

Opening Plenary Texts

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Texts Related to Creation, Tzimtzum and Leadership

From Torah: Genesis 1:26-27

And God said: Let us create the human-being in our own image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. And God created the human-being in God's own image. In the image of God, God created them, male and female, God created them.

From Lurianic Kabbalah: "Tzimtzum – Contraction"

"Before the creation of the world, **Ein Sof** withdrew itself into its essence, from itself to itself within itself. It left an empty space within its essence, in which it could emanate and create."

[From Shefa Tal, Shabbetai Sheftal Horowitz, 16th – 17th Century, in The Essential Kabbalah by Daniel Matt.]

A Contemporary Comment

"...He (Isaac Luria, a pioneer of mystical thought) boldly suggests that creation begins with an act of contraction, tzimtzum. God does not initiate the existence of other things by extending himself. There would be no place for them to be, no area of non-being or partial being in which they might exist. Hence to create, God must first withdraw into himself. God must, so to speak, become less so that other things can come into being..."

This readily translates into contemporary human terms. We seek a leadership construed not primarily in terms of the accomplishment of plans but equally in terms of its humanizing effect on the people being led. Our ethics demand a leader who uses power to enable people to be persons while they work together. Such a leader, as against the stereotype of the cruel general or ruthless executive is not essentially goal oriented, but recognizes that people are always as important if not more important than the current undertaking... ***I suggest that the ability to practice tzimtzum can sharply distinguish accomplishment-directed from person-fostering leadership.*** [Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, "Tzimtzum: A Mystical Model for Contemporary Leadership" (1974) in Exploring Jewish Ethics: Papers on Covenant Responsibility, Wayne State University Press, 1990]

➤ ***Tell a story from your life experience that illuminates this teaching about leadership.***

Texts Related to Revelation & Covenant

From Torah: Exodus 19:1-8

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai...Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, and Moses went up to God. God called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will listen to my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'... Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that God had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, "All that God has spoken, we will do."

From Prophets: Micah 6:8

You have been told what is good, and what YHWH seeks from you: only to do justice, and to love chesed/lovingkindness, and to walk modestly with your God.

Martin Buber, I and Thou (Germany, 1920s)

The *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*.

The *I* of the primary word *I-It* makes its appearance as individuality and becomes conscious of itself as subject (of experiencing and using).

The *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* makes its appearance as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity...Individuality makes its appearance by being different from other individualities. A person makes his appearance by entering into relationship with other persons. The one is the spiritual form of natural detachment, the other the spiritual form of natural solidarity of connection...

...She who takes her stand in relation shares in a reality, that is, in a being that neither merely belongs to her nor merely lies outside of her. All reality is an activity in which I share without being able to appropriate for myself. Where there is no sharing there is no reality. The more direct the contact with the *Thou*, the fuller is the sharing. The *I* is real in virtue of its sharing in reality. The fuller its sharing the more real it becomes.

A Contemporary Comment

In essence, a covenant creates a partnership based upon a firm, legally defined relationship delineating the authority, power and integrity of all the partners but which, at the same time, requires them to go beyond the legal definition to fully realize the relationship. In other words, the covenant relationship is to social and political life what Buber's *I-Thou* relationship is to personal life...Through covenants, humans and their institutions are enabled to enter into dialogue and are given (or themselves create) a framework for dialogue...It can be said that, in Jewish tradition, ties of covenant are the concretization of the relationship of dialogue which, when addressed to God make humanity holy and, when addressed to one's fellows, make people human. As

the Bible itself makes clear, the covenantal bonds transform what most religions understood as a mystical union into a real one, making life—including political life—possible in an all-too-real-world.

[Daniel Elazar, “Covenant as the Basis of the Jewish Political Tradition,” in *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses*, ed. Daniel Elazar, University Press of America 1983 – adapted]

➤ ***Tell a story from your own life experience that illuminates this teaching about covenant and covenantal community.***