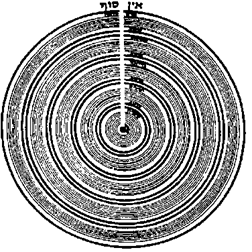
**[Tsimtsum and Richard Parker](http://teachers.lakesideschool.org/us/english/kaz/TsimtsumandRichardParker.htm)Yann Martel, Life of Pi**

**Tsimtsum (**Variant spellings - TZMZUM - ZIMZUM – TZIMTZUM)

The concept of **Tsimtsum** is a 16th century kabbalistic explanation of how God, if infinite and omnipresent, could form a material, physical world separate from himself.  If God is everywhere and in everything, how could he create a place where he was not?  How could God create a world infused with evil?

**Tsimtsum** was a concept first taught by Isaac Luria, a kabbalist rabbi, who posited that God vacated a region within himself in order to create the world.  Through this act of “shrinking,” “withdrawal,” or “contraction” (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word**tsimstum**), God brought into being a vacuum in which to create something other than Himself.  He could then fill this vacuum or empty space by the simultaneous process of self-revelation and creation.

**The concentric emanation of worlds, according to Lurianic Kabbalah**

[www.kheper.net/topics/Kabbalah/](http://www.kheper.net/topics/Kabbalah/)

In short, the first act of creation was, according to Luria, a self imposed exile of God from part of Himself.  God had descended more deeply into his own being and put a limit upon Himself.

**Discussion Question:**

**Tsimtsum** is the name given to the ship that Pi’s family takes on their voyage to Canada.  How does understanding the origin and meaning of the concept **Tsimtsum** help you understand its uses and layers of meaning in Life of Pi?   What is its significance to Pi’s physical ordeal and psychological challenges?

**Richard Parker**

Edgar Allan Poe's uncompleted adventure novel TheNarrative of Arthur Gordon Pym(1837) is the story of four shipwrecked sailors who find themselves facing starvation in a small lifeboat. The four draw lots to see who will be sacrificed and cannibalized by the other three. In this fictional account, a man named Richard Parker draws the short stick and is promptly stabbed and eaten by the surviving trio.

Ironically, in 1884 four survivors of a factual shipwreck stood trial for the murder of their ship's cabin boy, Richard Parker, who was killed and eaten in a true to life version of Poe's story. This real life event occurred some 47 years after Poe wrote his adventure novel.

Martel might be also making reference to a third allusion with his use of the name Richard Parker.  Clifford Richard Parker, 28, was a clerk from Guernsey who was aboard the Titanic as a second class passenger. He was lost at sea and his body was never identified.

**Discussion Question:**

**Richard Parker** is the name given to Pi’s primary antagonist, a 450-pound Bengal Tiger.  How do the historic references of this name help you understand its uses and layers of meaning in Life of Pi?  How does the way in which Richard Parker comes by his name have significance?  Examine the first references to Richard Parker in the novel (6,87, 97+): how do these initial references position the reader vis-à-vis a character named Richard Parker—and with what larger effect?