

**PARSHAT VAYISHLACH  
WHO OR WHAT IS EISAV?**

As Ya'akov makes his way to meet his brother, Eisav he meets a "man". Whether as the Rambam understands it, this was a vision of sorts or whether as the Ramban *holds* that this was a real event that took place, the question I will deal with here, is what this conflict represents for us.

The Midrash (Breishit Raba 77:2) wants to know how the mysterious figure that attacks Ya'akov looks and offers three opinions.

The first opinion says that he came as a robber, a **vicious bandit**. With weapon in hand he came to rob and kill. A further view states that he looked like a shepherd, coming in the guise of the **saviour, a faithful person** on whom one can rely due to their caring, nurturing and loving behaviour. Yet a third view sees this figure as a **philosopher** using the guise of scholarship, the skill of debate and the ability to convince.

For all night Ya'akov and this "man" fight. Each and every generation of Jews will also face a relentless battle, forces that undermine tradition and the midrash here uses a very illuminating style to remind us that such battle will come in three different guises.

At times the enemy will come to steal and rob. The Jew will experience the pogrom and the holocaust. He will come out limping, worse for wear but will survive. At other times the Jew will have to deal with the shepherd who showers the nation with love. A covert means of converting the Jew. We too have seen such behaviour from the modern day missionary who will "love bomb" the vulnerable and unwitting Jew who has strayed from his tradition. Then there will be times when Eisav will come in the guise of the philosopher. The powerful force of enlightenment, reform, debate and discussion that confuses the mind and undermines the foundations of thought of Judaism. Here the Jew who is unskilled and lacking in knowledge will not know how to answer and will languish not knowing how to respond with pride and depth.

Which guise is worse? This is of no interest to the midrash, it simply wants us to be aware of all three methods used by "Eisav" throughout the ages in knocking us off our feet. To be aware is the first step in knowing what to expect, but only **depth of knowledge and faith in Hashem will see Ya'akov through to the morning, the dawn of a speedy redemption**

**Shabbat Shalom**

**Rabbi Kacev**