**BELIEF IN ANGELS**

*Sura Nisa/Ayat 136:*

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O you who believe! Believe in God and His Messenger (Muhammad) and the Book He has been sending down on His Messenger in parts, and the (Divine) Books He sent down before. Whoever disbelieves in God, and His angels, and His Books, and His Messengers, and the Last Day, has indeed gone far astray (1)

*Sura Bakara/Ayat 285:*

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The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers; each one believes in God, and His angels, and His Books, and His Messengers: "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers (in believing in them)." And they say: "We have heard (the call to faith in God) and (unlike some of the people of Moses) obeyed. Our Lord, grant us Your forgiveness, and to You is the homecoming."(2)

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It is narrated on the authority of Yahya b. Ya'mur that the first man who discussed about Qadr (Divine Decree) in Basra was Ma'bad al-Juhani. I along with Humaid b. 'Abdur-RahmanHimyari set out for prilgrimage or for 'Umrah and said: Should it so happen that we come into contact with one of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) we shall ask him a bout what is talked about Taqdir (Division Decree). Accidentally we came across Abdullah ibn Umar ibn al-Khattab, while he was entering the mosque. My companion and I surrounded him. One of us (stood) on his right and the other stood on his left. I expected that my companion would authorize me to speak. I therefore said: Abu AbdurRahman! there have appeared some people in our land who recite the Holy Qur'an and pursue knowledge. And then after talking about their affairs, added: They (such people) claim that there is no such thing as Divine Decree and events are not predestined. He (Abdullah ibn Umar) said: When you happen to meet such people tell them that I have nothing to do with them and they have nothing to do with me. And verily they are in no way responsible for my (belief). Abdullah ibn Umar swore by Him (the Lord) (and said): If any one of them (who does not believe in the Divine Decree) had with him gold equal to the bulk of (the mountain) Uhud and then, it (in the way of Allah), Allah would not accept it unless he affirmed his faith in Divine Decree. He further said: My father, Umar ibn al-Khattab, told me: One day we were sitting in the company of Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) when there appeared before us a man dressed in pure white clothes, his hair extraordinarily black. There were no signs of travel on him. None amongst us recognized him. At last he sat with the Apostle (peace be upon him) He knelt before him placed his palms on his thighs and said: Muhammad, inform me about al-Islam. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: Al-Islam implies that you testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and you establish prayer, pay Zakat, observe the fast of Ramadan, and perform pilgrimage to the (House) if you are solvent enough (to bear the expense of) the journey. He (the inquirer) said: You have told the truth. He (Umar ibn al-Khattab) said: It amazed us that he would put the question and then he would himself verify the truth. He (the inquirer) said: Inform me about Iman (faith). He (the Holy Prophet) replied: That you affirm your faith in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and you affirm your faith in the Divine Decree about good and evil. He (the inquirer) said: You have told the truth. He (the inquirer) again said: Inform me about al-Ihsan (performance of good deeds). He (the Holy Prophet) said: That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don't see Him, He, verily, sees you. He (the enquirer) again said: Inform me about the hour (of the Doom). He (the Holy Prophet) remarked: One who is asked knows no more than the one who is inquiring (about it). He (the inquirer) said: Tell me some of its indications. He (the Holy Prophet) said: That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress and master, that you will find barefooted, destitute goat-herds vying with one another in the construction of magnificent buildings. He (the narrator, Umar ibn al-Khattab) said: Then he (the inquirer) went on his way but I stayed with him (the Holy Prophet) for a long while. He then, said to me: Umar, do you know who this inquirer was? I replied: Allah and His Apostle knows best. He (the Holy Prophet) remarked: He was Gabriel (the angel). He came to you in order to instruct you in matters of religion. (3)

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**THE INVISIBLE REALM OF EXISTENCE**

Belief in the invisible realm of existence and the beings inhabiting it is another essential of Islamic faith. Since our sensory powers are limited, it is not wise to deny outright the existence of realms beyond our senses. Also, we know so little about existence that what we do know is considerably less than what we do not. Our sciences are still in their “childhood,” and the future will witness dazzling scientific discoveries and developments.

Sciences are supported by theories and develop through trial and error investigation of those theories. Numerous “established” facts were once considered false, and many other “established” facts are now known to be incorrect. We accept unquestionably, and without any scientific basis, the existence of many things. Since the beginning of time, most people have believed in the existence of the spirit and angels, jinn and Satan. So, it would seem to be more scientific to allow their existence in theory and then investigate it. Denying their existence is unscientific, insofar as such a judgment or conclusion must be based on concrete proof. No one can prove and therefore scientifically claim the non-existence of the invisible realm of existence.

Many physical qualities, such as heat and cold, and such abstract qualities as beauty and charm, and feelings of joy, sorrow, and love, can be experienced directly and measured to some degree. Materialists attribute these to some biochemical processes in the brain, and some scientists (like psychologists and psychiatrists) still try to explain them by natural or physical laws. However, our non-physical side (namely, our feelings, beliefs, potentialities, desires, and so on that vary enormously from individual to individual, although everyone has the same material elements) is too profound to be explained by physics, chemistry, or biology.(4)

# THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGELS

Angels are created from what the Qur’an calls nur.3 We cannot exactly know whether *nur* is light or something like light. The Qur’anic word for angel is *malak*. According to its root form, *malak* means “messenger,” “deputy,” “envoy,” “superintendent,” and “powerful one.” The root meaning also implies descent from a high place. Angels are beings who build relations between the meta-cosmic world and the material one, convey God’s commands, direct the acts and lives of beings (with God’s permission), and conduct their worship in their own realms.

Having refined or subtle bodies of *nur*, angels move very rapidly and permeate or penetrate all realms of existence. They place themselves in our eyelids or in the bodies of other beings to observe God’s works through our or their eyes. They also descend into the hearts of Prophets and other beloved servants of God to bring them inspiration.

Some animals, like honeybees, act according to Divine inspiration, although science asserts that all animals are directed by instincts. But science cannot explain what an instinct is and how it occurs. Scientists are trying to discover how migrating birds find their way, and how young eels hatched in the rivers of Europe find their way to the ocean, which is their native water. Even if we attribute this to information coded in their DNA, this information is assuredly from God, Who knows everything, controls the universe, and assigns angels to direct the lives of such creatures.

Everything that exists, either as an individual or as a species, has a collective identity and performs a unique, universal function. Each flower displays a superlative design and symmetry and recites, in the tongue of its being, the Names of the Creator manifested on it; the entire earth performs a universal duty of glorification as though it were a single flower; and the heavens praise and glorify the Majestic Maker of the universe through their suns, moons, and stars. Even inert material bodies, although outwardly inanimate and unconscious, perform a vital function in praising God. Angels represent these immaterial bodies in the world of the inner dimensions of things, and express their praise. In return, these immaterial bodies are the angels’ dwellings and “mosques” in this world.

There are various classes of angels. One class is engaged in constant worship; another worships by working also. These working angels have functions that resemble human occupations, like shepherds or farmers. In other words, the earth’s surface is like a general farm, and an appointed angel oversees all of its animal species by the command of the All-Majestic Creator, by His permission and Power, and for His sake.

The earth’s surface is also an arable field where all plants are sown. Another angel is appointed to oversee all of them in the name of Almighty God and by His Power. Lower ranking angels worship and glorify Almighty God by supervising particular plant species. Archangel Michael, upon him be peace, is the head of all these angels.

Angels who function as shepherds or farmers bear no resemblance to human shepherds or farmers, for their supervision is purely for God’s sake, in His name, and by His Power and command. They observe the manifestations of God’s Lordship in the species they are assigned to supervise, study the manifestations of Divine Power and Mercy in it, communicate Divine commands to it through some sort of inspiration, and somehow arrange its voluntary actions.

Their supervision of plants, in particular, consists of representing in the angelic tongue the plants’ glorification in the tongue of their being. In other words, they proclaim in the angelic tongue the praises and exaltations that all plants offer to the Majestic Creator through their lives. These angels also regulate and employ the plants’ faculties correctly and direct them toward certain ends. Angels perform such services through their partial willpower and a kind of worship and adoration. They do not originate or create their acts, for everything bears a seal particular to the Creator of all things, meaning that only God creates. In short, whatever angels do is worship, and it is therefore not like the ordinary acts of human beings.

The Majestic Maker of this huge palace of creation employs four kinds or classes of laborers: angels and other spirit beings; inanimate things and vegetable creations, which are quite important servants of God working without wages; animals, which serve unconsciously in return for a small wage of food and pleasure; and humanity, which works in awareness of the Majestic Creator’s purposes. Men and women learn from everything, and supervise lower- ranking servants in return for wages in the form of rewards here and in the Hereafter.

The first class consists of angels. These beings are never promoted for what they do, for each has a fixed, determined rank and receives a particular pleasure from the work itself, as well as a radiance from worship. That is, their reward is found in their service. Just as we are nourished by and derive pleasure from air and water, as well as light and food, angels are nourished by and receive pleasure from the “lights” of remembrance and glorification, worship and knowledge, and love of God. Since they are created of *nur*, *nur* sustains them. Even fragrant scents, which are close to *nur*, are a sort of enjoyable nourishment for them. Indeed, pure spirits take pleasure in sweet scents.

From their jobs performed at the command of the One Whom they worship, their actions for His sake, their service rendered in His name, their supervision through His View, their honor gained through connection with Him, their “refreshment” found in studying His Kingdom’s material and immaterial dimensions, and their satisfaction in observing His Grace and Majesty’s manifestations, 56 *An Introduction to Islamic Faith and Thought* angels receive such elevated bliss that we cannot even begin to comprehend it. In addition, only they can perceive this bliss.

Angels do not sin or disobey, for they do not have an evil-commanding soul that must be resisted. They have fixed stations, and so are neither promoted nor abased. They are also free of such negative qualities as envy, rancor, and enmity, and from all lusts and animal appetites found in human beings and jinn. They have no gender, do not eat or drink, and do not feel hunger, thirst, or tiredness. Praise, worship, recitation of God’s Names, and glorification of Him are their nourishment, as are light and sweet fragrances.

Besides those deputed to represent and supervise various species on the earth and present their worship to God, there are four Archangels and other angels having special nearness to God. There are other groups of angels known as *Mala’-i A‘la* (the Highest Council), *Nadiy-i A‘la* (the Highest Assembly), and *Rafiq-i A‘la* (the Highest Company), as well as angels appointed to Paradise and Hell. Angels who record a person’s deeds are called *Kiramun Katibun* (the Noble Recorders), and 360 angels are responsible for each believer’s life. They guard their charges, especially during infancy and old age, pray for them, and ask God to forgive them. Other angels help believers during times of war, attend assemblies that praise and glorify God, as well as study meetings held for God’s sake and to benefit people.

God Almighty is powerful over everything. Even though He can guard everyone by Himself, He may appoint angels to guard His servants. To earn such a guardianship and the company of angels, one has to willingly do what is good and establish a close relation with God Almighty. One must have strong belief in God and all other pillars of faith, never abandon regular worship and prayer, lead a disciplined life, and refrain from forbidden things or sinful acts.

Belief in angels has many benefits. For example, it provides us with some sort of peace and removes our loneliness. The inspiration breathed by angels exhilarates us, enlightens us intellectually, and opens new horizons of knowledge and thought. Awareness of the continuous company of angels also helps us abstain from sin and improper behavior.(5)

**Angels and Jinn In This World**

Angels and jinn can assume any form or shape and appear in this world. Here, we observe movement from the visible to the invisible: water evaporates and disappears into the atmosphere, solid matter becomes a liquid or a gas (steam), and matter becomes energy (nuclear fission). Likewise, we observe movement from the invisible to the visible: gases become fluids, evaporated water becomes rain (as well as snow or hail), and energy becomes matter. Similarly, intangible thoughts and meanings in our minds can appear in the tangible form of letters and words in essays and books.

In an analogous way, such invisible beings as angels, jinn, and other spirit entities are clothed in some material substance, such as air or ether, and then become visible. According to Imam Shibli, God may allow them to assume a form when they utter any of His Names, for this functions like a key or a visa enabling them to assume a form and become visible in this world. If they try to do so without God's permission, by relying on their own abilities, they are torn into pieces and perish.

We read in Qur'an 19:17 that the spirit God sent to Mary (the mother of Jesus), and whom Muslim scholars say is Archangel Gabriel, appeared before her as a man. When Gabriel came to Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, with Revelation or God's Messages, he usually came as a warrior, a traveler, or a Companion named Dihya. For example, he came as a warrior on horseback following the end of the Battle of the Trench and told the Prophet, upon him be peace: "O Messenger of God, you have taken off your armor but we, the angels, have not yet done so. God orders you to march upon the BanuQurayza." Once he came as a traveler dressed in white and, in order to instruct the Companions in religion, asked the Prophet such questions as: What is belief? What is Islam? What is ihsan (excellence or perfection of virtue)? When is the Day of Judgment?

Like angels and jinn, Satan (who is a jinn) can appear in different forms. It is narrated that before the Battle of Badr, he appeared to the Qurayshi leaders as an old man from Najd and advised them. Likewise, a Companion guarding the spoils of war caught a disguised Satan trying to steal some items. Satan entreated the Companion to release him, which he did—twice. On the third time, the Companion tried to take him to God's Messenger. But Satan appealed: "Release me, and I'll tell you how you can secure yourself against me." The Companion asked what that was, and Satan replied that it was the Verse of the Throne (2:255). When informed of this, God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, commented: "That wicked one is a liar, but on that occasion he told the truth." [1]

The Qur'an relates that a group of jinn listened to God's Messenger recite the Qur'an and, when they returned to their people, said: "O people! Surely we listened to a Book that has been revealed after Moses, affirms what precedes it, and guides to right and the Straight Path" (46:30). The sura continues with what they thought about what they had heard. Some Traditions tell us that the Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, recited parts of the Qur'an and preached his Message to the jinn.

Jinn can also appear as snakes, scorpions, cattle, donkeys, birds, and other animals. When our Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, accepted the jinn's oath of allegiance in the valley of Batn al-Nakhla, he wanted them to appear to his community either in their own form or in other agreeable forms, not as such harmful animals as dogs and scorpions. He warned his community: "When you see any vermin in your house, tell it three times: 'For God's sake, leave this place' for it may be a friendly jinn. If it does not leave, it is not a jinn. If it is harmful, you may kill it."

The jinn who gave allegiance to God's Messenger promised him: "If your community recites the basmala (In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate) before anything they do and cover their dishes, we will not touch their food or their drink." Another Tradition says: [When you have relieved yourselves] do not clean yourselves with bones and dried pieces of dung, for they are among the foods of your jinn brothers.(6)

[1] The Companion did not know that the man was Satan

References:

**(1) 4:136/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(2)2:285/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(3) Sahih Muslim, The Book of Faith, Hadith #0001**

**(4)Ünal, Ali. Living in the Shade of Islam. Somerset, NJ: Tughra, 2009.**

**(5)Ünal, Ali. Living in the Shade of Islam. Somerset, NJ: Tughra, 2009.**

**(6)byFethullahGülen on 14 September 2001. Posted in** [**Essentials of the Islamic Faith**](http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/faith/essentials-of-the-islamic-faith)