

# Were We Told to Make Idols?

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TERUMA (5758)

## THE CHIZKUNI ON KERUVIM... SHOW ME THAT THE TORAH IS CONSISTENT!

Today's topic will be divided into two components. First, we will explore the very definition of "keruvim". Second, an attempt will be made to show that the Torah's commandment to create these golden images is not contradictory to the numerous injunctions against building idols.

"Make two golden *keruvim*; you shall make them beaten from both ends of the ark cover" (25:18). What are these *KERUVIM*? The *Gemara Succa* 5B is well known; *Rashi* on our *pasuk* [verse] brings it. The *Gemara* asks our question: What is a "keruv"? Rabbi Avahu answers that the word is comprised of the prefix "ki" - "like", plus the Babylonian word "ravva" - a young child. The two *keruvim*, beaten out of the *aron's* [ark's] cover, had FACES like young children. *Rashi* on our *pasuk* clarifies that these figures were not created independently and then placed onto the *kapores* [ark cover]. Rather, a large volume of gold was taken, and these forms were hammered out of the otherwise flat *kapores*.

As we investigate the words of our sages concerning these *keruvim*, much fascinating information comes to light. An early commentary, the *Chizkuni*, uses a *pasuk* in *Yechezkel* [Ezekiel] to prove that the *keruvim* were like birds. Let us review that *pasuk* and its background so we can fully appreciate the *Chizkuni's* comments.

The prophet *Yechezkel* delivered a number of messages to nations who neighbored Israel at the time of the destruction of the first *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple]. A theme which recurs in his words is their punishment for rejoicing at our downfall. One such nation was Tzor - Tyre. At the time of the destruction, the people of the port city Tyre occupied part of the coastal region of Israel, boasting power and prestige.

☞ To view this location on a map, please see page 1,041 of *The Living Torah*, or any other authentic Biblical map.

In *Yechezkel* 28, the prophet is told to communicate Hashem's rebuke to Chiram, the king of Tyre. First, however, the *navi* [prophet] lauds him as a righteous individual. "You are a GREAT PROTECTING *KERUV*" (*Yechezkel* 28:14). We will discuss this shortly, since it is our main reason for delving into *Yechezkel*. In 28:15, the king is admonished: "You are perfect in your ways, from the day you were created, until wrongdoing was found in you". *Radak* explains the iniquity in the manner we mentioned above - you have become haughty over Hashem's nation, the Jews, and you rejoiced at their downfall.

We see from this that the king of Tzor (Tyre) was basically a pious person, but he and his nation were blameworthy for their delight at *Bnai Yisroel's* [the Children of Israel's] tragic banishment from *Eretz Yisroel* [the Land of Israel] and the *Bais Hamikdosh*. Whatever the reasons for their reaction, political or otherwise, they were held accountable for this attitude.

Of course, we will center our attention on the prophet's description of the king of Tzor as a "keruv". *Rashi* on this *pasuk* in *Yechezkel* interprets *keruv* as a great bird that covers an enormous area with its wings. In other words, the *navi* was praising Chiram as an exalted ruler, one with extensive power and dominion. **The *Chizkuni* (a *rishon* [early commentator] who lived later than *Rashi*) on OUR *parsha* [Torah portion], 25:18, follows this *pshat* [plain meaning] of *Rashi* in *Yechezkel*.**

In summary, *keruvim* had the faces of children, based on *Succa* 5B and *Rashi* on our *pasuk* in *Teruma*. They also resembled birds with wings, according to *Rashi* in *Yechezkel* and our *Chizkuni* here. The part about wings is a clear *pasuk* in our *parsha*, 25:20. Obviously, there is no contradictory information, since their faces could be those of babies while the rest of them were similar to birds. This is also the conclusion of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan on our *parsha*, 25:18, after seeing the *Gemara* and *meforshim* [commentators]. The title of this *d'var Torah* [lesson] indicates that it is not meant to be a comprehensive study of the *keruvim*. We are focusing mainly on the *Chizkuni*. However, we should realize that these splendid creations are talked about by *Chazal* [our Sages] in other places, such as *Yoma* 54A. Neither have we discussed the positioning of the *keruvim* on top of the *aron*. Perhaps a future *d'var Torah* will cover these topics.

We are now left with a mystery. Everyone knows that the Torah strictly forbids the creation and worship of idolatrous images. It is found in the *Aseres Hadibros* [the Ten Commandments], in *Parshas* [the Torah portion of] *Yisro*, 20:4. “Do not make for yourself a carved image...” If so, how could *Bnai Yisroel* build these *keruvim* with a good conscience?

The *Chizkuni* explains that the Torah explicitly allowed these creations, since they were not formed for the sake of idol worship. Harav Moshe Menachem Aharon, in his commentary on the *Chizkuni*'s commentary, cites the *Midrash Lekach Tov* for elucidation. In the *Aseres Hadibros*, in regard to idols, the Torah says “*lo sa'aseh lecha*” [do NOT make for yourself]. Here, the Torah says “*v'asisa shnaim keruvim zahav*” - you MUST make two *keruvim* of gold! Anyone who perceives this as inconsistency is making an enormous blunder. G-d Himself told us both things, and He has the authority to do so. Besides, says the *Chizkuni*, the *keruvim* created for the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle], the place of Hashem's Presence, are there to create a resemblance to the Heavenly Throne of Glory. Rav Aharon points out that Hashem's throne, with angels near it, is discussed by the *navi* Yeshaya in the beginning of *Perek Vav* [chapter 6]. This is what the *Chizkuni* refers to when he mentions the *Kisai Hakavod* [Throne of Glory].

We must also hear what the *Rambam* says in *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:45. Rav Moshe Aharon cites these words as the source for a *Chizkuni* later on (25:20) and Rabainu Bachaya on our *pasuk*. In order to strengthen our faith in the existence of angels, Hashem commanded us to make on the *aron* the forms of two angels. If it would have only been one figure, there would have been room for people to err and think it represented an image of G-d. We see that these *keruvim* are here to instill in us the belief that *malachim* [angels], were created by Hashem for specific missions and purposes.

In addition, says the *Chizkuni*, the Torah does this numerous times. Here are some examples. *Melacha* [constructive labor], is forbidden on *Shabbos* [the Sabbath]. Yet, the Torah commands us to sacrifice the *tamid* [perpetual offering], even on *Shabbos* (*Parshas Pinchas*, 28:9). The *musaf* [additional offering], has the same *din* [law] (ibid 28:10), and this is true for *bris milah* [ritual circumcision] (*Parshas Tazria* 12:3; see the *Gemara*'s discussion in *Shabbos* 132A at the top of the page). Of course, a competent *Rav* [rabbi] must be consulted in all cases. The *Shulchan Aruch* in *Hilchos Milah* 266:2 details this situation of *bris milah* being performed on *Shabbos*.

There are more than a few illustrations of this concept. The *Chizkuni* himself brings others, but we will not delve into them today. In truth, this is its own discussion, the fact that Hashem “allows what is prohibited” - “*matir asurim*” (*Tehillim* [Psalms] 146:7). This means that the Creator allowed us to partake of some foods and engage in some activities which resemble certain foods and acts which are forbidden. Since Hashem is the One who did this, there is no inconsistency. They never WERE prohibited! *Vayikra Rabba* 22:10 focuses on this, and the *Gemara Chulin* 109B at the bottom does the same. Such is the case with *keruvim*. Since we were told to build them, they are not in any way viewed as idols.

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

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