

UNDERSTANDING MOSHIACH

Five Pure Examples of Ein Sof's Delight in Human Independence and Free Choice

The Garden of Eden Narrative

The most foundational example in Jewish tradition of Ein Sof's delight in human independence appears in the Garden of Eden narrative. Despite divine omniscience (knowing Adam and Eve would eat from the Tree of Knowledge), Ein Sof deliberately placed the tree within reach and explicitly articulated the prohibition rather than simply making the fruit inaccessible or its consumption impossible. The Maharal of Prague explains that this apparent divine "risk" reveals a profound truth: "God takes greater pleasure in the service that comes through free choice than in the automatic perfection that would exist without the possibility of transgression." The very possibility of disobedience was intentionally created because the freely chosen relationship that emerges after the fall contains a quality of depth and authenticity that could not exist in a state of automatic obedience. Rabbi Schneur Zalman elaborates that when Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit—exercising independence even against divine command—this represented not just a fall but a necessary stage in humanity's development toward genuine relationship with Ein Sof. The subsequent process of teshuvah (return) created a bond deeper than the original innocence, precisely because it came through the exercise of independence.

2. The Revelation at Sinai and the Golden Calf

A second profound example comes from the juxtaposition of the Sinai revelation and the Golden Calf incident. At Sinai, the Israelites experienced divine revelation so overwhelming that, according to the Midrash, "their souls departed from their bodies" with each divine utterance. This represents a state of nullification so complete that free choice was temporarily suspended. Yet almost immediately afterward, Ein Sof permitted the possibility of the Golden Calf transgression. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains this apparent contradiction: "The ultimate divine intention was not for Israel to remain in a state of overwhelming revelation where choice is impossible, but to descend from this mountain-top experience into the valley of independent decision-making." What makes this example so powerful is that after the Golden Calf, Moses achieved a level of divine intimacy surpassing even what occurred at Sinai. As the Talmud states, "Had Israel not sinned with the Calf, they would have received only the

Five Books of Moses; because they sinned and then returned, they received the additional dimensions of Torah—Prophets, Writings, Mishnah, and Talmud.” This reveals how the exercise of independence, even when initially misdirected, ultimately creates capacity for deeper relationship than would have been possible without it.

3. The Soul’s Descent into the Body

A third example comes from the Kabbalistic understanding of the soul’s journey. The Zohar describes how each soul exists in a state of perfect clarity and divine connection before birth, only to descend into the limitations and confusion of physical existence where that connection becomes concealed. The Baal Shem Tov taught that this descent represents not divine cruelty but divine love: “The King’s son is sent from the palace not as punishment but for the joy that will come when he finds his way back through his own efforts.” The soul’s temporary experience of apparent separation from its source—its sense of independence and autonomy—creates the possibility for a relationship with Ein Sof that contains dimensions impossible for a soul that never experienced apparent separation. Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn explains that Ein Sof takes unique pleasure in the soul that struggles through confusion to achieve clarity, through darkness to find light, through apparent independence to discover essential connection. This pleasure exceeds what would be possible if the soul remained in its original state of automatic connection without the journey through apparent separation.

4. The Institution of the Oral Torah

A fourth example appears in the deliberate incompleteness of the Written Torah and the institution of the Oral Torah. Rather than providing a complete, unambiguous legal code that would function automatically, Ein Sof intentionally created a system requiring human interpretation, debate, and creative application. The Jerusalem Talmud recounts that when Moses was shown Rabbi Akiva teaching Torah centuries later, he couldn’t understand the discussion until Rabbi Akiva explained, “This is the Oral Torah given to Moses at Sinai.” This paradox reveals that Ein Sof deliberately created a Torah system that would require genuine human partnership and independent thought to fully manifest. The Maharal explains: “The greatest divine pleasure comes not when humans merely implement clearly dictated divine instructions, but when they become genuine partners in the ongoing revelation of Torah through their own intellectual and spiritual efforts.” This explains why the Talmud states that when sages debate properly, “both these and those are the words of the living God”—even contradictory human interpretations can simultaneously express divine will when they emerge from authentic engagement with Torah.

5. The Concealment of the Messianic Identity

A fifth and particularly powerful example concerns the messianic process itself. Despite the centrality of Moshiach to the divine plan, Ein Sof deliberately maintains ambiguity around Moshiach’s identity and the timing of redemption, requiring humanity to participate actively in the redemptive process rather than passively awaiting a predetermined outcome. The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that “Moshiach is ready to come now; it is only from our side that we need to add something to complete the preparations.” This “something” involves the exercise of

human independence and choice—the active participation in bringing redemption rather than merely receiving it as a divine imposition. What makes this example especially profound is that it concerns the culmination of the entire divine purpose in creation. Even at this highest level, Ein Sof takes greater pleasure in redemption that comes through human partnership and choice than in redemption imposed without human participation. As the Talmud states, "If Israel merits, I will hasten it \[redemption\]; if not, it will come in its time"—revealing that even the cosmic timetable itself is influenced by human choice.

The Deeper Understanding These Examples Reveal

These five examples, taken together, reveal something profound about Ein Sof's delight in human independence. This delight is not incidental or secondary but central to the entire purpose of creation. The Alter Rebbe's statement that "divine delight is greater when service comes through effort and choice" is not merely a theological detail but a key to understanding the fundamental nature of reality itself. What makes these examples "pure" and "authentic" is that in each case, Ein Sof deliberately creates circumstances that appear to risk the fulfillment of divine purpose for the sake of genuine human participation. This apparent divine self-limitation—allowing for the possibility that humans might choose against divine will—reveals that the quality of relationship that emerges through independent choice is itself an essential aspect of divine purpose. As Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson expressed it: "The ultimate divine intention is not merely obedient servants but genuine partners—beings who relate to God not through overwhelming compulsion but through authentic choice." This teaching reveals that human independence is not opposed to divine purpose but is itself an expression of divine delight—perhaps its most profound expression in all of creation.