

## **Guardian Angels What are they saying?**

### **Angels Among Us?**

It's fun to imagine there are angels among us, invisible entities surrounding us, watching us, guiding us, protecting us. But are they really external entities, or a projected metaphor of something inside ourselves? On my own wedding day I had a mysterious encounter with a man I often think may have been an angel in disguise. It was during the reception afterward that I noticed him, out of place, standing in the center of the room. Our eyes met and there was moment of mutual recognition as I quickly turned away to contemplate what I had just seen. My first thought was that this short old man was a bum off the streets who had merely come to crash our wedding party. His hair was as long and gray as his Santa Claus like beard. His suit was a mix-match of plaids which appeared to have been collected at the Good Will. His face, though kind, was dark and weather worn. Yet there was something else, something that didn't jive with my first impression. His hair and beard were well groomed and kept. His suit of clothes, though lacking in style, was well fitted, neat and clean. That particular day, December 17th, 1988, had been the coldest day of the year. I recall just how cold it was because the church building had been undergoing renovations at the time, which meant a brisk outdoor walk from the sanctuary to the reception hall, through the chilled wind mixed with flurries of snow. Certainly this man had not been out in this sort of weather, wearing a suit, and just happened to notice an opportunity to come in from the cold. No, his presence had to have been intentional and premeditated. But nobody knew him, nor had a notice of our wedding been placed in the newspaper. How did he know? Why was he there?

Then there was that peculiar sparkle in his eye, that inner wisdom that seemed somehow familiar with me, and that simple smile that appeared as much a blessing as a greeting. My heart melted when I thought of this. "Who cares if he is a bum crashing our party?" I asked myself, "I'll greet him and make him feel welcome." By the time I turned back around, however, he was gone. I quickly scanned the room but caught no trace of this mysterious fellow. My heart filled with regret that I had not acted more spontaneously, that I had not immediately moved to make him welcome, that those few moments I had turned away were enough for him to realize he wasn't welcome. Or, perhaps, I have thought over the years since, I wasn't meant to speak with him. It was enough that I had seen him, and that beneath his rough and unflattering exterior, I recognized something kind and beautiful. Perhaps this was his wedding gift, the message this angel had been sent to deliver, that there is something deeper, something hidden beneath the surface, learn to recognize it and make it feel welcome whenever you have the opportunity.

Plenty of our other guests also witnessed the man, though no one ever spoke to him. Nor does anyone seem to recall him coming or going. We've since watched our wedding video several times, including video from the reception, but can't find any indication he was ever present. Was he an angel? Was he an otherwise invisible entity, who had become manifest in that moment to offer me a little divine guidance on a such an

important day in my life? Or was he just a bum off the streets coming in for a few moments of warmth? It's impossible to answer any of these questions with certainty. I am convinced, however, in some way, at least, he was indeed an angel, whether a human angel or a heavenly angel, he taught me a very important lesson about mystery, spontaneity, kindness and inner truth.

The point is, there are angels among us. Whether they happen to be real entities, or spiritual beings, is unimportant. Anytime you receive divine insight, through another person, a meaningful dream, a good book, a thought in your head or a peculiar feeling, you have been touched by an angel. The word itself comes from the Greek word *angelos*, which literally translates as *messenger*. The idea is that mortals cannot comprehend the Divine in its fullness, thus, God must pass on information through a special agent, through an angel. This likely stems from the ancient Hebrew belief that a person who saw God would die, which is why Moses was only allowed to see God's rear end.

In fact, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word which eventually came to be translated "angel," is, *mal'akh*. However, translator and mystic, Stephen Mitchell, reminds us that the word was originally translated "*manifestation*." [Genesis, xxiv] So what came to be considered an angel was originally a manifestation or representation of the Divine. An angel wasn't necessarily an individual entity separate from God, but a part of God. In the story of Creation, for example, Yahweh and humanity are in direct contact with each other, walking and talking together. There's even an old hymn about it;

*I come to the garden alone,  
While the dew is still on the roses;  
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,  
The Son of God discloses.*

*And He walks with me,  
And He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there  
None other has ever known.*

This has always been one of my favorite hymns because it expresses the similarity between the Divine and myself. It emphasizes the humanity of God. In such a relationship no intermediary is necessary. Later on, however, after the idea God cannot be seen becomes more prominent in Hebrew tradition, the "manifestation of the Lord," became "the angel of the Lord." So, in a sense, the concept of angels works to separate us from the Divine. We are no longer in direct communication with the Divine. Instead there must be some mediator, an angel, scripture, a priest, prophet or Pope.

I like to think it's still possible for us to communicate directly with the Divine by entering the garden inside our hearts where we walk and talk with God through our own intuition. In her book, *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong comments on Friedrich

Schleiermacher's idea that when we "*come to the limit of reason, feeling would complete the journey to the Absolute...*"

When he spoke of "feeling," Schleiermacher did not mean a sloppy emotionalism but an intuition which drove men and women toward the infinite. Feeling was not opposed to human reason but an imaginative leap that takes us beyond the particular to an apprehension of the whole. The sense of God thus acquired arose from the depths of each individual rather than a collision with objective Fact.[350]

It is my belief, then, that angels are the outward manifestation of God, meant to remind us of our secret inner garden where we must go to encounter the Divine. Outwardly, in the objective world, the world of opposites, of Yin and Yang, we cannot see the Divine in its wholeness. Remember that consciousness operates through the process of separation and division. So, as we fall under the spell of *Maya*, as the Hindus call it, the illusion of things, the illusion that reality is a duality rather than a unity, we need angels to remind us of the unity in all apparent things, of the Divine, the One, the All. That is, we need outward signs, symbols and experiences that drive us inward, to the Garden of God. So, as I said, in this sense, angels are everywhere, all around us because everything is a part of the Whole, of the Divine, and is therefore a manifestation of God, an Angel of the Lord. As with the stranger at my wedding, we merely need to look beneath the surface of things to see them, to hear the messages they come to deliver.

### **Divine Watch Dog**

I would like to focus our attention now on a particular and popular aspect of angel lore, the idea of the *guardian angel*. This is simply the idea that each of us has an invisible presence watching over us, protecting us, as we make our way through life. This concept is very close to the notion of the *daimon* James Hillman makes so much of in his book *The Soul's Code*.

The soul of each of us is given a unique daimon before we are born, and it has selected an image or pattern that we live on earth. This soul-companion, the daimon, guides us here; in the process of arrival, however, we forget all that took place and believe we come empty into this world. The daimon remembers what is in your image and belongs to your pattern, and therefore your daimon is the carrier of your destiny.[8]

Hillman borrows this term from Plato's *Republic* in which the philosopher talks about individual souls choosing their fate before they are born. "*When all the souls had chosen their lives according to their lots, they went before Lachesis [lachos = one's special lot or portion of fate]. And she sent with each, as the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice, the genius [daimon] that had been chosen.*"[Ibid.45] So, for Plato and Hillman,

the guardian angel represents that invisible thing that inexplicably keeps our lives on track. Remember, Hillman posits the idea that each of us is born complete, that, like the might oak contained within the tiny acorn, each of us has everything we need to achieve our lot in life.

Does this mean we have no choices, that everything we do and experience is meant to happen, and we are nothing more than pre-programmed automatons? I don't think this is the case at all. That's why we need a daimon, our guardian angel to help keep us on track. In my own story, for example, beginning as early as six or seven years old, I wanted to grow up and become a minister. There was no explanation for this. My family wasn't religious. We didn't go to church. I wasn't even exposed to religion. In fact, I didn't even know the appropriate term to use. I began by saying I wanted to grow up and become a "priest," probably a word I picked up from watching *The Flying Nun* on TV. My mother explained the marital differences between priests and ministers, so I began using the term minister instead. Even though, at the time, I thought all girls had cooties, I must have unconsciously known it was also part of my destiny to marry and have children.

By the time I entered my teen years I had forgotten all about the ministry. Nevertheless, after dropping out of high school, I reluctantly and miraculously ended up in college to receive theological training, almost against my own will. Upon graduating I was ordained as a Southern Baptist Minister, again, against my own desires. Even then I knew I didn't really belong to the Southern Baptist and hoped my ordination would cause some controversy among other ministers. I fantasized they might come to my ordination service, ask me a few controversial questions, as they are allowed to do, and would find me unfit for ordination. I would have been relieved if this would have happened, perhaps because I thought it would let me off the hook, it would have meant I wasn't suppose to be a minister after all, even though everything kept pushing me in that direction. I was, however, ordained without a hitch. The only people attending my ordination were those who believed in me as a minister.

After a semester and a half I dropped out of Southern Seminary, realizing, no matter what I was meant to do, it didn't include such an intellectually stifling and shallow environment. So, I spent the next decade working in an absolutely miserable business, television news. I wonder now, however, is it really the business that's miserable, or was I just miserable in it? Was I out of place? Television news is not my lot in life. It's odd that during all those years I never took my certificate of ordination off my wall, even though I was no longer connected with the Southern Baptist and was actually somewhat embarrassed that I could have ever been so deeply involved with them in the first place. Yet, I felt my ordination was real, that, in some way, I had an obligation to it and could not just forget about it.

Shortly after leaving the TV business I became the minister of Clifton Unitarian Church and have been quite content ever since. I currently work outside the church as well, as a corporate video producer, but I consider the ministry my real work. Down the road I hope to devote even more time to it because I now realize it's me, it's my lot, my destiny. This is what I'm meant to do. It took me a while, but I finally get it. Perhaps now I won't be as

difficult for the powers that be to work with.

Still, the question remains, how does a high school drop out end up in college when he doesn't even want to be there? How could I have been ordained against my own wishes? Why couldn't I take that certificate of ordination off my wall? Why was I so miserable doing something else? How, after all this, did I manage to come full circle and end up fulfilling the wish of that six year old little boy? Has my guardian angel been watching over me all along, guiding me, making sure I stay on track?

This idea of guardian angels as protectors of destiny is consistent with angel lore and mythology. Back to the creation story, you'll recall there were two trees in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. After expelling humanity from paradise, Yahweh placed two angels with flaming swords along the path to the Tree of Life to guard, not the Tree, but the path to the Tree. This, again, indicates that angels guard the way in which we approach life. They are guardians of destiny.

Carl Jung also noticed an archetypal quaternity that sometimes shows up in mythology. You may recall in Christian mythology a symbol that has four faces, an eagle, ox, lion and an angel. This is quite similar to the Egyptian god Horus surrounded by four sons, three of which have animal heads, and one human head. Four is a symbol of completion, just as there are the original four elements, earth, wind, fire and water, the four corners of the earth, north, south, east and west, only four bases to DNA, and Jung's four functions of the psyche, thinking, sensation, feeling and intuition. So the angel, the fourth face, becomes a symbol of completion, as if to help us complete our life's work, our individual destiny.

If this seems too fatalistic, too predetermined, remember the words of Henry Miller, "*Destiny is what you are supposed to do in life. Fate is what kicks you in the ass to make you do it.*" Of course we have choices. But having choices doesn't necessarily negate the possibility of having a calling as well. "*Fate shuffles the cards and we play,*" Schopenhauer once said. In his work, *An Apparent Intention of the Fate of the Individual*, Schopenhauer also wrote that as we look ahead at our lives things often seem confusing and uncertain, but there's a certain age when one is able to look back on his or her life and realize that it seems as orderly as a well written novel. "Who wrote this novel?" he asks. Could it have been penned by our guardian angel?