

You shall make the Altar of shittim wood... and three cubits its height. (27:1)

The **Baalei Tosfos** teach that the three *amos*/cubits height of the *Mizbayach*, Altar, coincided with the three redeemers who acted on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*: Moshe *Rabbeinu*; Aharon *HaKohen*; Miriam *HaNeviah*. We wonder why Miriam is included. There is no mention anywhere of her role as redeemer. Why is she included? What did she do to facilitate the redemption that warrants her inclusion in this triumvirate? *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, explains that it was exactly this act of facilitating that grants her mention as one of the three redeemers.

The *Talmud Sotah* 12a states that Miriam's father, Amram, was one of the leaders of his generation. When he heard Pharaoh's decree to throw all Jewish male children into the Nile River, he decided to divorce his wife, rather than bring more children into a world where they would be drowned. As a result of his eminence among the people, his personal decision had communal ramifications, with the Jewish men following suit and also divorcing their wives.

Enter young Miriam, who asserted that her father's decree was worse than Pharaoh's. The despotic Egyptian leader's evil decree was directed only at Jewish males, while Amram's decree would put a temporary halt to procreation in general. What Miriam said made sense, and Amram remarried Yocheved, and, at the age of one hundred and thirty, she conceived Moshe. Everyone else followed suit, and the Jewish people began to once again multiply. We see here how Miriam was the indirect cause of Moshe's birth, which, of course, led to his becoming the one who led the Jewish People out of Egypt.

Furthermore, when the infant Moshe was placed in a reed basket in the river, it was Miriam who stood watch over him. When Bisyah, daughter of Pharaoh, discovered the infant, conjecturing that it was a Jewish child, she sought a Jewish wet nurse to nourish the child. It was, once again, Miriam who came to the rescue, by suggesting that Yocheved nurse the child.

Miriam's role was behind the scenes. In her covert role as enabler, she played a pivotal role in *Klal Yisrael's* redemption.

I think we may add to this exegesis. Interestingly, it is the *Mizbayach*, the Altar, representing sacrifice, whose height corresponds with the number of redeemers/leaders of the Jewish People. Perhaps this alludes to the idea that a leader must be willing to sacrifice for his flock. He must be willing to sacrifice his time, energy, even his spirituality. When Jewish lives are in danger, the leader may not ignore their plight, claiming that he must learn, prepare his *shiur*, address personal issues. A leader's "personal" issues are his people. They become part of him when he assumes leadership.

Furthermore, we see from here that the individuals who work in the background, behind closed

doors, who rarely receive public accolades, and who sacrifice as much as those who do – are just as worthy of the mantle of leadership.