

פרשת תרומה *Parashat Terumah*

*Shemot / Exodus 25:1-27:19, Isaiah 66:1-24
Matthew 13:1-53*

Does the Bible Sanction a Form of Idolatry?

In this week's Torah portion, Parashat Terumah, we read about the construction of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant (ארון העדות, *Shemot / Exodus 25:10-22*), the table of the presence (שולחן לחם הפנים, *Shemot / Exodus 25:23-30*), the golden menorah (מנורת הזהב, *Shemot / Exodus 25:31-40*), the Tabernacle (המשכן, *Shemot / Exodus 26:1-37*), the Altar (תבנית המזבח, *Shemot / Exodus 27:1-8*), and the yard of the Tabernacle (חצר המשכן, *Shemot / Exodus 27:9-19*). There is something particularly interesting in the second Aliya mentioned in the construction of the Ark of the Covenant according to *Shemot / Exodus 25:18-19*, יח וַעֲשִׂיתָ שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מְקֻשָּׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מְשֻׁנִי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת: יט וַעֲשֶׂה כְרוֹב אֶחָד מְקֻצָּה מְזִיָּה וּכְרוֹב-אֶחָד מְקֻצָּה מְזִיָּה מִן-הַכַּפֹּרֶת תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת-הַכְּרֻבִים עַל-שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו: 25:18 'you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. 25:19 'Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. (NASB) The question is what exactly is the purpose of the Cherubim on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant? It seems strange to me that they were part of the Tabernacle and Temple.

The reason being is due to the prohibition on idolatry. Wouldn't this be considered a form of idolatry making an idol? Especially in light of what we read according to *Shemot / Exodus 20:1-4*, א וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים, את כל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאָמֹר: ס ב אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים: ג לא-יְהִי לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי: ד לא-תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר: 20:2 *Then God spoke all these words, saying, 20:2 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 20:3 'You shall have no other gods before Me. 20:4 'You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. (NASB)* Do these verses put a prohibition against building cherubim on the cover of the ark?

A Cherub (כְּרוּב) is a type of angel that is mentioned very often in the Torah, and especially in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel has a vision of God that is similar to a chariot. (*Ezekiel 1:4-28*) The earliest mention of Cherubim (כְּרָבִים) is found in *Bereshit / Genesis 3:24*, כד וַיִּגְרֹשׁ אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּשְׁכֵּן מִקְדָּם לְגֹן-עֵדֶן אֶת-הַכְּרָבִים וְאֶת לֵהט הַחֶרֶב הַמֵּ- 3:24 *So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life. (NASB)* Due to Adam and Eve's sin eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the disobeyed God's command and so the Lord drove (וַיִּגְרֹשׁ) them from the garden and he stationed Cherubim (כְּרָבִים) to protect the way to the tree of life so man in his sin would not eat and live forever in a state of sin. In this narrative, the Cherubim guarded the way to eternal life.

Another comparison from the Torah is in the people's sin before the mountain of the Lord (Sinai) according to Parashat Ki Tisa. *Shemot / Exodus 32:1-6*, א וַיִּרְא הָעָם כִּי-בָשַׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרֶדֶת מִן-הָהָר וַיִּקְהַל, הָעָם עַל-אֶהָרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוֹם | עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי-זֶה | מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יַדְעֵנוּ מָה-הָיָה לוֹ: ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶהָרֹן פָּרְקוּ גִזְמֵי הַזֹּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשִׁיכֶם בְּגִיכֶם וּבְגִתִּיכֶם וְהִבִּיאוּ אֵלָי: ג וַיִּתְּפְּרוּ כָל-הָעָם אֶת-גִּזְמֵי הַזֹּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיְבִיאוּ אֶל-אֶהָרֹן: ד וַיִּקַּח מֵיָדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֵׂהוּ עֵגֶל מַסְכָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלוּךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ה' וַיֵּרָא אֶהָרֶן וַיָּבֹן מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו וַיִּקְרָא
 32:1 *Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'* 32:2 *Aaron said to them, 'Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.'* 32:3 *Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.* 32:4 *He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.'* 32:5 *Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.'* 32:6 *So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. (NASB)* We read here that the Egel Hazahav (עגל הזהב, Golden Calf) was condemned as gross idolatry. We read later however, according to Parashat Terumah, the Ark was a permitted non-idolatrous religious image, sanctioned by God, complete with explicit instructions. What exactly is the essential difference between the golden Cherubim (כְּרֻבִים) that were carved on top of the ark of the covenant and the golden calf constructed by Aaron in the wilderness? Many who are skeptical about the Scriptures who believe the Torah and all of Scripture is chock-full of contradictions have asked this question and so let's look a little closer at this question according to the Torah.

The Scriptures we are looking at for this week are from *Shemot / Exodus 25:1-22*.

ספר שמות פרק כה

[פרשת תרומה] א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר
 אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנֶה
 לְבָבוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת-תְּרוּמַתִּי: ג וְזֹאת תְּרוּמָהּ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ
 מֵאֵתם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וּנְחֹשֶׁת: ד וּתְכַלֶּת וְאַרְגְּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי
 וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: ה וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעֵצֵי

שָׁטִימִים: ו' שָׁמֶן לְמֵאֵר בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמְּשֻׁחָה וְלִקְטָרֶת
הַסָּמִימִים: ז' אַבְנֵי-שֹׁהַם וְאַבְנֵי מְלֵאִים לְאַפֹּד וְלַחֲשׂוֹן: ח'
וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכָם: ט' כָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵרְאֶה
אוֹתָךְ אֵת תְּבִנֹת הַמְּשָׁכָן וְאֵת תְּבִנֹת כָּל-כְּלָיו וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ:
ס' י' וְעָשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שָׁטִימִים אֲמָתִים וְחֲצֵי אַרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה
וְחֲצֵי רַחְבּוֹ וְאַמָּה וְחֲצֵי קָמְתוֹ: יא' וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר
מִבֵּית וּמְחוּץ תַּצְפִּנּוּ וְעָשִׂיתָ עָלָיו זָרָה סָבִיב: יב' וְיִצְקָתָ
לּוֹ אַרְבַּע טַבַּעֲתֹת זָהָב וְנִתְתָּה עַל אַרְבַּע פְּעֻמָּתָיו וְשִׁתִּי טַבַּעֲתֹת
עַל-צִלְעוֹ הָאֶחָת וְשִׁתִּי טַבַּעֲתֹת עַל-צִלְעוֹ הַשְּׁנִייתָ: יג' וְעָשִׂיתָ
בְּדֵי עֲצֵי שָׁטִימִים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב: יד' וְהִבַּאתָ אֶת-הַבָּדִים
בְּטַבַּעֲתֹת עַל צִלְעוֹת הָאֲרוֹן לְשֵׂאת אֶת-הָאֲרוֹן בְּהֵם: טו' בְּטַבַּעֲ-
עַת הָאֲרוֹן יִהְיוּ הַבָּדִים לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ: טז' וְנִתְתָּ אֶל-הָאֲרוֹן
אֵת הָעֵדֻת אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהֶיךָ: [שְׁנִי] יז' וְעָשִׂיתָ כַּפֹּת זָהָב
טָהוֹר אֲמָתִים וְחֲצֵי אַרְפֵּה וְאַמָּה וְחֲצֵי רַחְבָּהּ: יח' וְעָשִׂיתָ
שְׁנַיִם כְּרָבִים זָהָב מִקְשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מְשֻׁנֵי קִצּוֹת הַכַּפֹּת:
יט' וְעָשֶׂה כְּרוֹב אֶחָד מִקְצֵה מִזֶּה וּכְרוֹב-אֶחָד מִקְצֵה מִזֶּה
מִן-הַכַּפֹּת תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת-הַכְּרָבִים עַל-שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו: כ' וְהָיוּ
הַכְּרָבִים פְּרָשִׁי כְּנָפִים לְמַעַלָּה סִכְכִים בְּכֹנְפֵיהֶם עַל-הַכַּפֹּת
וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָיו אֶל-הַכַּפֹּת יִהְיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרָבִים: כא'
וְנִתְתָּ אֶת-הַכַּפֹּת עַל-הָאֲרוֹן מִלְּמַעַלָּה וְאֶל-הָאֲרוֹן תִּתֵּן אֶת-
הָעֵדֻת אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהֶיךָ: כב' וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לְךָ שֵׁם וְדִבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ
מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרָבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת אֵת
כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֲצַוְהָ אוֹתָךְ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Shemot / Exodus 25:1-22

25:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 25:2 'Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. 25:3 'This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, 25:4 blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, 25:5 rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, 25:6 oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 25:7 onyx stones and

setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 25:8 'Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. 25:9 'According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it. 25:10 'They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. 25:11 'You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. 25:12 'You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it and two rings on the other side of it. 25:13 'You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 25:14 'You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them. 25:15 'The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it. 25:16 'You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you. 25:17 'You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. 25:18 'you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. 25:19 'Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. 25:20 'The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. 25:21 'You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. 25:22 'There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (NASB)

The Psalmist describes the situation in Parashat Ki Tisa (*Shemot / Exodus 32:1-6*) in the following way, *Tehillim / Psalm 106:19-23*, יט יַעֲשׂוּ-עֵגֶל בְּחָרֵב וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְמִסְכָּה: כ וַיִּמְירוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדֶם בְּתַבְנִית שׁוֹר אֲכַל עֵשֶׂב: כא וְשָׁחֲחוּ אֶל מוֹשִׁיעֵם עֲשֵׂה גְדֵלוֹת בְּמִצְרַיִם: כב נִפְלְאוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ חָם נוֹרְאוֹת עַל-יַם-סוּף: כג וַיֹּאמֶר לְהִשְׁמִידֶם לִוְלֵי מִשָּׁה בְּחִירוֹ עָמַד: 106:19 *They made a calf in Horeb And worshiped a molten image.* 106:20 *Thus they exchanged their glory For the image of an ox that eats grass.* 106:21 *They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt,* 106:22 *Wonders in the land of Ham And awesome things by the Red Sea.* 106:23 *Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, To turn away His wrath from destroying them. (NASB)* According to the Psalmist, the people had Aaron construct the golden calf in order to exchange the glory God had shown them through the miracles, the Red Sea, the manna, water, and their powerful and mighty deliverance destroying the entire army of Egypt, they were attributing these things to the golden calf. In the case of the golden Cherubim on the top of the Ark, these miracles of God were not attributed to these images on the Ark.

Looking closer at *Shemot / Exodus 20:1-4*, the text states the following, א וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר: ס ב אֲנֹכִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: ג לֹא-יְהִי לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פָּנָי: ד לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם: 20:1 *Then God spoke all these words, saying,* 20:2 *'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* 20:3 *'You shall have no other gods before Me.* 20:4 *'You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. (NASB)* The text has the context of not making or constructing (לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה) a Pesel (פֶּסֶל, idol/image) from anything that is in heaven (בַּשָּׁמַיִם) or upon the earth (בְּאֶרֶץ) or under the earth, or what is in the waters (בַּמַּיִם). The context speaks to creatures on this earth or in the heaven above. When we consider the context of the Creation account according to the Torah, The creation narrative describes God creating the heavens and the earth. This is a reference to the universe (outer space), and the earth (atmo-

sphere, land, and sea). The creation did not detail the heavens where the throne of God resides. Therefore, one possible interpretation may be that there is no prohibition on creating heavenly images, such as what is being described in the construction of the Ark. Remember also how Solomon also created images of cherubim in the first temple. (see *2 Chronicles 3:11*)

Performing a literature search the rabbis do discuss the Cherubim in regards to the Chariot of God from Ezekiel's vision. I tried to pick the most relevant rabbinic literature which has the following to say concerning the construction of the Cherubim (פְּרָבִים) on the cover of the Ark.

Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 99a

כיצד הן עומדין רבי יוחנן ור' אלעזר חד אמר פניהם
 איש אל אחיו וחד אמר פניהם לבית ולמ"ד פניהם איש
 אל אחיו הא כתיב (דברי הימים ב ג, יג) ופניהם לבית
 לא קשיא כאן בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום כאן
 בזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום

§ Continuing its focus on the cherubs, the Gemara asks: How were the cherubs standing? Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Elazar disagree about this. One says: Their faces were turned one toward the other. And one says: Their faces were turned toward the House, i.e., the Sanctuary. The Gemara asks: But according to the one who says that their faces were turned one toward the other, isn't it written: "And their faces were toward the House" (II Chronicles 3:13)? How does he explain the meaning of this verse? The Gemara answers: This is not difficult, as their faces miraculously changed directions in reflection of the Jewish people's relationship to God. Here, when it states that the cherubs faced each other, it was when the Jewish people do the will of God. There, the verse that describes that the cherubs faced the Sanctuary and not toward each other, was when the Jewish people do not do the will of God.

The way the *Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 99a* describes the cherubim may be connected to the Bereshit / Genesis account of the angels guarding the way to the tree of life. The idea of the angles facing different directions, which is literally not possible on the Ark cover, may be an analogy to the sin of Adam and Eve and the Angels that God had sent to guard the way to the tree of life. This has a lot of application to our lives, as eternal life is not something of our own making; eternal life is only achievable by having a covenant relationship with the God of Israel.

Talmud Bavli Yoma 54a

אמר רב קטינא בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל מגללין להם את הפרוכת ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה ואומרים להן ראו חבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר ונקבה

Continuing the previous discussion, Rav Ketina said: When the Jewish people would ascend for one of the pilgrimage Festivals, the priests would roll up the curtain for them and show them the cherubs, which were clinging to one another, and say to them: See how you are beloved before God, like the love of a male and female. The two cherubs symbolize the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the Jewish people.

A literature search using Sefaria of the Rabbi's did not produce any discussion on idolatry coupled to the construction of the golden cherubim on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The *Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 99a* has a discussion on the Cherubim (כְּרֻבִים) moving miraculously depending upon the people's sin. The *Talmud Bavli Yoma 54a* speaks to the purpose of the Cherubim as demonstrating the love of God to the people, their direction with their wings and faces facing each other is paralleled to the two Cherubs hugging. The two Cherubs represent the God of Israel and His beloved people. It is interesting though we find a prohibition against making any kind of image, while at the same time we find the command to construct Cherubim on the cover of the Ark as being sanctioned by God.

If we just brainstorm a little, a parallel idea to this is found in the

prohibition on murder. The concept is that murder is forbidden but killing is authorized. This is in the case of war, defending your family, etc. In this example on the Mitzvot of murder, killing is not equal to murder (Killing != Murder). This may be understood in the sense of putting to death the murderer in order to atone for the land which swallowed up the blood of the innocent, etc. (see *Bereshit / Genesis 9:6*, *Shemot / Exodus 21:22*, *Vayikra / Leviticus 24:17*, *Bamidbar / Numbers 35:30-31*)

We consider what is written according to *Shemot / Exodus 20:20/23*, כ 20:23 *לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן אֱלֹהִי אִתִּי אֱלֹהֵי כֶסֶף וְאֱלֹהֵי זָהָב לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם:* *‘You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. (NASB, note the bible references is different comparing the Hebrew Masoretic text and the English translations)* The Midrash on *Shemot / Exodus 20:23* on the “Do not make with Me gods of silver or gods of gold; do not make them for you” the rabbis describe this as a specific injunction against making Cherubim anywhere else, or by making them differently even in the Temple. The rabbinic point was these Cherubim (כְּרֻבִים) had to be constructed in the exact pattern that is described in the Torah upon the Ark or else the Torah considered it idolatry. The Sages reason according to the Talmud, that the Cherubim symbolized God’s relationship with Israel. Performing a search on what others have said about this topic, a quote from the website myjewishlearning.com writes on this topic saying, “The Jewish philosophers, in particular, tried to rationalize the subject. In Philo’s discourse on the cherubim these represent two aspects of God, His goodness and His authority. For Maimonides the cherubim represent a species of the angelic hosts. In Maimonides’ scheme there are ten grades of angels, and the cherubim belong to the ninth degree. Angels are seen by Maimonides as the various spiritual forces God uses for the control of the universe. The angels adjacent to the Ark represent the operation of these spiritual forces in the revelation of the Torah and are a symbolic representation of the dogma that the Torah is from heaven. There were two cherubim on the Ark because had there been only one it might have been confused with a representation of the One God (Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3.45)”

We are also told according to the Torah in *Vayikra / Leviticus 16:2*, ב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן אֹחֶיךָ וְאֶל-יְבָא בְכָל-עֵת אֶל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ

מִבֵּית לְפָרֹכֶת אֶל-פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בָּעֵנָן אֲרָאָה עַל-
:הַכַּפֹּרֶת: 16:2 and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the mercy seat which is upon the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. (RSV) There is an important point here in regards to the holy place in which the Ark was placed in the Tabernacle. God told Aaron there was to be a cloud above the Ark which essentially hid the Ark of the Covenant from sight. The danger of seeing the Ark, and specifically the mercy seat including the Cherubim, was under penalty of death if the Cohen Hagadol (High Priest) would go whenever he chose to do so. The point was that neither Aaron nor the people were bowing down to the Cherubim (כְּרֻבִים) that were upon the Ark of the Covenant. Idolatry is the worship of an idol or cult image, being a physical image, such as a statue, or a person in place of God. The command to hide the Ark in the Holy of Holies, which was to be hidden out of sight from the people and from the Cohen Hagadol, and when the Ark was transported it was covered with a tekelet (blue) cloth to hide from view, all of these things reveal to us the Cherubim were not a means or a representation of God. The account in *Bereshit / Genesis 3* reveals to us how the Cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life (to eternal life). The Cherubim on the top of the Ark may represent this aspect of the Torah narrative, as guarding the way to eternal life which only comes from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and where atonement in blood was necessary, and how God Himself is the one who gives us eternal life! Again, these things reveal to us that the two golden cherubim (כְּרֻבִים) were never intended to be a representation of God. Throughout all of Scripture, not the slightest hint of any such thing can be found anywhere that the Cherubim were to be a molten-image representation of God. We are told that the Lord God would appear in the space between the two of them in the form of a cloud and would speak to the Cohen.