

COVID-19 and Rotenberg's concept of Tzimzum

Government officials, experts and the general public in the West have declared COVID-19, a corona virus, as the biggest crisis since World War II. The same declaration in Israel. Countries are (partially) locked down, the economy is in crisis and people have to stay home or are in quarantine. Universities and schools are closed. An increasing number of sick people are hospitalized in Intensive Care units. People are worried and afraid. Youngsters feel lonely. The lives of people in fragile condition, like the elderly or those with health issues, are in acute danger. The impact of COVID-19 throughout the world is huge. Some countries are trying to mask the impact and loss of life.

Several PM's and presidents appealed for social trust, support and love. The question that follows is evident: How can you appeal for moral traits in the Western community if there is a severe lack of trust, social bonding and love? The so-called I-Society, is widely described in the social sciences and literature. Experts have called it the Selfie-Culture of the West. Central to this type of culture is a lack of balance between the 'I' and the 'We'. A Selfie-Culture is deficient of a sense of togetherness. People are 'bowling alone'. People are lacking strong social bonds and social support. People are stuck into an egocentric way of living. An increasing amount of youngsters are feeling lonely and anxious.

One of the ways used by healthcare professionals to cope with this crisis, is the use of Tzimtum-interventions, based on Rotenberg's theory. What is Tzimtum? Tzimtum means 'creating space' or self-contraction. In short, Tzimtum can be stated as a process of dialogue where two seemingly opposing elements enable one another to grow, so they can be brought in harmony. For example: the use of the interpersonal dimension of Tzimtum creates space for both the 'I' and the 'other'. People are fed up to 'bowl alone' and are longing to live together with others, based on the integrated diversity of two (or more) unique individuals to create harmony (instead of distraction and aloofness). The COVID-19 crisis can help us to recover from the 'Selfie-illness' of The West, by creating space again for solid and healthy relationships. The pain of the 1.5 meter distance can be a wake-up call for creating space for others again.

The overall message of healthcare workers, who are trained Tzimtum-therapist, can be: We are forced into Tzimtum – contracting our lives from an external energy to a more internal energy. Thru leveraging the Tzimtum approach we can learn to grow from it. Our yearning for relationships with the other has been awakened and the whole world is uniting in order to take care of the other – the weaker who might be in danger. We are given an opportunity thru the Tzimtum approach to create a healthier balance in the self and in relationships with others..

Individuals and society can recover after a crisis. The COVID-19 crisis can be a turning point in Western society. We have to recover from the Selfie-Culture. The science is clear. We need strong social bonds, a good enough identity and morality to be healthy, happy and maintain the good values of a free society. Sometimes, we need a crisis to gain insight and change the course of history.

COVID-19 is a huge crisis and this can bring the worst for our society, but it can also bring out the best in people. Rotenberg's concept of Tzimzum can help people to create a new lifestyle and perspective.

Dr. G.J. Kloens (1965) is a Dutch-awarded PhD in clinical psychology, psychotherapy and sexologist, expert on love and relationships and e-Health. He lives in Israel and works in The Netherlands. He works with the Rotenberg Tzimtum approach and is a well-known specialist in the theory and practice of Positive Psychology. At this very moment, he and his family live in quarantine.