

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Teruma 5785

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The Torah gives the instructions for the Aron.

וַעֲשִׂיתָ שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מְקֻשָּׁה מַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת:

“And construct two gold cherubim, construct them with hammer-work, from the two ledges of the caporas covering.” (Shmos 25:18).

What are cherubim? Why are they on top of the Aron? And why are they made out of the ledges of the cover?

In the Torah, there is a concept of angels. The angels that are called messengers, *מְלַאכֵי הַשָּׁרָת* Ministering Messengers, manifest in physical form and communicate with mankind. Hashem led the people out of Eretz Mitzrayim with these Messengers through the pillars of fire and cloud. (Ibid 13:21). Hashem signaled to Moshe through a Messenger that appeared as a flame on the thornbush. (Ibid 3:2). Hashem would also call to Moshe to come learn in his tent with a cloud. (Ibid 33:9). When Hashem has to communicate with mankind while they are awake – all other prophecy, save for Moshe’s is done when the receiver is asleep or unconscious – then Hashem sends a Messenger. One called to Avraham on Har Hamoriah. (Bereishis 22:11). Similarly, a Messenger of Hashem appeared to the mother of Shimshon. (Shoftim 13:3). Yeshayahu saw that a Messenger of Hashem struck down a hundred and eighty-five thousand from the Assyrian camp. (Yeshaya 37:35). However, he gives no description of what the Messenger looked like.

Messengers of Hashem are usually not delineated in the Torah as to what type of angel they are. They are their own being and they manifest either in simple physical form like clouds and flames, and sometimes even manifested in as men – as in the plain meaning of the verses in regards to the messengers that Avraham sent to Lot to get him out of Sodom before it was destroyed. These Messengers of Hashem, perhaps have no form of their own but manifest out of convenience per their given task.

Cherubim are also a type of heavenly angel. It does not interact with mankind but it has a special task. They also are described in how they appear. “The man was banished, and from the east of the Eden Garden were stationed cherubim and their flaming spinning swords, to guard the path to the Tree of Life.” (Bereishis 3:24). The cherubim are not described here but their mission is to guard the Tree of Life. Yechezkel saw cherubim. They have heads (Yechezkel 10:1), wings (ibid 10:5), and human-like hands under their wings (ibid 10:8). They also have four faces – that of a cherub, human, lion, and eagle. (Ibid 10:14). They also have four wings each. (Ibid 10:21). Yechezkel further describes them as having human figures (ibid 1:5) with only one fused leg and a calf’s hoof-like foot (ibid 1:7). They also sparkle like burnished bronze. What is a “cherub” face? That appears to be the face of a child. (Divrei HaYomim II 3:10).

Their mission, according to Yechezkel, is to be Hashem's footman. They are His chariot's protectors, or bodyguards, so to speak. Dovid also describes Cherubim. Dovid describes their mission similarly. (Shmuel II 22; Tehillim 18).

In regards to the Aron, the Torah simply states that their wings will spread out above the cover, covering it, and they shall face each other. (Shmos 25:20). It may imply that the cherubim only had one face each. Shlomo HaMelech also made great cherubim for his Beis HaMikdash. He made two of them, out of olive wood, and each were ten amos high. (Melachim I 6:23). These giant cherubim had two wings each with their wingspan being ten amos. (Ibid 6:24). Their wings touched, extending from wall to wall (ibid 6:27). Since the dimensions of the Kodesh Kedoshim was twenty by twenty amos (ibid 6:20) the cherubim did not face each other. They faced forward and spread their wings out like a T and their wings, together, stretched the twenty amos. Accordingly, it is unclear how many faces these cherubim had. It is also unclear if the two wings described were merely the large wings—mentioned because they touched wall to wall, and the cherubim had two other smaller wings—or they were the only wings on these gold-covered olive wood cherubim. No hands are mentioned or how many faces.

The cherubim that guard Eden Garden also have hands, as they are holding flaming swords. The Torah does not record any human arms for the Aron's cherubim or other faces. It is possible, though, that the Torah only recorded the parts of the cherubim that matter. They had to face each other. That could refer to the cherubim faces. It could also be that all four faces faced the same direction. Also, it could have had hands and the one leg, and body of a human. What is important is that they faced each other, were looking down, and their wings covered the entire top of the Aron. The pasuk does not say its two wings should spread out but its "wings." It is possible it had four wings.

As for the faces, the Gemara seems to suggest that the Aron cherubim only had one face each. At regel time, the curtain of the Kodesh Kedoshim was pulled back and the people were able to see the cherubim clinging to each other. (Yoma 54a). Similarly, the Gemara records that when tidings were good, they would face each other; when tidings were not good, they would face away. (Bava Basra 99a). That would imply one face of the cherubim on the Aron. Except, the Gemara is clearly talking about the large Cherubim that Shlomo made, not the ones on the Aron. We can derive this because the Gemara cites Divrei HaYomim II 3:13 and that is talking about Shlomo's large cherubim. His large ones always had their bodies face forward but their faces toward each other—no matter how many faces there were. Accordingly, we can still interpret that the two cherubim on the Aron also had multiple faces, human arms, and one leg. The Torah leaves those out to merely indicate the important parts and orientation.

קצות הכפרת the ledges of the cover means that the two cherubim were to be hammered out of a single piece of gold with the cover. (Shmos 25:19). They were not to be two cherubim soldered on. It was to be one piece, they to be connected and a part of the cover. This is important because of what the Cherubim do. Like we learned, Cherubim are protectors. They are there to protect what is most holy—the presence of Hashem that appeared between them (Bamidbar 7:89) and the Luchos Habris.