

"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak and also My covenant with Avraham I will remember." (26:42)

Rashi comments on the order in which the Patriarchs are listed in this *pasuk*. The order implies that the merit of Yaakov is sufficient to bring redemption to his descendants. If his merit is found to be insufficient, we can turn to Yitzchak in whose merit our redemption will be effected. If this is still not enough, we rely upon Avraham *Avinu's* merit to bring about our redemption. We may question the reversed sequence of the *Avos*. Is not Yaakov considered to be the *bchir ha'Avos*, chosen of the Patriarchs? Why, then, is he listed first? In sequence, Yaakov should have been listed last as the one upon whose merit we should finally rely.

A number of responses are given to this question. **Horav Simcha ha'Kohen Rappaport, zl**, explains that each Patriarch represents a merit to counteract a specific form of punishment. In the event *Klal Yisrael* is guilty of an offense which carries the punishment of fire, Hashem will remember Avraham *Avinu*, who courageously entered the fiery cauldron, demonstrating his conviction to the Almighty. If their transgression demands death by the sword as penalty, the merit of Yitzchak, who stretched out his neck - prepared to be slaughtered as a sacrifice - will stand by *Klal Yisrael*. Last, if *Klal Yisrael's* behavior warrants that they go into exile as penance for their sins, Yaakov *Avinu*, who was willing to go into exile to show his commitment to Hashem, will rescue them from oblivion. Since exile is the most moderate of the three punishments, Yaakov's merit is mentioned prior to that of Yitzchak and Avraham.

Horav Reuven Ha'Levi, zl, M'Dvinsk uses a parable as an alternative approach to answer our question. A man was once walking in a forest. He heard the screams of another person, who was being beaten by a robber. His sense of *rachamim*, compassion, was aroused. He ran over and rescued the defenseless victim from the hands of his oppressor. Under normal circumstances, the rescuer's "work" would be over. He felt a sense of *din*, justice, however, which motivated him to punish the would be murderer for the beating he inflicted upon his victim. After he completed exacting punishment from the despot, he retrieved the stolen money and returned it to its rightful owner. This latter act was one of pure *chesed*, kindness, for the owner had apparently lost all hope of retrieving it.

Our "hero" in this story performed three different acts of rescue. Similarly, Hashem make use of three *middos*, attributes, in dealing with His people's oppressors. First, His compassion for *Klal Yisrael* is aroused as He saves them from annihilation. Second, He takes punitive measures against those who deal harshly with His people. Third, as we saw during the exodus from Egypt, He returns to us that which we have lost in exile.

These three *middos* are personified by traits of the three Patriarchs. Yaakov *Avinu* exemplified *rachamim*; hence, he is the first Patriarch mentioned in the sequence. Yitzchak, who was the

epitome of *din*, is listed second in the order. Avraham, the *amud ha'chesed*, pillar of kindness, is the last to be mentioned.