah and wait for them until they return from the study hall." (Berachot 17a) Women play a critical role in assisting their husbands and children to learn Torah. What value, what benefit do they get? Miriam alerted the women about this point and about that they were cheering. What had the horses of the Egyptians done so wrong that they deserved to be thrown into the sea? They were only helping their masters. Well, they were punished too for that assistance. How much more so is there a reward for **those who help with Mitzvos**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).