



Where did All the Female Angels Go?

The Angels in My Life

“You are an angel!” I often exclaim when people show up at the right time in the right place. Today two such ‘angels’ knocked on our door. The first was a new neighbor – that I didn’t know I had – who needed milk for his coffee. It turned out that this newlywed young man had experience in painting houses. When he entered Friday afternoon, Levi, our family home-improver, was about to finish changing the floor tiles in our son’s bedroom. We had been postponing changing our cracked floor tiles for many years, as it just seemed to unmanageable a project to move out all our accumulated stuff from each room. This year we just jumped into the cold water, trusting that somehow we would get through it. After having carried all the exorbitant amount of stuff – mainly Torah books – out of our son’s bedroom, it became clear that the room needed a serious paint job, and if we didn’t do it now we probably wouldn’t do it for at least another ten years, if ever. In order to avoid living one more day with all my son’s stuff in the living room, the painting had to happen ASAP, and it turned out with amazing Divine providence that our new neighbor was available to get the job done right away. The second ‘angel’ was a 10-year-old-son of a different neighbor who asked if he could collect our garden clippings for his goats. Now, my husband had just been pruning various bushes, and I had not managed to hire anyone to pick up after him, so this boy was truly an angel sent to clean up our garden in honor of Shabbat. Do I really mean to say, that these various wonderful people are actual angels? What is an angel anyway? In Hebrew, the word מַלְאָךְ /malach – ‘angel,’ also means ‘messenger.’ Angels are messengers of G-d, sent into this world to accomplish a particular mission. The word malach is mentioned 67 times in the Tanach. The first instance was the angel that Hashem sent to Hagar to help her return to her mistress, Sarah. Every time I step into my car, I pray to Hashem to send His protective angels to help me arrive and return home safely!

Avraham’s Angelic Visitors

Each angel can only perform one errand (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 50:2). This is because the identity and essence of each angel is the mission for which it was created. If two angels would carry on the same mission, they would become one angel, while one angel performing two missions would become two angels (Maharal, *Bereishit* 18:2). This principle is exemplified in the opening of this week’s parasha when Hashem sends Avraham three angels in the form of men:

ספר בראשית פרק יח פסוק א וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו הַשָּׁם בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:
(ב) וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָץ לְקִרְאָתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיֵּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה:
 “Hashem appeared to him in Alonei Mamrei, while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of day. He lifted his eyes and behold, three men were standing beside him, he saw and he ran towards them from the entrance of the tent, and he prostrated himself to the ground” (*Bereishit* 18:1-2).

These ‘men’ visiting Avraham were angels, who each were charged with a particular mission: One to bring the good tidings [of Yitzchak’s birth] to Sarah, one to overturn Sodom, and one to heal Avraham. Raphael, who healed Avraham, went from there to save Lot (Rashi, *Bereishit* 18:2). If an angel can only perform one mission, how can the same angel both heal Avraham and save Lot? According to Rashi, healing and saving is the same kind of mission (*Siftei Chachamim* Ibid.). Although many kinds of angels expire as soon as they have completed their mission, the

ministering angels, who have multitudes of underlings, continue throughout the ages performing their particular kind of mission. The Talmud explains: “Who were the three ‘men?’ – Michael, Gavriel, and Raphael. Michael came to bring the tidings to Sarah; Raphael [which means ‘healer of G-d’], to heal Avraham; and Gavriel [‘strength of G-d’], to overturn Sodom. But is it not written, “The two angels came to Sodom in the evening” (*Bereishit* 19:1)? – Michael accompanied him to rescue Lot (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia* 86b). Thus, there is a discord between the Talmud and Rashi whether it was Michael or Raphael that went to rescue Lot. Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that the mission of each of the three ministering angels visiting Avraham was according to their particular *midah* – character. The mission of Michael, the angel of *chesed* – ‘kindness,’ came to tell Sarah the good news, although according to nature she was unable to conceive; and to save Lot, although he didn’t deserve it. Raphael, the angel of *gevurah* – ‘severity and judgment’ – came to overturn Sodom, whereas Raphael – whose mission is *rachamim* – ‘compassion,’ came to heal Avraham. If you have any doubt whether the three ‘men’ visiting Avraham indeed were Michael, Gavriel and Raphael, our Torah verse alludes to this identification as follows: וְהִנֵּה שְׁלוֹשָׁה *v’hine shelosha* – ‘behold three’ has the numerical value of 701. This equals the accumulated numerical value of, אלו מיכאל גבריאל ורפאל – These are Michael, Gavriel and Raphael (*Ba’al HaTurim* Ibid.).

Do Angels Have Free Will?

“He ran towards them from the entrance of the tent.” Why did Avraham run towards the angels rather after them, as we would expect when the men were passing by his tent and Avraham wanted to invite them in. Since angels don’t have a backside, therefore, Avraham would not be able to run after them. Luckily, his tent had four entrances; therefore, it is possible that he ran towards them to the opposite entrance (Toldot Yitzchak). It makes sense to me that angels don’t have a back, since all our unrectified negativity and doubts reside in the back. Because angels do not have free choice, they need no backside as they can only move forward to fulfill their mission. For the same reason angels are depicted with only one straight leg. “*Their legs are a straight leg*” (*Yechezkiel* 1:7). They do not need two legs to move forward, since they are created to reach their goal automatically. Being static, they only need one leg as a stand, without even a knee to bend. If angels don’t have a free choice then how could they possibly come to sin as was the case with the two angels in our parasha who came to Sodom? They were punished for being arrogant when they exclaimed, “For we are destroying this place” (*Bereishit* 19:13). Consequently, Gavriel was forced to admit that ultimate power is only in Hashem’s hand as it later states, “Hasten, flee there, for I will not be able to do” (Ibid. 22). This is the angels’ punishment because they said (verse 13): “For we are destroying,” and they attributed the matter to themselves (Rashi Ibid.). According to the Midrash, they were punished and left to wander the world for 138 years. They were permitted to return only at the time of Ya’acov’s dream. This is why the verse first says that the angels were ascending and only afterwards descending (*Bereishit* 28:12); (*Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah* 68:12). Since angels do not have a *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), they cannot sin by deliberately opposing the will of G-d. However, only the Creator is perfect, in contrast to the imperfect creation. Since angels are also creations of G-d they are imperfect like any other creation even the highest intellectual beings. They too in some way conceal the ultimate reality. Therefore, although an angel cannot sin, it can nevertheless make a mistake or at least present a distortion of the truth (Rabbi Yeshaya Halevi Horowitz, *Shnei Luchot HaBrit (Shelah)*). When an angel is sent on a divine mission, it is meant to fulfill that duty while putting its own identity completely aside. Although the angels who were sent to destroy Sodom did indeed fulfill their mission, they spoke as if they themselves were going to destroy the city. This was a distortion of the truth of their role, due to their imperfections. Thus angels can sin only through mistaking their mission or trying to reach levels of revelation where they do not belong ([Rabbi Eibshitz, Ya’arot Devash, vol. I lecture 2](#)).

Are there Female Angels?

In the Torah, angels never appear as women. The angels that visited Avraham were all male, and no angel is ever referred to in Scripture as any gender other than the masculine. One of the ten categories of angels are even called אישישׁים/*Ishim* – ‘men’ (Rambam, *Mishna Torah, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah* 2:7). However, we would expect the spiritual world to reflect the male and female creatures of the physical world according to the spiritual rule: “Hashem has made one corresponding to the other” (*Kohelet* 7:14). In essence, the angels are completely genderless and therefore do not engage in procreation. This is why the Torah was not given to the angels, as its laws such as the prohibition against adultery do not apply to them (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 88b). If the angels are neither male nor female, then why are they depicted as males in the Torah? According to Kabbalah, male and female is relative. The male is essentially the influencer, whereas the female is the receiver. The same being may be considered male in one world and yet female in relation to another higher world (*Zohar* part two, 4a). Since the angels are sent down into this world to perform a mission of enacting a particular divine influence they are described as males in this world, while they would be female in relationship to Hashem. Even if some may claim that the “two women, with the wind in their wings” described in [Zechariah 5:9](#) are an example of female angels, yet, these women in Zechariah’s prophetic vision are not called angels, but נשישׁים/*nashim* – “women.” By contrast, the angel that Zechariah was speaking to is called מלאך/*hamalach* – “the angel.” Similarly, there are those who claim that the angel Laylah in charge of conception and birth is a female angel. Although the name, Laylah, has a female ending and its function is apparently feminine, it is described in the male gender, לַיְלָה שְׁמוֹ/*Laylah shemo* – “Laylah is **his** name” (*Babylonian Talmud, Nidah* 16b). Nevertheless, I was happy to find the mention of female angels in the writings of the Arizal who asserts that also among the angels there are two aspects, male and female. The female angels are the powers of judgment in holiness. These female angels sing praises to Hashem including the Song of the Sea and they are rectifications for the Shechina (Divine Female Indwelling Presence). Whenever we perform a mitzvah below it creates an angel above: “He who fulfills one mitzvah, acquires for himself one angel-advocate...” (*Pirkey Avot* 4:11). Certain mitzvot create female angels whereas others create male angels (*Me’il Hakadosh* on *Etz Chaim*, gate 16). The female angels are part of the entourage of the angel Sandalphon (Arizal, *Pri Etz Chaim*, Gate of Prayer chapter 7). Sandalphon is considered the soulmate of one of the main awesome angels called Metatron (*Sefer Emek HaMelech* gate 14 chapter 95). These two angels are possibly the two כְּרוּבִים/*Keruvim* – ‘Cherubs’ that resided upon the cover of the Ark of the Covenant (*Pardes Rimonim* gate 23 chapter 11). The angels Metatron and Sandalphon are the twin souls – male and female that unite Heaven and Earth. Thus, we women can be comforted to know that the feminine is not absent among the heavenly hosts.