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## Angels

### Beyond Imagination

So much mystery surrounds these beings, and once again speculation and imagination have taken hold in American popular culture. Movies, TV dramas and documentaries, and other images have come out sparking new interest in a subject which goes back as far as human history. But do angels actually exist? And if so, what are they really like?

Every Muslim must believe in angels as we know from the Qur'an.

***"It is not devotion to turn your faces towards the East or the West. Rather, true devotion is believing in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the prophets. (Quran 2:177)***

In addition: ***"Anyone who rejects Allah and His angels and His Messengers and the Last Day has gone very far astray." (Quran 4:136)***

We also have the well-known hadith in which the Prophet (PBUH) answers a question about the meaning of faith, ***"It is that you believe in Allah, His Angels, His books, His Messengers and the Last Day, and that you believe in the Decree, both the good and the bad of it. (Sahih Muslim)***

So we have strong indications of the importance of believing in angels. But should we accept popular notions about angels? Angels have often been pictured in European art as young boys wearing little or no clothing, and in popular fiction as souls of the dead who have gone to heaven...those who have 'earned their wings' and now sit on clouds playing harps. Perhaps the most common image is that of a beautiful female angel, one who comforts us in times of distress. However, as Muslims, we must beware of such creative versions, as they are based on speculation. As we know from the Qur'an, ***"Those who believe not in the Hereafter name the angels with female names, but they have no knowledge therein. They follow nothing but conjecture, and conjecture avails nothing against Truth. (Quran 53:27-28)***

Angels are creations of Allah, separate from human beings. According to Ibn Hajar, Sa'id bin al-Musayyab,


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children."

The Prophet (PBUH) in sound hadith said, **"The angels were created from light, the jinn were created from fire. Man was created from what has been described to you."** (Muslim)

Unlike humans, angels do not have free will and are not able to disobey Allah. Rather, they always faithfully carry out His commands. Perhaps this is why a good person is often referred to as 'an angel'. These qualities of angels separate them from the jinn, who, like humans, have free will and can be Muslim or non-Muslim. The differences between these three creations of Allah can be seen clearly in the story of the creation of Adam:

Iblis (Satan) was in the presence of the angels when he refused to bow down to Adam,

***"He said, 'I am better than he, Thou didst create me form fire, and him from clay.'" (Quran 7:11)***

Unlike Iblis, the jinn and all of the angels bowed down.

Angels are said to be immensely beautiful creations, they can also be incredibly huge, especially compared to objects we know on earth, and only Allah knows their number. We do know that the number of angels is great.

After the Night Journey, the Prophet (PBUH) recounted, **"Then I was taken up to the Frequented House and every day 70,000 angels visit it, never returning to it again, another [group] coming after them."** (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

It is also related in hadith that the number of angels carrying Hell-fire on the Day of Resurrection will number 4,900,000,000... and this is only one of the countless number of tasks the angels have been given.

Now, one might ask, if Allah is self-sufficient, why angels are necessary at all? It is not a matter of need, as the angels carry out their tasks only by Allah's leave. Equally, Allah does not question His creations on the Day of Judgment for the purpose of obtaining information. Allah has no partners in His power. The angels were created to worship Allah and glorify Him, and to fulfill the purposes of Allah according to His wisdom ...just as Allah created mankind and jinn to worship Him. With this in mind, we turn to the different types of angels.

There are angels in charge of revelation, natural places

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**Mika'il**, and **Israfil** are the leaders of the angels. and mentioned by name in authentic sources.

**Jibril** (Gabriel) is the angel of revelation, the angel sent with the Books to all the Messengers. Passages in the Qur'an referring to the Faithful Spirit, and the Holy Spirit are said to refer to the Angel Jibril. He also appears in a number of hadiths in the form of a man, suddenly appearing out of the desert to question the Prophet (PBUH) about matters of religion. It was Jibril who came to the Prophet (PBUH) in the cave of Hira with the first revelation of the Quran, and reviewed the Quran in its entirety with the Prophet (PBUH) each Ramadan to insure its accuracy.

The angel **Mika'il** (Michael) is named once in the Qur'an:

**"Say: Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and prophets, to Jibril and Mika'il ... Allah is an enemy to those who reject faith." (Quran 2:98)**

According to commentary, this refers to some disbelievers during the time of the Prophet (PBUH) who ridiculed Muslim belief. According to hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) asked Jibril, **"What is Mika'il in charge of?" He replied, "The plants and the rain."** (At-Tabarani)

Mika'il has assistants who follow his orders and make the clouds and winds move according to Allah's will. In another hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) asked Jibril, **"Why do I never see Mika'il laugh?" He replied, "Mika'il has not laughed since the Fire was created."** (Ahmad)

**Israfil** is the angel given the Trumpet. He is ready to blow the three blasts ushering in the Day of Judgement upon Allah's command. It is reported the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

**"How can I enjoy myself when the one with the Trumpet has raised the Trumpet to his mouth, knitted his brow and is waiting to blow?" They said, "What should we say, Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Say: Allah is enough for us, and the best Guardian. We have put our trust in Allah."** (At-Tirmidhi)

The du'a (supplication) of the Prophet (PBUH) concerning these three angels is, **"O Allah, Lord of Jibril, Mika'il, and Israfil, Bringer of the heavens and the earth into being, Knower of the unseen and visible, it is You who judges between Your**

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things about which there is disagreement by Your permission. You guide whomever you will to a straight path."

Other angels mentioned in the Qur'an are **Guardian angels**, appointed to protect each human being. They avert all danger, except what Allah has decreed, and the **Recording angels**, two for each person. The one on the right hand writes down the good actions, and the one on the left writes the evil actions:

***"Yet there are over you noble watchers, writers that know whatever you do." (Quran 82:11)***

On the Day of Judgment, each person is given his book, a complete account of all his deeds in life.

**The Angel of Death**, who takes the soul of the dying:

***"Say: The Angel of Death will take you back, who has been given charge of you. Then you will be returned unto your Lord." (Quran 32:11)***

Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, says of the believers,

***"Those the angels take in a good and wholesome state. They say, 'Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden on account of the things you used to do.'" (Quran 16:32)***

From hadith it is said that the helpers of this particular angel may be the most beautiful beings, or appear the most frightful, depending on a person's deeds during his lifetime.

There are **Angels who visit those placed in the graves**. The Prophet (PBUH) said,

**"When someone is placed in his grave, and his companions turn and go, and he can still hear the tread of their sandals, two angels come to him and make him sit up and say to him, 'What do you say about this man Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace?' He will say, 'I testify that he is the slave of Allah and His Messenger.' It will be said, 'Look at your place in the Fire. Allah has given you, in exchange for it, a place in the Garden.'" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "He will see both places." And further, "The unbeliever or the hypocrite will say, 'I do not know. I used to say what everyone else said. He will be told, 'You neither understood nor followed the guidance. Then he will be hit between the ears with an iron hammer and will cry out with a cry which is heard**

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We know from Qur'an also of the **Custodians of the Fire** to the **Garden**:

***"And those who were fearful of their Lord will be driven to the Garden in companies and then, when they arrive there finding its gates open, its custodians will say to them, 'Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter timelessly forever.'" (Quran 39:71)***

And likewise the **Custodians of the Fire**, as described in the Qur'an,

***"O you who believe, safeguard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, and over which are harsh, terrible angels who do not disobey Allah in anything He commands and do what they are commanded." (Quran 66:6)***

There will be **Angels to issue glad tidings** to the believers at their time of death and upon their resurrection.

***"Those who say 'Our Lord is Allah', and then go straight, the angels descend on them, Feel no fear and do not grieve, but rejoice in the Garden which you were promised. We are your protectors in the life of this world and in the Next World. You will have there all you could wish for. You will have there all that you demand. Hospitality from One who is Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Quran 41:30-32)***

There are **Angels entrusted with developments in the womb**. One hadith tells us, **"The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, whose truthfulness is confirmed, said "The way that each of you is created is that you are gathered in you mother's womb for forty days as a sperm-drop and then for a similar length of time as a lump of flesh. Then an angel is sent and he breathes the spirit into you and is charged with four commands: to write down your provision, your life-span, you actions, and whether you will be wretched or happy." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)**

According to another, the Prophet (PBUH) said, **"Allah has put an angel in charge of the womb. He says, "O Lord, a drop? O Lord, a clot? O Lord, a morsel?" When Allah desires to complete the creation of the fetus, he says, "O Lord, male or female? Wretched or happy? How much**

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From this second hadith it is clear that the angels do not act independently in these matters, but ask Allah concerning His decree in order to fulfill their tasks; for Allah, Glorified and Exalted, knows of all events before they come to pass.

There are also the **Bearers of the Throne and the Kárúbiyyun**.

***"Upon that day eight shall bear above them the Throne of your Lord." (Quran 69:17)***

According to Ibn 'Abbas, the Companion of the Prophet (PBUH) who was foremost among interpreters of the Qur'an, the eight refers to eight rows of angels. The Kárúbiyyun are the chiefs of the Bearers of the Throne. The term Kárúbiyyun is said to come from a root connoting worry or distress, due to their great awe and fear of Allah. Also, the singular, Akarúb is analogous to the English Acherub or archangel.

When the Prophet (PBUH) was ridiculed and stoned by the people of the city of Ta'if, Jibril came to him with the **Angel of the Mountains** and offered to crush the people of Ta'if between the mountains. The Prophet (PBUH) declined, preferring to be patient in hopes their offspring would accept Islam.

Another magnificent Hadith relates, **"Allah's apostle said, (A group of) angels stay with you at night and (another group of) angels by daytime, and both groups gather at the time of Asr and Fajr prayers. Then those angels who have stayed with you overnight ascend (to Heaven) and Allah asks them (about you) ...and he knows everything about you. 'In what state did you leave My slaves?' The angels reply, 'When we left them, they were praying, and when we reached them they were praying'".**

**The Angels of the Ranks** are in constant worship, never moving from a standing, bowing, or prostrating position. There are yet others of whom we do not know,

***"None knows the hosts of your Lord except Him. It is nothing but a reminder to all human beings." (Quran 74:31)***

The angels who travel in search of those who gather together for the remembrance of Allah are called the **Angels of Dhikr**. On encountering such a gathering, these angels report to Allah, and Allah grants forgiveness to those remembering their Lord.

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Though we may not see an angel (or recognize one that is), as Muslims we know that we are continually watched over and blessed by their presence. Why would we ascribe earthly attributes to the angels of Allah, when Allah has created this most wondrous gift? Indeed, we have only to open the pages of The Glorious Qur'an to find out all we desire about Angels. It is truly "beyond our imaginations".



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