

1. Rav Immanuel Chai Rikki: *Yosher Levav* 1:1:12

ומשרשי עניינים אלו למדנו כי החס על כבוד קונו צריך לעעלות על לבו מחשבת צמצום זס כפשומו לכל יפגום בכבודו בחשבו שעצמותו נמצא גם בגשמיים השפליס הבלתי נכבדים.

From these things, we have learned that one who takes pity on His Creator must think in his heart that *tzimtzum* is literal so that he doesn't come to insult God's honour and think that God's essence is present in the lowly, dishonourable, physical and even in the lowest things, God forbid.

2. Rav Tzadok HaCohen: *Sefer Zichronos* 3:13

There have already been many great people and authors of the kabbalists who have made this mistake. For example the author of *Yosher Levav* explains the concept of *tzimtzum* and other concepts in a way that gives God physicality, to those who understand his words. I mention him by name because many other authors who came after him already mentioned his name in print and attempted to clarify his mistakes. He was certainly a great and holy man, as is well known, and his error of belief came through his learning.

3. Rav Yosef Irgas: *Shomer Emunum HaKadmon Vikuach Sheni*:35

Anyone who wants to understand *tzimtzum* literally will come to make many mistakes and will come to contradict many of the principles of faith.

4. Vilna Gaon: *Likutim at end of Safra de-Tzneuta (Sod HaTzimtzum)*

דע כי א"ס ב"ה אין לחשוב בו כלל וכלל כי אסור לכנות בו אפי' חובת המציאות . כי אפי' ספי' ראשונה קורין אין ושני' מכנין יש שידענו שהוא נמצא וזה לבד משיגין ממנה משא"כ בראשונה וכ"ש בא"ס ב"ה ית"ש שאסור לחשוב כלל וכלל ואפי' א"ס אסור לקרותו. ומה שאנו מדברים בו ובספירות הכל מרצונו והשגחתו שידוע מצד פעולותיו. וזה הכלל לכל דרכי הקבלה. וידוע כשם שהוא בלתי כל תכלית כן רצונו. וזהו א"ס לרצונו הפשוט ואף בזה אסור לחשוב כלל רק ידוע שהעולמות הן בעלי תכלית והכל במספר וע"כ צמצם רצונו בבריאת העולמות וזהו הצמצום.

5. Vilna Gaon: *Asarah Klalim Clal 2*

This original contraction (*zimzum*) is called *Atik*. This word has two meanings. Firstly it means 'old', and secondly 'removed'. It is called 'old' because it is first of all the contractions, therefore it is called *Atik*. This contraction was also the removal [of G-d from the world], and this is the other meaning of the name *Atik*.

6. Rav Shneur Zlaman of Liadi: *Likutei Amarim Tanya Shaar Hayichud ve-Ha-Emunah* Chapter 3

והנה אחרי הדברים והאמת האלה כל משכיל על דבר יבין לאשורו איך שכל נברא ויש הוא באמת נחשב לאין ואפס ממש לגבי כח הפועל ורוח פיו שבנפעל המהוה אותו תמיד ומוציאו מאין ממש ליש. ומה שכל נברא ונפעל נראה לנו ליש וממשות זהו מחמת שאין אנו משיגים ורואים בעיני בשר את כח ה' ורוח פיו שבנברא. אבל אילו ניתנה רשות לעין לראות ולהשיג את החיות ורוחניות שבכל נברא השופע בו ממוצא פי ה' ורוח פיו לא היה גשמיות הנברא וחומר וממשו נראה

כלל לעינינו כי הוא בטל במציאות ממש לגבי החיות והרוחניות שבו מאחר שמבלעדי הרוחניות היה אין ואפס ממש כמו קודם ששת ימי בראשית ממש. ורוח פיו הוא לבדו המוציא תמיד מאפס ואין ליש ומהוה אותו א"כ אפס בלעדו באמת.

Now, following these words and the truth [concerning the nature of the Creation], every intelligent person will understand clearly that each creature and being is actually considered naught and absolute nothingness in relation to His Activating Force and the “Breath of His mouth” which is in the created thing, continuously calling it into existence and bringing it from absolute non-being into being. The fact that every creation and act appears to us to exist and have substance is only because we are unable to perceive and to see with our eyes of flesh the power of G-d and the breath of His mouth. But were we able to see and perceive the life force and spirituality that is in each creation which is sustained from the mouth of G-d and breath of His mouth, there would be no physicality to creation or substance or reality apparent to our eyes at all. It is nullified in actuality when compared to the life and spirituality which it contains, since without the spirituality it would literally be nothing and naught like before the six days of creation. The spirituality which flows into it from “That which proceeds out of the mouth of G-d” and “His breath” – that alone continuously brings it forth from naught and nullity into being, and gives it existence. Hence, there is truly nothing besides Him.

7. Ibid. Chapter 7

והנה מכאן יש להבין שגגת מקצת חכמים בעיניהם ה' יכפר בעדם ששגו וטעו בעיונם בכתבי האריז"ל והבינו ענין הצמצום המוזכר שם כפשוטו שהקב"ה סילק עצמו ומהותו ח"ו מעוה"ז רק שמשגיח מלמעלה בהשגחה פרטית על כל היצורים כולם אשר בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת והנה מלבד שא"א כלל לומר ענין הצמצום כפשוטו שהוא ממקרי הגוף על הקב"ה הנבדל מהם ריבוא רבבות הברלות עד אין קץ אף גם זאת לא בדעת ידברו מאחר שהם מאמינים בני מאמינים שהקב"ה יודע כל היצורים שבעוה"ז השפל ומשגיח עליהם וע"כ אין ידיעתו אותם מוסיפה בו ריבוי וחידוש מפני שידוע הכל בידיעת עצמו הרי כביכול מהותו ועצמותו ודעתו הכל א'.

In the light of what has been said above it is possible to understand the error of some, scholars in their own eyes, may G-d forgive them, who erred and misinterpreted in their study of the writings of the Ari, of blessed memory, and understood the doctrine of *Tzimtzum*, which is mentioned therein literally – that the Holy One, blessed be He, removed Himself and His Essence, G-d forbid, from this world, and only guides from above with individual Providence all the created beings which are in the heavens above and on the earth below. Now, aside from the fact that it is altogether impossible to interpret the doctrine of *Tzimtzum* literally, [for then it] is a phenomenon of corporeality, concerning the Holy One, blessed be He, who is set apart from them [i.e. the phenomena of corporeality], many myriads of separations *ad infinitum*, they also did not speak wisely, ... [since] the Holy One, blessed be He, knows all the created beings in this lower world and exercises Providence over them, and perforce His knowledge of them does not add plurality and innovation to Him, for He knows all by knowing Himself. Thus, as it were, His Essence and Being and His Knowledge are all one.

8. Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi: Letter to Chasidim in Vilna.

I would welcome [a discussion] in matters of faith. According to a report from his disciples in our provinces, it is precisely in this area that the Gaon and Hasid found objections to [my] book *Likutei Amarim* and other similar works. The teachings that G-d “fills the world” and that “there is no place void of Him” are interpreted [by us] in a literal sense, whereas in his esteemed opinion it is pure heresy to hold that G-d, blessed be He, is to be found in the mundane matters of our world, and it is for this reason, according to your esteemed letter, that the book [*Toledot Yaakov Yosef* or *Tzava’at ha-Rivash*] was burned. For they explain the passages “the whole earth is full of His glory” etc. in a figurative manner, as referring to Divine Providence. Would that I might present our case to him, so as to remove from ourselves all his philosophical censures.

9. Rav Chaim Volozhin: *Nefesh HaChaim* shaar 3, perek 7

The explanation of the word *tzimtzum* here is not ‘removal’ or ‘abandoning’ from one place to another in order to come back and reconnect Himself with Himself, as it were. Nor does it mean to make a space empty [of His Essence] – Heaven forbid. Rather it means... hidden or covered.

10. Shlomo Elyashiv: *Leshem Sh-vo ve-Achlama* Sefer Ha-Deah drush olam hatohu chelek 1, drush 5, siman 7, section 8 (p. 57b)

I have also seen some very strange things in the words of some contemporary kabbalists who explain things deeply. They say that all of existence is only an illusion and appearance, and does not truly exist. This is to say that the *ein sof* didn’t change at all in itself and its necessary true existence and it is now still exactly the same as it was before creation, and there is no space empty of Him, as is known (see *Nefesh Ha-Chaim* Shaar 3). Therefore they said that in truth there is no reality to existence at all, and all the worlds are only an illusion and appearance, just as it says in the verse “in the hands of the prophets I will appear” (Hoshea 12: 11). They said that the world and humanity have no real existence, and their entire reality is only an appearance. We perceive ourselves as if we are in a world, and we perceive ourselves with our senses, and we perceive the world with our senses. It turns out [according to this opinion] that all of existence of humanity and the world is only a perception and not in true reality, for it is impossible for anything to exist in true reality, since He fills all the worlds.... How strange and bitter is it to say such a thing. Woe to us from such an opinion. They don’t think and they don’t see that with such opinions they are destroying the truth of the entire Torah....

Practical Difference

11. R' Tzadok HaCohen: *Machshevet Charutz* 25b

A person must know that G-d is the One who does everything in the world and in the hearts of people, because there is nothing in the world but Him and all our actions He does for us. Everything that he thinks is his own wisdom, strength and wealth, is only from the perspective of *Olam HaZeh* in which there is a revelation of free choice and it is as if a person is separate from G-d.

12. Rav Tzadok HaCohen: *Tzidkas HaTzadik* 140

As long as a person has not reached perfection, he should know that anything that seems to him one way is really exactly the opposite. This is clear from the Talmud (Pesachim 50a) "There [in the World to Come] I saw an upside down world." There, in the place of truth, everything is the opposite of this world. Only if G-d has lit up someone's eyes through Torah, about which it says "truth" as our Sages have told us (Avoda Zara 4b), can a person can come to know the truth.

13. Rav Elyahu Dessler: *Strive for Truth* vol. 2 p. 240, 250

Nature has no objective existence; it is merely an illusion which gives man a choice to exercise his free will: to err, or to choose the truth.... If someone is successful this is not because he is clever; Hashem wanted him to succeed and therefore gave him cleverness.

14. Rav Eliyahu Dessler: *Strive for Truth* vol. 3 p. 163-64

The Torah obliges each one of us to carry on our lives by reference to natural causes.... The person at the lower level, since he believes in the efficacy of natural causes, will find this mitzvah perfectly understandable. On the other hand, the person on a higher level, who realizes the essential unreality of natural causes, finds this mitzvah difficult to understand - a *chok* like the mitzvah of the Red Heifer.... He is aware that there is no logical reason why the effect should follow the cause; the whole system of apparent cause and effect is erected by Hashem to form a background for our moral choices and the exercise of our free will.

15. Vilna Gaon: *Introduction to Pe'as HaShulchan*

כה אמר כל החכמות נצרכים לתורתנו הק' ובלולים בה וידעם כולם לתכליתם והזכירם חכמת עלגעברע ושולשים והגדסה וחכמות פסיקה ושיבחה הרבה.

This is what he said: All wisdom is necessary for our holy Torah, and included within it. He knew all of them very well, and mentioned wisdom of algebra, trigonometry, engineering, and physics, which he praised highly.

16. Vilna Gaon: Asarah Clalim Clal 2

כן רצונו ית' נתגלה בכתיבה ב' פעמים כלומר ע"י הספר ב' פעמים, אחד בעת הכתיבה שנחקקו ונכתבו כמו כתיבה השגחתו ורצונו בהאור אשר בה נבראו כל הברואים, וכך תמיד שהשגחתו ית' בא ע"י האור והוא הטוב שזהו רצונו כמ"ש וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב, אך עדיין הוא כספר החתום שאין מבינים בהם כבודו ית' ורצונו האמיתי רק חכמים מחוכמים הקוראים בהם ומשימין עינין שכלם היטב בפעל ה' ובמעשה ידיו, כענין שכתוב שאו מרום עיניכם וראו מי ברא אלה.

So too, His Will was revealed twice, meaning in two 'books'. The first is at the time of writing when it was engraved and written, like the writing of Providence and Will with the Light with which all creatures were created. So too, always, His Providence comes to use through the light, which is the Good, and which is His Will, as the verse states "G-d saw the light that it was good". However, it is like a sealed book from which we cannot understand G-d's Glory and true Will. Only the wise people who read it and delve deeply into the works of G-d and his handiwork [can understand]. As the verse states "Raise your eyes to heaven and see Who created these".

17. Rambam: Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah chapter 2:2

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו, ויראתו: בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים, ויראה מהם חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ--מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול, כמו שאמר דויד "צמאה נפשי, לאלוהים--לא אל חי" (תהילים מב, ג). וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן, מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו, וירא ויפחד וידע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה, עומד בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דויד "כי אראה שמך . . . מה אנוש, כי תזכרנו" (תהילים ח, ד-ה).

What is the way to love and fear G-d? Whenever one contemplates the great wonders of G-d's works and creations, and one sees that they are a product of a wisdom that has no bounds or limits, one will immediately love, laud and glorify Him with an immense passion to know the Great Name, like David has said, "My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living G-d". When one thinks about these matters one will feel a great fear and trepidation, and one will know that one is a low and insignificant creation, with hardly an iota of intelligence compared to that of G-d, like David has said, "When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers...what is man, that You are heedful of him?".

18. Rambam: Guide for the Perplexed 1:71

I have already told you that nothing exists except God and this universe, and that there is no other evidence for His Existence but this universe in its entirety and in its several parts. Consequently, the universe must be examined as it is: the propositions must be derived from those properties of the universe that are clearly perceived, and hence you must know its visible form and its nature. Then only will you find in the universe evidence for the existence of a Being not included therein.