



# Rea



**Charting the great  
debate over the extent  
and impact of tzimtzum**

Original illustrations by **Mussi Sharfstein** for A Chassidisher Derher.

לעילוי נשמת דודינו הרבנים החשובים  
שנספו בנגיף הידוע

הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' ישראל יצחק  
בן ר' יעקב ע"ה פרידמאן  
נלב"ע ז' ניסן ה'תש"פ

הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' שלום  
בן ר' ארי' דוב ע"ה איידלמאן  
נלב"ע ט"ז ניסן ה'תש"פ  
תנ"צ'ה'

נדפס ע"י

הרה"ת ר' חיים שניאור זלמן  
וזוגתו מרת מלכה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
גורקאוו

# ility

In the early days of Chassidus, there was tremendous opposition to its new approach to *avodas Hashem*, to the extent that there were burnings of the *sefer* of the Baal Shem Tov's teachings, the *Tzavaas Harivash*.

Why did they decide to burn the *sefer*? The *misnagdim* claimed that it was due to the following teaching: *If [a non-Jew] is speaking while you are davening, you should say to yourself, 'Why did Hashem bring about that he should speak to me during my davening? It must be b'hashgacha pratis. The very words he is saying are from the Shechina, which resides in his mouth in order to motivate me to strengthen my service of Hashem.'*

What's so controversial about this statement? Why would they burn a *sefer* over this? And it didn't stop there: Although the Alter Rebbe explained this statement at length in a letter, the Vilna Gaon brought it up again in a letter in 5657\*. What about this statement was worthy to be repeated again and again by the opponents of Chassidus?

It goes to the heart of the famous argument in Kabbalah about the meaning of the *tzimtzum*, known as *tzimtzum kipshuto*—the *tzimtzum* is literal, or *tzimtzum shelo kipshuto*—the *tzimtzum* is non-literal.

## The Tzimtzum

One of the great innovations of the Kabbalah of the Arizal, as was revealed to him from above, is the concept of the *tzimtzum*.

*...Before anything physical or spiritual was created, the simple infinite light of Hashem filled everything, and there was no empty place. When Hashem decided with his abstract will to create creations, he contracted the light... right in the middle of it... and there remained an empty space.<sup>1</sup>*

What does this mean? The early *mekubalim* in the generations following the Arizal were split in their understanding: Some held that the *tzimtzum* is *kipshuto*, that the *tzimtzum* should be understood literally, that Hashem actually removed his light. Others held that the *tzimtzum* is *shelo kipshuto*, that it shouldn't be understood literally. *Tzimtzum* means only that *we* (from *our* perspective) simply don't *feel* Hashem's light.

### Tzimtzum Kipshuto

*Hashem actually contracted his light, and it is no longer revealed in the world.*

The Mishnas Chassidim  
Reb Yonasan Eibeshitz  
The Vilna Gaon

### Tzimtzum Shelo Kipshuto

*Hashem never actually contracted his light, and everything remained the same. We feel that it's contracted, meaning that **we** don't realize that it is revealed.*

Shaar Hashamayim  
Shomer Emunim

Chassidus *paskens* that the reality is that *tzimtzum shelo kipshuto*, for *tzimtzum kipshuto* would be a limitation in Hashem. As the Alter Rebbe puts it, *tzimtzum kipshuto* is "*mikrei haguf*," something that could apply only to physical, bodily matters.

## What's the argument?

A casual reader might think that those who held *tzimtzum kipshuto* believed that Hashem literally moved his light away, he literally

contracted his light, whereas those who hold that it's *shelo kipshuto* believe that it's not literal.

But the truth is that this is obviously not what they meant; Hashem's light is not a physical thing, *chas veshalom*, that can be moved. Even spiritual things in our physical world, like ideas, cannot literally be moved, so of course Hashem's light cannot be moved. And considering that this was an argument among *gedolei Yisroel*, it obviously wasn't about such a simple concept.

The argument is in the spiritual realm and is a nuanced difference in understanding:

When Hashem's *or ein sof* is utterly revealed, when the ultimate truth of Hashem is fully expressed, there can be nothing else—the concept of a separate world makes no sense. That's why there needs to be a *tzimtzum*, so that this ultimate truth is not expressed in a revealed manner, and the worlds are able to be created.

But here comes the argument. Some say that, in a spiritual sense, this actually happened, and Hashem's *or ein sof* is actually not revealed in the worlds. Others say that it is *shelo kipshuto*, that the *or ein sof* was never removed from the world; it's only that Hashem made it so that the *world* does not feel the *or ein sof*.

For a clearer understanding of their argument, see below.





## Deep read

In order to gain some clarity on this profound issue, we will be discussing the following points:

- Tzimtzum as a contraction in order to make “space” for the creation of the world: What is the definition of “contraction” and “space” in spirituality?
- The logic of tzimtzum kipshuto.
- Why we do not accept this viewpoint.
- What tzimtzum shelo kipshuto means.
- How to understand tzimtzum shelo kipshuto.

This explanation and presentation is adapted from the shiurim of Reb Yoel Kahn on Shaar Hayichud Veha'emuna, especially as they are written in “Shaar Hayichud Veha'emuna” by Maaynosecha p. 265ff. For a clearer understanding of the topics, see there.

### The meaning of “contraction” and “space” in spirituality

Let us explore the following question: Are spiritual things limited to a specific location or space, or are they everywhere?

For example, the logic that 2 plus 2 equals 4—is that idea everywhere?

Well, it's certainly not limited to a specific location; the same way it's true in one place, it's true in another. You cannot talk about it using physical terms—like north, south, east and west—and you cannot touch it. It's beyond the limitations of time and space: whenever and wherever you have two and two, you will have four.

So in a certain sense, one might think that spiritual things are everywhere too. (One might even think that this is what we mean when we say that Hashem is everywhere: He is spiritual, and therefore he isn't limited in physical location.)

But if you think into it a bit more, you will discover the problem with this perspective. Is this idea really everywhere, meaning in every single place? Does this idea have any connection with this place? Is it actually here more than anywhere



else? Of course not. It is *beyond* space, it is *beyond* location, since it exists in a higher realm, the world of intellect. So, on the one hand, it's not limited to a *specific* location.

But it's not actually in the physical realm. Try to use an idea to move a table. It won't work, because the idea isn't *in* this physical space. Ideas are not limited to one location, but not because they are *everywhere*—because they are *nowhere*, they do not inhabit the physical world. The only place that an idea can be is in the brain because the brain is able to think about and process ideas. They are not limited to a specific *physical* location but they are limited to a specific realm—the spiritual realm.

**Key point:** *The definition of something “existing” in a particular realm or space—as we naturally understand it—is that it is **there**, that it has some actual connection to, and effect on, the space. If it has no actual connection to this space, then in its world, it does not exist. Just as physical beings exist only in one specific location, spiritual things only inhabit their own specific realm.*

### Everything has its place - the logic of Tzimtzum Kipshuto

The truth is that every existence in this world has a realm, a “place” where it exists.

A person has many different parts of himself, beginning with his mind all the way down to his feet; and every part has a different function: the brain processes ideas, the feet walk. Ideas exist in the brain because the brain can think about ideas, whereas there are no ideas in the feet because feet cannot understand ideas. You wouldn't say that the feet *have* ideas, they just don't know about it—feet don't have ideas!

The same is true in the general world. There are four general types of creations: *domem*, *tzomeach*, *chai* and *medaber*—inanimate, vegetative, animal, and human. Each one of them has a different type of spiritual energy. The power to grow exists in the plant and not in the rock. The animal soul exists in animals and not in plants, and the human soul exists only in humans. Each of these exist in a separate realm and it has no connection to the lower levels. A rock does not have the energy to grow, plants do not have a living soul and animals do not have human souls. Everything exists in its own realm.

Beyond this physical world, there are higher levels of life in the spiritual worlds. These spiritual worlds do not inhabit our physical world, they are beyond us.

These spiritual worlds also each have their own realm, and each one of them has its own spiritual energy that is tailored for it—not higher and not lower.

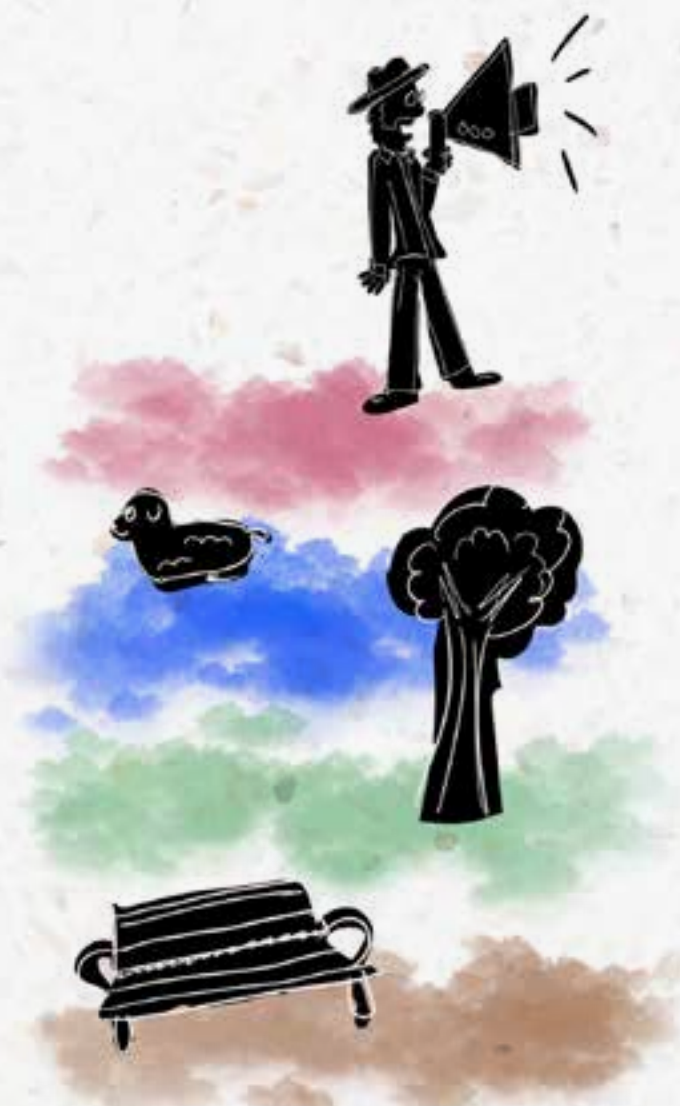
Let's go even higher. Is there *ein sof* in the spiritual worlds? Looking at it from a logical perspective, there is not. A rock cannot grow, for then it would no longer be a rock; feet cannot think, for they would no longer be feet; then there certainly cannot be *or ein sof* in the world, for then it would be unlimited, it would not be a world. If one limited being doesn't exist in another limited being, unlimited certainly doesn't exist in the limited. The unlimited *or ein sof* is everywhere—since it is unlimited—but it is *higher* than the limited worlds.

This is how the *tzimtzum kipshuto* camp thought: In order to create the universe, Hashem removed the *or ein sof*, and created a limited type

of *chayus*, and that's what he put into the worlds. The unlimited light of Hashem is not in the limited worlds. The unlimited light of Hashem is *not* felt and it's *not* revealed—which means that it's not here.

Just as ideas do not populate physical spaces, Hashem's *or ein sof* is removed and beyond the limited worlds—and much more so.

**Key point:** *Tzimtzum kipshuto* is a way of saying something very simple: The unlimited or *ein sof* is not revealed in the limited worlds—it is higher than them. When we say that Hashem contracted his light, all we're saying is that Hashem created a level where his unlimited light is not revealed.





## Why Tzimtzum Kipshuto cannot be true: Hashem cannot be somewhere

However, in refuting their opinion, the Alter Rebbe writes that this would be considered “*mikrei haguf*,” something that only applies to physical beings. What does he mean? Based on how we explained it, the *tzimtzum kipshuto* camp was also referring to a non-literal *tzimtzum*, so why is this *mikrei haguf*?

But if you think about it, their understanding of *tzimtzum* is a “physical” limitation as well.

To explain: The most obvious difference between physical things and spiritual things is that physical things are utterly defined by time and space. They are here and not somewhere else, and if you would take away their space they would cease to exist. Physical things are limited in a very tangible way. Spiritual beings, on the other hand, are not limited by time and space. In the example above, two plus two is not limited to any time or location.

But, as explained, spiritual beings also have a “space,” a place where they belong; namely, in the spiritual realm and not in the physical realm. An idea does not inhabit the physical realm—it cannot move a table—and it is also limited to the specific scenarios where it applies, where the laws of logic dictate that it belongs. So although an idea is not as limited as a physical being which is literally confined to a single space, it, too, is limited to a specific “place,” a specific realm of existence.

Similarly, according to the opinion that *tzimtzum kipshuto*—the *or ein sof* of Hashem is higher than the worlds, but it does not inhabit them (and what does inhabit the world is a limited *chayus* that comes from Hashem).

But, the Alter Rebbe says, that itself is *mikrei haguf*, that itself constitutes a limitation! If you’re saying that there’s a realm in which Hashem *does not fully exist, chas veshalom*, because he’s too high to be there—that, too, is a limitation!

True *bli gvul*, true unlimited-ness means that He fully exists in every realm and every



scenario—regardless of how high or low it is. When we say Hashem is everywhere, we mean that he’s *everywhere*, including that he’s fully *here* in our physical world.

Thus, Chassidus rejects the opinion that *tzimtzum kipshuto*.

**Key point:** *Tzimtzum Kipshuto cannot be true because Hashem cannot be limited to a specific realm—even above the world—for he cannot be limited in any way.*

## Tzimtzum shelo kipshuto: He exists in the world yet we do not feel it

Then what does *tzimtzum* mean?

The answer is that it was *shelo kipshuto*: Hashem did not actually contract himself at all. He exists in the limited worlds just as he did before the *tzimtzum*: He is not higher than the worlds but *within* them—yet we somehow

don't feel it, and thus continue to exist. In fact, Chassidus explains, the world is primarily created from Hashem's *or ein sof* and it is fully present in the innermost of every being.

But how? As we explained earlier, if something has no connection to a realm, it does not exist there: Ideas have no connection to feet—and they do not exist there; a rock cannot grow—and it doesn't have a soul. How can we say that *or ein sof* is in the world—not only higher than it—yet, at the same time, the world does not feel it?!

### Hashem can be somewhere no matter what - the logic of *tzimtzum shelo kipshuto*

In order to understand this, we must examine the difference between the way things exist in the world, and how it works above:

In the world, the definition of something being in a place is that the place feels it. If the place does not realize it, then it is actually not there, *in the reality of that place*. For example:

- If light comes into a room, then the room will light up—it “realizes” that there is light. If there's a curtain, and the room does not light up—that's because the light did not enter. Can light exist in a room without lighting it up? It cannot.
- Ideas exist in the brain because brains understand ideas. Feet, on the other hand, do not understand ideas. Do ideas exist in feet without them realizing it? Obviously not, feet don't understand anything.

In the world, you cannot disconnect these two things: If something exists in a place, by definition that means that the place “feels” it; if the place does not feel it, then it never fully came to that place. A physical thing will be felt in a physical way—if light enters a room, by definition the room will be lit up. Spiritual things will be felt in a spiritual way: if an idea enters the brain, that means that the brain understood it.

In other words—the location must be the type of location that can accept it. An idea cannot enter a foot—because ideas are limited to the

spiritual realm, and feet are not the type of things that receive ideas. By the same token, feet cannot kick ideas, because feet are limited to the physical realm, and ideas are not the type of things that take physical movement.

But by Hashem, it doesn't work that way. (The following is a difficult concept that a human being cannot fully understand—just as we cannot understand Hashem Himself—but we will present it very briefly.)

Hashem is everywhere—not because He happens to be there, but because He's fundamentally unlimited; the fact that He is everywhere stems from His unlimited-ness. He's everywhere not because the world is the type of thing that can accept Him—but because He is so unlimited that He's there too.

Therefore, even though we cannot feel Hashem's *or ein sof*—because of the *tzimtzum*—it's still fully present within us, just as it was before the *tzimtzum*. This means that *tzimtzum* is not *kipshuto*.

As the Alter Rebbe says in perek 48 of Tanya: “The light which is *ein sof*...and is called *sovev kol almin*... encompasses each and every created being from its beginning to its end, and its inside and very core, all in actual reality.” (*For more on this topic, see perek 48 of Tanya.*)

**Key point:** *Tzimtzum shelo kipshuto can make sense because Hashem exists in a different manner than anything else we know of. He exists fundamentally, because He exists, and He exists everywhere even when the location does not feel Him at all.*

### The furor of the misnagdim

From the very beginning, the war against Chassidus was officially about certain key beliefs. The Alter Rebbe and Reb Mendel Horodoker famously traveled to the Vilna Goan to attempt to resolve these issues with him face to face but he refused to meet them. Later, too, the Alter Rebbe attempted to resolve this in public and private discussions to no avail. The leaders of the fight did not want to even talk, out of fear they would



be swayed (although many, many prominent *misnagdim* did become Chassidim over time).

One of the central issues was a certain passage in the then-published collection of the Baal Shem Tov's teachings, the *Tzavaas Harivash*, quoted above, which says that if someone—meaning a non-Jew—is bothering you during davening, you should realize that it's the Shechina within him that is bothering you, motivating you to concentrate harder.

This makes sense according to Chassidus, being that the *tzimtzum* is not literal and Hashem is within every single aspect of creation, including the lowest of the low. But the *misnagdim* argued that this notion was an offense to Hashem's honor. How can you say that Hashem exists even in “the garbage?!”

The Alter Rebbe answered in a long letter (printed in Tanya Iggeres Hakodesh Siman 25), where he explains the concept of constant creation and how Hashem exists within every being. In the letter, he emphasizes that this belief is based on a simple reading of the *possuk*: הלא את השמים ואת הארץ אני מלא נאום ה'—Do I not fill the heavens and the earth, says Hashem. Furthermore, this was the belief handed down through the generations, from our saintly ancestors—until “new ones have come to examine the problem” based on philosophy, who decided that Hashem cannot truly fill the earth, *chas veshalom*, but they lacked the true understanding.

The *misnagdim*, however, did not accept this answer. Many of them believed that Hashem Himself truly does not fill the earth, *chas veshalom*—rather He watches over everything, like a king sitting in a palace and looking out his window, but He does not fill every aspect of the world. They burned the *Tzavaas Harivash* with the burning of the *chametz* on Erev Pesach of 5566\*. In a letter the following year, the Vilna Gaon wrote another letter against the Chassidim, writing: On every tree and stone, they say “This is your G-d; and they distort the meaning of *pesukim* ברוך כבוד ה' ממקומו ואתה מחיל את כולם and ה' ממקומו

Subsequently, there was another attempt to set up a debate with the *misnagdim*. In a fascinating letter, the Alter Rebbe describes his multiple attempts to speak with the Vilna Gaon and debate the *misnagdim*—to no avail. (He puts forth an interesting offer: To debate them in writing, with the judges being neutral rabbonim from other countries who would not be biased either way. However, the Vilna Gaon passed away shortly thereafter and it never came to fruition.)

And yet, the viewpoint of Chassidus swept the Jewish world, to the extent that the Vilna Gaon's primary student, Reb Chaim Volozhiner, in his philosophical *sefer* Nefesh Hachaim, writes clearly like the opinion of the Alter Rebbe—without even mentioning that his teacher held differently!

## Is there even an argument?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler was a prominent rav and leader of the Mussar movement. At one point in the late 5690s\*, he spent much time together with Reb Itche Der Masmid in London and they had lengthy discussions in Kabbalah and Chassidus. (He would later describe this as the happiest time of his life.)

One of the subjects he focused on was this argument between the Vilna Gaon and the Alter Rebbe regarding the *tzimtzum*. Based on his understanding of the Nefesh Hachayim, he could not clearly understand the difference between the Vilna Gaon and the Alter Rebbe, as he writes in a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe: “I discussed this many times with the great Chassidim of the Rebbe, if they could explain the difference between the Baal Hatanya and the Gr”a, but no-one answers me clearly.”

He asked Reb Itche der Masmid as well but it seems that at some point, the Frierdiker Rebbe asked the Rebbe to address this query. In a letter dated 19 Shevat 5699\*, the Rebbe wrote the following answer (through Reb Yerachmiel Binyominson who served as an intermediary for the correspondence):

“I was amazed to hear such a proposition, particularly since you describe that person as



one who has studied Kabbalistic texts. Obviously, that is absolutely not correct. Even in the first generation after the Arizal—the one who revealed the secret of the *tzimtzum*—there were radical differences in opinion among his disciples with regard to the *tzimtzum*. These are obvious from the texts they composed and these differences were perpetuated [in the subsequent generations].” The Rebbe goes on to explain the difference

between the opinion of the Alter Rebbe, the Vilna Gaon, Reb Chaim Volozhiner, and others.

In a letter to Rabbi Binyaminson a few years later, the Rebbe follows up on the previous letter, and describes in vivid terms what *tzimtzum shelo kipshuto* actually means: “You certainly remember your letter to me about the *tzimtzum*. Now, consider this: Imagine if at this moment, right here, you were with your Rebbe, the Alter

### The validity of Tzimtzum Kipshuto: Hashem can do anything

In general, Chassidus explains at length how *tzimtzum* is not *kipshuto*—but it does not provide much explanation into the opinions that *tzimtzum* is *kipshuto*. The Rebbe discussed it on several occasions, with profound insights to explain the validity of the opinions that held *tzimtzum kipshuto*. The full depth of these insights require much explanation but we will suffice with bringing the general idea:

One point the Rebbe made on several occasions is that the Alter Rebbe cannot truly depend on logical proofs—that Hashem cannot be limited, and that you cannot divide between Hashem’s sight (*hashgacha*) and Himself—because when we talk about Hashem Himself, *there are no rules of logic*.

In a fascinating conversation with Rashag during a Yom Tov meal,<sup>3</sup> the Rebbe spoke about it at length:

**Rashag:** It was always difficult for me to understand the opinion that the *tzimtzum* is literal. [He went on to quote an explanation that he had once heard.]

**The Rebbe:** I don’t know why one needs that explanation—that opinion makes sense to me.

**Rashag:** Is the Rebbe referring to the opinion of the *to'im* [“those who were mistaken”], who believed that the *tzimtzum* is literal?

**The Rebbe:** You call them *to'im*? I don’t want to argue with the Alter Rebbe, but it’s somewhat difficult to refer to them as such, considering that *gedolei Yisroel* held this opinion to be true, including Harav Immanuel Chai Reiki, the author of *Mishnas Chassidim*...

**Rashag:** Then what is, in fact, the explanation of their opinion?

**The Rebbe:** The explanation is: The proof [of the Alter Rebbe against them] is that we cannot logically say that Hashem limited Himself.

Now, in the levels after the *tzimtzum*—in *hishatalshelus*—logical proofs hold sway (*sechel* is the “*baal habos*”), because Hashem created *hishatalshelus* in a way that it can be understood. But before the *tzimtzum*, logic has no place, so the questions make no difference.

In the language of Chassidus: There’s a famous argument between the philosophers and the Rashba. The philosophers held that one cannot say that Hashem can do *nimna hanimnaos*, limitation and unlimitedness at the same time. But the Rashba writes in his famous *teshuva*

Rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov, the Arizal, the Rashbi at the time of the Idra, Rabbi Akiva when he was discussing *maaseh merkava*, the *kohen gadol* in the *kodesh hakadashim*, all the way to Moshe Rabbeinu at the moment of *matan Torah*—you would be completely and utterly nullified! Now, Chassidus made the final ruling that the *tzimtzum* is only in the *or*, and not in the *maor*, *chas veshalom*, and the *maor* is here with us exactly as He is in the *kodesh*

*hakadashim* of the world of *asiyah*; [exactly as He was] on Har Sinai at the moment of *matan Torah*; as he is in the world of *atzilus* and the infinite worlds; and as He is before the first *tzimtzum* when the *or ein sof* filled everything!” **T**

1. Eitz Chaim Shaar 1, Anaf 2.
2. Iggeres Hakodesh, Siman 25.
3. Shemini Atzeres 5731, *Hamelech B'Mesibo* vol. 2, p. 217.

that Hashem can do anything, even *nimna hanimnaos*. [In the famous example, the *aron* can both take up space in the *kodesh hakadashim* and not take up space at the same time.]

If one can say that there is limitation and unlimitedness in the same place, why can't you say that the *tzimtzum* literally happened, and it's still somehow not an *chisaron*, a deficiency in Hashem?... Hashem can limit Himself, and it's still not a defect. He doesn't want to be there, and it's not a question, because Hashem can limit Himself and there still wouldn't be a question... Thus, the opinion of *tzimtzum kipshtuo* makes eminent sense, and there can be no question.

**Rashag:** Then why did the Alter Rebbe ask questions on this opinion?

**The Rebbe:** The truth is, if the Mishnas Chassidim had written that [*tzimtzum kipshuto*] is the truth even though it doesn't make sense, and it's beyond logic—then the Alter Rebbe wouldn't ask questions. What bothers the Alter Rebbe is that the Mishnas Chassidim is trying to explain his approach according to *logic*—bringing the parable of a king looking [from his chamber] at the garbage—and the Alter Rebbe says that this explanation can only apply to a physical king, but you cannot separate the watching of Hashem from His essence.

In other words: The question of the Alter Rebbe is on *the logical explanation* that they give for their opinion. But as far as the actual issue [whether the *tzimtzum* is *kipshuto* or not] one cannot bring logical proofs.

But the Alter Rebbe knew, based on the revelations of Chassidus, that the *tzimtzum* is not *kipshuto*... This is also what he received from the Maggid and the Baal Shem Tov. The *shita* of the Baal Shem Tov is that “Hashem's word stands forever,” meaning that every single particle of time and space is filled with *Elokus*, and just as there is *Elokus* in the *kodesh hakadashim*, there is *Elokus* in every single particle of space. Based on this, the Alter Rebbe knew that we must say that *tzimtzum* is not *kipshuto*—and once he knew this to be true, he proved it logically as well. But I don't believe that the Alter Rebbe would have rejected their opinion based on logic alone, since questions do not apply there...

(Another point the Rebbe made several times is that the question of how Hashem Himself can exist in garbage—meaning a place of *avoda zara*—is a very difficult question, and that he couldn't find anyone to explain it logically. See the *farbrengen* of *Shabbos Parshas Nasso 5743\**; and the conversation above in *Hamelech Bimesibo*.)

*Igros Kodesh* vol. 1 p. 20-21





# The argument about Tzimtzum

## Proof that Tzimtzum Kipshuto

Hashem must have contracted His light, and He remains above the world but not in it. Otherwise, you would have to say that He exists even in the dirty parts of the world, in the garbage—meaning in places of *avoda zara*. How can you say that the King Himself is in such places!

We therefore must say that it's like a King sitting in His palace *watching* the world: He knows what's going on in the world, but He's not in it.

## Proofs for Tzimtzum Shelo Kipshuto

### Logical proof 1: Hashem cannot be limited

As explained at length above, to say that Hashem's *or ein sof* is *above* the world and not within it would be a limitation on Hashem.

### Logical proof 2: Hashem cannot be divided into different parts:

This is a difficult concept, but in short: Those who held that *tzimtzum kipshuto* believed that Hashem is watching over the world, like a King sitting in His chambers looking out the window; meaning that although He isn't within the world, He's watching over it from above.

Now, Hashem is unlimited and utterly one, as the Rambam says: הוא היודע, והוא הידוע, והוא הדעה עצמה. He is the knower, the knowledge, and the known. If He is watching over the world, that itself means that He is in the world!

### Proof from sources and tradition:

The Alter Rebbe explains that this is not only based on logic. It is based on:

- The simple reading of the *possuk*: ה'לא את השמים ואת הארץ אני מלא נאום ה'—*Do I not fill the heavens and the earth, says Hashem*. Clearly, Hashem is everywhere.
- The Zohar says this as well: "There is no place devoid of Him, not in the upper worlds nor in the lower worlds" (Tikkunim, Tikkun 57); and, 'He grasps all and none can grasp Him... He encompasses all worlds... and no one goes out from His domain; He fills all worlds... as He is within them.'
- The tradition of Yidden. "It is a simple article of faith among the general totality of Yidden, handed down to them by their saintly ancestors who walked in wholeness with Hashem, without searching the concept of Divinity by means of the human intellect."<sup>2</sup>

*The tzimtzum kipshuto camp would have to stretch the simple meaning of these pesukim and passages, explaining that this all refers to the fact that Hashem watches over everything, and His hashgacha fills it all.*



## Four possibilities of explaining tzimtzum

Until now, we have discussed the general question of *tzimtzum kipshuto* or *lo kipshuto*. But in a letter to Rav Dessler, the Rebbe explains that there are, in fact, four possible ways of explaining the *tzimtzum*. The explanation of these four possibilities is beyond the scope of this article, but we would be remiss to not mention it at least in brief.

The Rebbe explains that in addition to the question whether the *tzimtzum* is literal or not, there's the question of which "level" in Hashem was affected by the *tzimtzum*:

1. The *or ein sof*, the light of Hashem.
2. The *maor*, the source of light—Hashem Himself.

Thus, the Rebbe writes, it is possible to outline four different approaches:

1

The *tzimtzum* should be interpreted literally, and moreover, it affected Hashem's essence. *This is the opinion of the misnagdim at the time of the Alter Rebbe. They held that one cannot say that Hashem's essence is everywhere, for He cannot be "in a place of garbage."*

3

The *tzimtzum* should not be interpreted literally, but it affected Hashem's essence as well. *This was the opinion of the Reb Chaim Volozhiner in Nefesh Hachayim.*

2

The *tzimtzum* should be interpreted literally, but that it affected only His light.

4

The *tzimtzum* should not be interpreted literally, and it affected only His light. *This is the true explanation, as revealed in Chassidus.*