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## **Moses' Essential Character Traits**

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### 1. THE SEVENTH OF ADAR

Today is a special day, the seventh day of Adar, the *yahrzeit* and birthday of Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) about whom we will devote our words this evening. As we have done in the past, when relating to other great figures in the Torah, we will try to paint a picture of Moshe Rabbeinu using the classic model of the *sefirot*. Afterwards, we will open up the works of the Arizal, the greatest of the Kabbalists, and we will see the chronology of Moses' soul as it passes through history, through the generations.

#### **Moses' soul in every generation**

As it turns out, Moses' soul is the one that is most present from the beginning of creation (before he was Moses) until he redeemed us from Egypt and gave the Torah, and thereafter throughout history. Moses' soul will be here until the Mashiach, and indeed Moses' soul will be the soul of the Mashiach.

The Arizal says that Moses' soul is reborn into the world every fifty years, the length of the Jubilee. So, Moses is the secret of the Jubilee, which is also called a "world" in the Torah.<sup>1</sup> His spirit fills our world, inspiring us in every generation to come close to God and to receive His Torah anew. In particular, the generation that Moses brought out of Egypt and took through the wilderness is called "the generation of knowledge" (דור ידעה) since the souls of that generation were full of the faculty of knowledge, which is Moses' special power—the ability to know and feel the Presence of God in our lives. Indeed, it is this particular power, to be conscious of God that is considered the spark of Moses in our own souls.<sup>2</sup> His presence in every generation endows us with knowledge of our Creator, the experience of continual renewal by the word of God.

### 2. THE SEFIROT IN MOSES' CHARACTER

#### **Crown and Foundation: Moses, the man of God**

This week's Torah reading is *Tetzaveh*. It is the only parashah in the Torah since Moses is born in which his name does not appear explicitly. The reason is that there is something special here—Moses goes up to his ultimate source, to the Divine state of nothingness, which is the *ayin*, and the source of all the souls of Israel, as it says (and interpreted by the Ba'al Shem Tov), "the *mazal* of Israel is the *ayin*" (אין מזל לישראל). In this week's Torah portion Moses ascends to that source in Divine nothingness. For this reason his name does not appear, because he has returned to his primordial state of

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 21:6.

<sup>2</sup> See *Tanya* ch. 42.

“nothingness.” He has returned to his source in *Elokim*, the Name of God that recreates the world at every moment. This is also the crown, the super-conscious faculty of the soul, which is why Moses’ name does not appear explicitly, i.e., in consciousness.

Moses is referred to as the “man of God” (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים). There are other prophets known by this connotation. But, by all the other great prophets, this connotation is used because they are reflections of Moses—he speaks through them. The phrase, “Man of God” in the original Hebrew (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים) equals exactly “Ben Amram” (בֶּן עַמְרָם), literally, “the son of Amram,” one of the ways in which Moses is referred to (particularly by the sages of the Talmud and the Midrash), after his father’s name.

There are two great souls known as the sons of their fathers: Moses and David. David is commonly called *Ben Yishai*, “the son of Yishai” (or Jesse in its Anglicized form). The two of them together make up the two components of the Mashiach. Biologically, the Mashiach will be a descendant of David, but his soul, as revealed through his teachings, will be that of Moses, as mentioned earlier.

In explaining the connotation “man of God” in reference to Moses, the sages say something amazing. They say that it means that from “half up” he was Divine and from “half down” he was a man. This implies that the spark of Moses in each one of us reflects (in our personalities) these two dimensions of Divinity and humanity.

When Moses returns to his source in the nothingness, he is returning to the apex of his half Divine nature. This is his soul root in God, and so it is in every person. At that state, the level of crown, he does not possess a particular name. His human dimension relates in particular to his *sefirah* of foundation. This is where he is a “man” (אִישׁ), which means both a “man” and “the husband of...” The *Zohar* interprets the phrase “the man of God” to mean that Moses is the husband as it were of the God’s imminent nature, i.e., the Divine Presence, also called the *Shechinah*. He gives spiritual input, or one might say that Moses shines a flashlight to reveal the Divine Presence in our lives.

So this connotation of Moses, “the man of God” (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים), refers to both Moses’ crown and to his foundation. So in our model of the *sefirot* as they appear in Moses’ figure, we have already identified two of the *sefirot*.

### **Moses and Tetzaveh**

If Moses’ soul returns every 50 years, in a millennium it returns 20 times. *Tetzaveh* is the twentieth Torah portion. The word “twenty” (עֶשְׂרִים) equals “crown” (כֹּתֶרֶת). In the six millennia of reality, Moses will return altogether 120 times. This of course relates to Moses’ lifetime, which was 120 years. This means that every year of his lifetime corresponds to a 50 year period in the history of the world. We said that Moses was here before the Exodus. Where? In the time of Noah (who was one of Moses’ incarnations, as we shall see), there is a verse that reads, “His years will be 120 years for he is also made of flesh.” The word “for he is also” (בְּשָׂרָה) equals 345, the value of Moses (מֹשֶׁה). This is the allusion in the Torah that Moses was present in the time of the flood.

### **Wisdom: Drawn out of water**

Let’s continue to contemplate the *sefirot* and Moses. When he was born, he was not given a name until Pharaoh’s daughter saved him from the river and called him

“Moshe,” which means “to draw out of the water.” Moses is a water soul, just as the Torah is likened to water. Among the *sefirot*, this trait corresponds to wisdom, the Divine wisdom of the Torah. Wisdom is the first conscious channel of creation after the superconscious crown. Moses and his affinity to water are his wisdom.

### **Understanding: How God runs the world**

There is a phrase from the Zohar<sup>3</sup> that Moses merits understanding (מִשָּׁה לְבִינָה), the next *sefirah* after wisdom. He is coming from wisdom—the father principle—and going to understanding—the mother principle. Wisdom and understanding correspond to the right and left sides of the mind. Where do we see in the life of Moses his coming from wisdom and achieving understanding?

When Moses asked God that he might envision Godliness, God replied that he could not see His face. To see God’s back-side is an allusion to understanding how God runs the world. God revealed to Moses how he runs the world, but He did not reveal why he runs the world the way He does. To know that, Moses would have had to be able to see God’s face.

Still, even though during his life Moses was not allowed to understand why God runs the world the way he does, at the moment of his passing from this world, Moses merited seeing this too. This aspect of understanding God’s reasons is also called the Fiftieth Gate of Understanding. In fact, Moses was able to see why God runs the world the way he does already at Mt. Sinai. But, because of the sin of the Golden Calf this insight was taken from Moses (and it was given back to Moses at his moment of passing from the world).

There’s another essential property of Moses that relates to his meriting to understanding. The only attribute with which Moses is praised in the Torah is humility—“And the man Moses was very humble, more than any man walking on the Earth.”<sup>4</sup> Humility in Kabbalah is an expression of understanding that all that I possess, both spiritually and physically, is a gift of God. In addition, Moses felt that if someone else would have been given the same talents, he would have done more with them. So Moses’ understanding also includes his exceptional level of humility.

### **Knowledge: Connecting the mind and the heart**

The next property is knowledge. As stated above, Moses’s generation is called “the generation of knowledge.” The ability to know God is the presence of Moses in a soul. When Mashiach comes, impurity, which is known as the “other side,” will be annihilated. Every soul has an anti-soul, like in quantum mechanics. In spiritual physics, every soul has an antithesis. Moses’ anti-soul is the prophet Balaam, the one who wanted to curse the Jewish people but God forced him in the end to bless them. Balaam says that he has supernal knowledge.<sup>5</sup> From this we learn that he is Moses’ antithetical soul, since Moses too has supernal knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> Zohar II, 23b.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 12:3.

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 24:16.

Kabbalah explains that Moses' faculty of knowledge manifests in us as the power of soul to connect the mind to the heart, comprehension of God to the emotions of love and fear of God. Balaam is the very opposite, he has a strong connection to that which is the opposite of faith in God and tries to bring that heretical mindset into the heart. Sometimes you learn about the good from its opposite.

### **Loving-kindness: A loving leader**

The sages say that Moses was a great lover of the Jewish people. His love expressed itself in many ways. One of them is that while God instructed Moses to teach us the laws of the Torah he was not told to reveal to us the rationales behind the laws that God had taught him. But, Moses had a "good eye," so he wanted to share everything with us and so he did. This is one expression of his great love for Israel.

There is a verse that reads that "Moses leads to the right" (מוליך לימין משה). Loving-kindness and love are on the right axis of the *sefirot*, and all of Moses' leadership is related to the right axis. He received the Torah with his wisdom, the first *sefirah* on the right axis, while the continuation of the right axis is the love that he had for the Jewish people. One of the meanings of leading with the right is to lead with miracles. The difference between left and right is that the left represents the natural world while the right represents the supernatural. The forty years in the desert were all miraculous. The manna came down in Moses' merit (while the well came in the merit of Miriam, his sister and the Clouds of Glory came in merit of Aaron, his brother). But, when his two siblings passed away, these continual miracles came back in the merit of Moses alone. To lead in a good way is to lead in a supernatural way, bestowing above and beyond every person's limitations.

### **Might: Smiting the Egyptians**

Moses was also very courageous. This quality of his relates to the next *sefirah*, might. His very first act that the Torah describes is killing the Egyptian that was brutalizing one of the Hebrew slaves. Moses and Aaron each had a special task in taking the Jewish people out of Egypt. Aaron was entrusted with bringing the people close to God so that they could ascend from their low place and leave Egypt. But, Moses was given the task of smiting Pharaoh and the Egyptian people. Another important manifestation of Moses' might.

### **Beauty: Compassion for every Jew**

The next *sefirah* is *tiferet*, or beauty. Its inner experience is one of compassion. The simple and straightforward connection between Moses and beauty is found in the Zohar's identification of Moses as the soul of the patriarch Jacob. Moses himself is most often associated with the *sefirah* of knowledge, since it is he who sustains the soul of the Jewish people by teaching them to know God through the Torah. Subsequently, the *sefirah* of knowledge is the soul, the inspiration, and the inner motivator of the *sefirah* of beauty.

However, there is a deeper explanation that illustrates how compassion was exhibited by Moses himself. To understand this point, we have to begin with something

from the Arizal.<sup>6</sup> When Moses as a baby was put in the small ark and set in the Nile, Miriam stood by on the side to watch over him. The Torah describes that, "His sister [Miriam] stood far away to know what would happen with him." The Arizal says that the concealed meaning of these words describes the relationship between wisdom and kingdom. Miriam represents the *sefirah* of kingdom, while Moses represents wisdom. Kingdom cannot receive the inner light of wisdom through the means of the *sefirah* of foundation, the *sefirah* nearest kingdom that connects to kingdom and enlivens it. Instead, kingdom "sees," i.e., receives the light of wisdom, from afar, which the Arizal explains means that it receives it from the *sefirah* of beauty. As noted, the inner experience of beauty is compassion, indicating that Moses' wisdom shines out especially through compassion to enlighten and enliven kingdom, also referred to as "the congregation of Israel."

How does this all play out? When Miriam was watching over Moses, she experienced his compassion. She was getting from Moses vibrations of compassion/mercy. What was being created here was a unification of herself as kingdom (whose inner experience is lowliness, the essential property of a true righteous king) and Moses as beauty. This was a precursor for the relationship that every Jew later felt with Moses. The rapport between Moses and the Jewish people is an expression of compassion for one another. The Arizal teaches that Moses is the suffering servant of Isaiah (chapter 53) who comes to redeem our sins. We have compassion for Moses and he has compassion for us.

Moses serves as the collective intellect of the Jewish people, which appears in each individual as a spark of his *sefirah* of knowledge. But, he also appears to each of us as a compassionate shepherd. Indeed, he is referred to as, "the faithful shepherd," and was chosen by God to be the shepherd of the Jewish people because of his compassion for his sheep.

### **Victory: The eternity of Moses' presence**

Victory, acknowledgment, and foundation are the lower triplet of *sefirot*. Foundation, the male aspect of the *sefirot* through which the husband exhibits compassion for his wife was discussed above. Foundation is associated with Joseph. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him when leaving Egypt. In Hebrew, "Bones" also refer to something's essence. Moses identified with Joseph and took the essential power of Joseph to provide for and sustain the souls of Israel (just as Joseph provided for his father and brothers in Egypt), for which reason is called "the man of God," as explained above.

The Hebrew name of victory is *netzach*, which can also be translated as eternity. Among the seven lower *sefirot*—the attributes of the heart—Moses is identified with this *sefirah*. How is Moses related to eternity? He is the most eternal of all souls, because as the Zohar says, there is an extension of Moses into every generation. Moses' soul appears in every generation. Because he is eternal, we will eventually be victorious, because we are his people and like him, we too are eternal. The thing that keeps us alive

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<sup>6</sup>. *Sha'ar hapesukim to parashat Shemot, s.v., Vateitatzav.*

and gives us eternal existence is Moses' presence both in the collective soul of Israel and within each and every one of us.

We are saying that Moses' soul is eternally present. Where was it then at the very first moment of creation? The Arizal says that when Adam and Eve were first created, they had marital relations and gave birth. There was no extended pregnancy, no waiting. The Talmud<sup>7</sup> describes this with the words, "two ascended the bed, four came down."

Where does such an amazing and miraculous state appear again? In the time of redemption it says that a woman will become pregnant and give birth simultaneously (lit. "together," as in the verse, "she conceives and gives birth together."<sup>8</sup> This will only happen with the coming of Mashiach. According to the Rambam there is a first stage of Mashiach when nature retains its laws, but then in the second stage it changes, and acts in the way just described. How is this change particularly related to Moses? It says that Moses's aspect of victory is what allows this all to happen. This is because victory/eternity acts both within the context of time and above time. To be totally above time is to be in the crown (as we explained above with regard to Moses ascending to the nothingness of the crown), but this lower manifestation of eternity, the normative level of Moses, appears as the shortening of the time period needed for something to ripen—it appears instantaneous. So actually Moses was present as the shortening of the time from union to birth of Adam and Eve. And he will be present again in the time of the redemption when a woman will become pregnant and give birth "together."

### **Acknowledgment:**

The next *sefirah* is acknowledgment. After Moses descends from Mt. Sinai his face radiated an aura of splendor. The Arizal says that Moses had both aspects of light, inner and surrounding. He received inner light when he was born. It says that when he was born, his mother saw that he was good because the entire room was filled with light, light radiating from Moses' inner soul. The Arizal says that that innate light was his inner light. But, when he merited the lights that came out of his face after he descended from Mt. Sinai, these were the surrounding lights that he merited. This is also described as the light of "splendor," another meaning of the Hebrew word for the *sefirah* of "acknowledgment."

### **Kingdom:**

At the end of the Torah we find that Moses is called a king.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand God is the king and on the other hand it is Moses that is the king. A king possesses an aura of splendor. As it says, "she [kingdom] is splendor"—this is Moses' splendor that surrounds him as explained above and is reflected in Moses' kingdom.

So these are the *sefirot* as they relate to Moses. The special connection he has to today is also because this is the first part of the *parshah* in which he ascends to his source in Divine nothingness.

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<sup>7</sup>. *Sanhedrin* 38a.

<sup>8</sup>. *Jeremiah* 31:7.

<sup>9</sup>. *Deuteronomy* 33:5.

## 2. MOSES' INCARNATIONS

### **Moses as God's image in Adam**

Now let's turn to the story of Moses' many reincarnations. We said that on the one hand Moses' soul is eternal, meaning that it is super-temporal. On the other hand, Moses' soul manifests or appears in every generation, and especially every fifty years.

Since Moses' strongest characteristic is denoted by his statement, "And we are nothing," his essential character trait is nothingness (related to his humility). Nothingness in this context goes together with Moses being the "man of *Elokim*" (אִישׁ אֶלֹקִים), which we saw earlier, indicating that his soul is rooted in *Elokim*. Adam was created in God's image, specifically, in "the image of *Elokim*" (צֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים). This is to say, that in a manner of speaking, Adam the first man was created in the image of Moses, as are all of mankind that continue to cling to the image of God in themselves. Indeed, the Arizal says that Adam reached the level of the wisdom of the world of Emanation and that is the same level that Moses reached. So the first manifestation of Moses' soul was in Adam's image of God.

### **Moses as Abel**

Adam had two sons at first, Abel and Cain. In terms of their character, Abel belonged to the right axis of the *sefirot*, as he was a man of loving-kindness, while Cain belonged to the *sefirot's* left axis, as he was a man of might and harsh judgment. Moses' soul was manifest in Abel. Now, even though Cain killed Abel, it does not mean that he is entirely wicked. Cain also had goodness in him. This goodness appears from time to time in those righteous souls who also belonged to Cain's spiritual lineage (such as Jethro, Moses' father-in-law). Cain's goodness will have a marked effect just before the coming of Mashiach (which the Lubavitcher Rebbe explained is the task of our generation) in the prophet Elijah whose task it is to announce the coming redemption.

### **Abel and Cain in every soul**

As one reads the Arizal, one sees that in essence, every Jewish soul has two components: a right-side component that stems from Abel and a left-side component that comes from Cain/Elijah. At the end of the exile, Elijah's role will be to bring peace to the world. Indeed, as documented in the Book of Kings, Elijah was a zealot during his life. Interestingly, Moses also began his life as a zealot when he killed the Egyptian. It is explained that in the spiritual dimension, Moses was killing the element of Cain in the Egyptian, claiming retribution on how Cain had killed Abel, Moses' previous incarnation. Despite his being a zealot, Moses killed the Egyptian with a holy name, thereby allowing his soul to return as a convert (the Egyptian's soul united with that of Jethro, also from the source of Cain, who converted to Judaism). (Contrast this with what the Arizal says about Pinchas who killed Zimri. Pinchas, whom the sages identify as Elijah himself,<sup>10</sup> killed Zimri physically and on purpose did not do so with a holy Name).

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<sup>10</sup>. *Pirkei derabbi eliezer* 47; *Zohar* II, 190a.

### **Moses as Seth and his descendants**

After Cain murdered Abel, Adam and Eve had a third son, Seth, whom the Torah refers to as being "instead of Abel," thus alluding to his being a reincarnation of Abel. Thus, Moses' soul, which initially had been in Abel, returned in Seth. In fact, the Arizal notes that Moses' name (in Hebrew, **מֹשֶׁה**) is an acronym for Moses-Seth-Abel (**מֹשֶׁה שֵׁת אֲבֵל**).

From Seth, Moses soul was reincarnated in Noah and then in Noah's son Shem. Since the world started anew after the flood, Noah is in a sense like a second Adam. His son Shem is like Seth. And thus, the reincarnation in Noah and Shem echoes the initial manifestation of Moses' soul in Adam and Seth. After Shem, Moses' soul manifested as Moses himself.

So far we have seen seven manifestations of Moses' soul: *Elokim*, Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Shem, and Moses. All sevens are endeared. The sages also stress that Moses himself is the seventh generation from Abraham. This is the mystical line of the reincarnations of Moses' soul until Moses himself.

### **Moses' later Biblical reincarnations**

After Moses passes away, his soul continues to reincarnate in other prophets. Among the early prophets, he incarnates as Achiyah the Shiloni who prophesized about the splitting of the nation into two kingdoms governed by King Solomon's son Rechavam and the first king of the new Northern Kingdom, Yerovam. In the Book of Kings, we learn that not only did Achiyah prophesize the splitting of the nation, he was also the one who gave Yerovam the legitimacy to pursue this split and to become the leader of the Northern Kingdom. He signed the constitution of the Northern kingdom, of Yerovam. As great as he was, because he gave the legitimacy to Yerovam and his kingdom, the sages consider it to be an unconscious sin that he had to rectify. He did this by later coming back to teach Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the Ba'al Shem Tov, the two great teachers of the Torah's inner dimension. Even though Achiyah's name means to sew together, he tore the kingdoms apart. Therefore his rectification was to teach the Torah's inner dimension which unifies, by bringing the various and seemingly contradictory opinions of the sages together.

After Achiyah, Moses' soul incarnated in the prophet Zechariah son of Yehoyada.<sup>11</sup> This is not the well-known author of the book of Zechariah (who lived at the time of the beginning of the second Temple). The one we are referring to was a High Priest, a prophet, and he was also a judge. He was in the time of Yo'ash, the king of Judah. As an infant, Yo'ash was saved by Zechariah's father (Yehoyada) and mother (Yehosheva) and hidden in a secret chamber just above the Holy of Holies in the Temple. His step-mother, Atalyah the woman who was the queen at the time, wanted to kill all the male lineage of Judah. In the end, Yehoyada led a revolution against Atalyah and Yo'ash became king at the age of 7. As long as Zechariah's father, the High Priest Yehoyada was alive, Yo'ash followed the Torah. But, once Yehoyadah passed away, the ministers came and bowed down to him, claiming that he was a god for being able to survive in the Holy of Holies.

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<sup>11</sup>. See 2 Chronicles ch. 24.

This idolatry led to more idolatry throughout the nation. Yehoyada's son was Zecharyah. Zecharyah chastised the people for leaving the way of God and worshiping idols. The king was so angry at him that he had the people kill him in the Temple.

His dying words were, "God should see this and demand [revenge]."<sup>12</sup> This indeed happened right away, as in the next war Yo'ash was killed. But, this was not the end of it. The sages relate<sup>13</sup> that Zecharyah's blood continued to boil for over 200 years until the Temple was destroyed by Nevuzadran. The latter asked what this boiling blood was. At first the Jews in the Temple would not tell him, so he started killing various things to see if it would stop boiling. When it did not he continued slaughtering the sages of the generation, and then priests, and finally young children. But, the blood would not stop boiling over. Nevuzaradan asked God: Do you want me to kill the entire Jewish people for this blood. God told the blood to stop boiling. Eventually because of what he saw, Nevuzradan converted. The Arizal identifies Zecharyah with Moses.

This of course raises a lot of questions, beginning with how could God let Zecharyah be murdered and this whole terrible chain of events be set in motion? The answer is offered that when he chastised the people, Zecharyah who was Moses' incarnation, actually abandoned his sense of absolute humility revealed by the fact that he stood "above the people" and chastised them.

### **The partzuf of Moses' incarnations**

After this incarnation as Zecharyah, Moses came back many generations later as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Finally he will come back as the soul of the Mashiach.

So altogether we saw that Moses has seven incarnations until he actually appeared as Moses. Then he was Achiyah and then Zecharyah; then Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and finally the Mashiach. So altogether there are eleven different manifestations of Moses, which we can now correspond with the *sefirot*.

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<sup>12</sup>. Ibid, verse 22.

<sup>13</sup>. *Eichah rabbah* 2:4.

**crown**  
image of Elokim

**understanding**  
Abel

**wisdom**  
Adam

**knowledge**  
Seth

**might**  
Shem

**loving-kindness**  
Noah

**beauty**  
Moses

**acknowledgement**  
Zechariah

**victory**  
Achiyah

**foundation**  
Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

**kingdom**  
Mashiach

### **Biblical source for Moses presence in every generation**

A final point we would like to make about Moses relates to chapter 53 in Isaiah, mentioned above. This is a well-known chapter describing the suffering of God's servant. Some of the commentaries state that God's servant here refers to the Jewish people as a whole. The Arizal though says that this chapter is about Moses and his incarnations throughout history. Whenever it says "my servant," it is referring to God's servant Moses.

In verse 9, Isaiah describes that this suffering servant of God places his grave with the wicked. The Arizal explains that this is firstly referring to the fact that Moses buried himself. But, the notion that he buries himself with the wicked provides a source for the fact that Moses, as it were, buries himself in every generation by coming back in a particular sage of the generation to guide the wicked. Even though it is like burying himself anew every time, he does this because of his absolute devotion to the Jewish people and to redeeming every single Jew.