

PART ONE

*Angels* IN THE  
TRADITIONS OF ABRAHAM

There is an angel who watches over people, even in the dark. This is Yode'a, the Angel of Losses. He watches lives unfold, recording every detail before it fades. This angel has servants, and his servants have servants. Each of the angels carries a shovel, and they spend all their time digging, searching for losses. For a great deal is lost in our lives.

—RABBI NACHMAN

It is certain that spirits have no bodily shape, and yet scripture, in accommodation to us, describes them under the form of winged Cherubim and Seraphim; not without cause, to assure us that when occasion requires, they will hasten to our aid with incredible swiftness, winging their way to us with the speed of lightening.

—JOHN CALVIN

Angels include

the assembly of the Intelligences and Souls in the heavens;  
yet their action is not confined to the celestial world.

They fulfill many functions in the daily religious life of man  
as well as preserving the order of the cosmos.

It is ultimately the angels who guide man  
to his final beatitude and who thereby  
bring to fruition the purpose of creation.

—SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

*One*  
WHERE WE LEARN ABOUT ANGELS

There is a certain greatness in the angels; and such power,  
that if the angels exert it to the full, it cannot be withstood.

And every man desireth the power of the angels, but their  
righteousness every man loveth not.

—ST. AUGUSTINE

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, Tenth edition, an angel is “a spiritual being superior to man in power and intelligence; also an attendant spirit or guardian.” This definition has been boiled down from much lore and legend. We often think of angels as winged creatures with supernatural powers that assist us when we are in danger. Where did that image of wings come from? And why would these beings look out for our benefit if they are superior to us? How much contact is possible between humans and these creatures? These are just a few of the questions to be explored throughout this book.

For the purposes of this particular exploration, I define angels as spiritual beings created by God to carry out God's work in the universe and to aid humanity. They are spirit rather than material as we are; yet they are not the same as God. Neither are they to be confused with spirits of people who have died. They were created with specific

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characteristics and to perform specific functions. However, we have no way of knowing all of their traits or functions. We must confess, along with the earliest thinkers and philosophers, that the angelic world is for the most part beyond human comprehension. One difficulty in providing a clear definition of “angel” is that there are various nuances and differences in the definitions we find even within the faith traditions.

Another definition that becomes important in the study of angels is that of **demon**: “an evil spirit; a source or agent of evil, harm, distress, or ruin; an attendant power or spirit.” Within the traditions of this study, a demon is generally believed to be an angel that fell out of God’s favor through some act of rebellion or evil. In Jewish and Christian cosmology especially, demons and angels are closely related, because at one point they were both on the side of good and performed God’s will. In the context of this book, “demon” lies within the angelic realm of spirits; a demon is in fact a fallen angel.

Two other terms that will appear a few times in the pages to come are **occult** and **magic**. Again, we turn first to the standard dictionary definitions. **Occult**: “not revealed, secret; matters regarded as involving the action or influence of supernatural or supernormal powers or some secret knowledge of them.” Because angels are spirits and belong to realms that are outside the ordinary knowledge of humans, information about them has often been regarded as secret knowledge that humans could know only if revealed to them by a special messenger or by

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special means. Many legends about angels involve secret knowledge being given to certain humans so that they could understand more about the spiritual realm. This secret knowledge was supposedly passed down through the generations orally or was written in special books. The Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic scriptures—all given to human beings by God, what we refer to as “revelation”—contain information about angels.

Yet, often people have looked beyond the orthodox, sacred texts to other sources that claimed to contain secret knowledge of the heavens and heavenly beings. Through the centuries, certain individuals have become practitioners of secret knowledge, claiming to have the ability to communicate with spirits, whether angels, demons, or spirits of the dead. They also might seek supernatural powers, working through spells or incantations that they supposedly learned from spirits. In this way, occult practice would merge with **magic**, which is, according to Webster’s, “the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces; an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source.” Generally, these practitioners have worked on the fringes of the orthodox faith communities. If not condemned altogether by religious authorities, they have been approached with care.

Angels, demons, occult, magic—depending on which sources we choose to study, these terms could take us in any number of directions. It’s important to decide which sources to use and why.

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The fact is, most of what we “know” of angels is legend. When we look at the sacred books of the three Abrahamic faiths, we find but a handful of angel names, the two constants being Michael and Gabriel. In other sources, however, I found more angel names than I could count, something I found puzzling, because the only angel names given in the Old Testament are Michael and Gabriel—and Raphael, if you’re using the Catholic Old Testament, which includes the Book of Tobit.

So where did all these other names come from? And what about the angels I discovered that were linked to the zodiac, to the hours of the day, to the four directions, and so on? Where did information end and legend begin?

### FOUR TIERS OF INFORMATION

There are four general categories of information on angels, depending on your view of credibility and authority. For most “people of the book”—those whose faith is founded upon sacred scripture—the source of information on spiritual matters is quite important. And for all people of religious belief, a certain level of tradition and lore make up everyday belief and practice. This is especially true when it comes to the unseen world, with its heavens and angels.

#### *Tier One*

We start with what are considered the sacred scriptures of each faith. In Judaism this is the Tanakh, more commonly

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called the Hebrew Bible, which consists of Torah (books of Moses), Nevi'im (prophets), and Ketuvim (writings). Because the Hebrew Bible is nearly the same in content as the Christian Old Testament, to avoid confusion I will list the individual books here. Thus, the Tanakh consists of the following:

TORAH The Five Books of Moses	NEVI'IM The Prophets	KETUVIM The Writings
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
Leviticus	1 Samuel	Job
Numbers	2 Samuel	The Song of Songs
Deuteronomy	1 Kings	Ruth
	2 Kings	Lamentations
	Isaiah	Ecclesiastes
	Jeremiah	Esther
	Ezekiel	Daniel
	(minor prophets)	Ezra
	Hosea	Nehemiah
	Joel	1 Chronicles
	Amos	2 Chronicles
	Obadiah	
	Jonah	
	Micah	
	Nahum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

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In Christianity, the Hebrew Bible is embraced as Scripture but renamed the Old Testament, then joined with the New Testament to form the Christian Bible. The New Testament consists of these books:

Matthew	Colossians	2 Peter
Mark	1 Thessalonians	1 John
Luke	2 Thessalonians	2 John
John	1 Timothy	3 John
Acts of the Apostles	2 Timothy	Jude
Romans	Titus	Revelation
1 Corinthians	Philemon	
2 Corinthians	Hebrews	
Galatians	James	
Ephesians	1 Peter	
Philippians		

The Catholic (and Anglican and Orthodox) branches of the Christian church accepted some writings as Scripture that were later rejected by the Protestants. These books are known as the Apocrypha and are added to the Old Testament:

Psalm 151	Azariah
Wisdom of Solomon	Epistle of Jeremiah
Susanna	Prayer of Manasseh
1 Maccabees	4 Ezra or 2 Esdras
2 Maccabees	Judith
3 Maccabees	Additions to the Book of Esther
4 Maccabees	1 Esdras
Sirach	
Baruch	
Tobit	
Bel and the Dragon	

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Throughout this book, I will refer to texts primarily according to the names of individual books: the book of Genesis or of Tobit or of 1 Corinthians, rather than solely by “Old Testament,” “Apocrypha” or “New Testament” because in many cases I will be discussing a passage that applies to both the Jewish and Christian communities.

In Islam, the Qur’an is the sacred text. Not only is the Qur’an sacred but also its very language—Arabic—is considered a primary component to the sacred character. To a devout Muslim, any translation of the Qur’an is not as viable as the Arabic Qur’an. The form of Arabic used in the Qur’an has become classical Arabic—understood by any literate Arab in any country of the world.

To say that these holy books are the sacred canon of their respective faiths does not mean that they are free of outside influences. For instance, Jesus refers to Beelzebub as the prince of demons in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Most of us assume that he is naming the devil; we know, though, that Beelzebub was the name of a Syrian god that had, apparently, been absorbed into Jewish thought at the time, obviously not as a god but certainly as an entity. In the study of angels and demons, the lines between cultures and belief systems are crossed constantly.

### *Tier Two*

The second tier of sources is comprised of the traditional teachings. In Judaism, the Talmud integrates the Torah

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with the oral tradition. Talmud essentially adds explanation of the Torah or, as one Jewish writer put it: "Torah says keep the Sabbath, Talmud tells how!" In fact, the essence of "Torah" is not just the sacred text but the many teachings about it, and this education, which is of utmost importance in Judaism, has been systematized for centuries to the effect that any self-respecting Jew would not attempt to simply pick up the Scriptures and absorb their meaning without instruction from another person (or at least a text by another person). It is nearly impossible to separate Scripture from the layers of rabbinical interpretation of the Scripture. In addition to this are the decades of tradition and various instructions about life, that come under the general term of Midrash. Not only were many of the beliefs about angels and demons generated from these teachings and traditions, but also some of the people we would consider to be the early angel experts were accomplished scholars of the Talmud.

For Christians—Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican—church teaching forms much of the faith tradition. This includes not only official documents and decisions of the church but also its general history, including biographies and writings of saints and mystics. The nine choirs of the angelic hierarchy so standard to church teaching came out of the writings of Dionysius, whose identity is uncertain but whose claims were affirmed by Thomas Aquinas and other theologians.

In Islam, the Hadith are made up of the writings that concern all that the Prophet Mohammad said and did.

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These writings include what God said through the prophet as well as what the prophet said himself. The Hadith concern all aspects of life, helping to form (along with the Qur'an) the basis for religious law. Although there are many references to angels in the Qur'an, the narratives about angels are often more elaborate in the Hadith.

### *Tier Three*

Each of these three faiths has its mystical branch, and angels show up often in writings of the mystics. Numerous mystics and saints, of all three traditions, have had direct experience with angels. And in each of these traditions, some mystics have journeyed, in one way or another, to heaven and observed its structure and inhabitants.

Although mystics have often remained enigmatic to people in the mainstream, they have commanded respect in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities, and their explorations have done more to expand our view of angels than have the traditional theologies. In Islam, the Sufi scholars have been responsible for most of the study of angels. In Christianity, the mystics have dared to report their dreams and visions, which have kept alive our belief in angels long after science and technology disavowed them.

And the mysticism of Judaism has generated more material on angels than can be surveyed easily. Angels figure regularly in all three of its major mystical traditions—

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Merkabah, Kabbalah, and Hasidim. Without the writings from Jewish mystics, the angel lore would be slim indeed.

### *Tier Four*

This fourth level of angel information is complex, because the worldviews of the three faiths do not quite match up in regard to what is and is not acceptable as having merit and religious approval. Generally speaking, Tier Four involves sources of information that lie outside scripture, religious tradition and teaching, and mysticism. Because the fourth tier in Christianity is so well delineated, let's begin there.

Because devout Christians consider Scripture and church teaching to be paramount in authority, anything lying outside those two spheres is often suspect. And anything clearly forbidden in Scripture is taken, if not literally, then at least very seriously. So when the Bible forbids sorcery, divination, or astrology, each of which has involved interaction with angels and demons to some extent—the lines have been drawn clearly. From earliest times in Christendom, people who practiced sorcery, divination, and astrology were considered to be acting in opposition to God. Anyone who called upon, or conjured, angels or demons was in direct conflict with orthodoxy. Those who turned to the stars for help were also acting outside orthodox practice. Thus, “secret knowledge”—information about the spirit world that came from anything but Scripture and tradition—was by definition outside the bounds of approved practice. And so, within Christianity,

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a Tier Four source of information is prohibited and not sanctioned as a means of research.

Islam is almost as strict, but the mystical experiences of Sufism sometimes also entered the realm of magic. What might occur in the personal experience of a mystic could appear more magical than orthodox. For instance, what if a Sufi master, while in meditative trance, encountered an angel that took him on a journey and revealed to him specific information not covered by the Qur'an, the Hadith, or other Sufi experiences and writings? This would appear to fall within the realm of secret knowledge (occult); secret knowledge might enable a person to exercise power that other humans, in their relative ignorance, would not have, and superhuman powers are a form of magic. In this sense, the knowledge gained through this Sufi's experience would be mystical, but it could possibly go beyond mysticism and thus would fall within Tier Four. Yet a true Sufi practitioner was also by definition a devout Muslim, led by holy motives and always intent upon submitting himself to God's will. Most likely, Islamic authorities would not chastise the Sufi for his experience; at the same time, they would expect him to refrain from turning his experience into a divine revelation for all believers to follow.

In Judaism, the distinctions between faith and magic were blurred early on. Partly this was because to Jews scholarship and knowledge of the holy were highly revered. A practice that grew out of one's study of the Talmud bore merit in and of itself. From earliest times,

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knowledge of spiritual realms was considered the jurisdiction of the Talmudic scholars. Some of these scholars obtained knowledge that enabled them to communicate with angels (and, not as commonly, demons). As with Sufism, a Jewish mystic was planted firmly within the faith to begin with, and this assumed a certain level of wisdom and discretion. Out of respect for scholarship, religious authorities were hesitant to dismiss out of hand any practice that lay outside the mainstream. Joshua Trachtenberg throws some light on this in his *Jewish Magic and Superstition*:

The Bible had pronounced an unqualified condemnation of sorcery. The Talmud, while maintaining this fundamental attitude, pursued its customary function of clarifying and classifying Jewish law, and so broke up the all-inclusive category of sorcery into several divisions, establishing varying degrees of guilt. Two main types of forbidden magic were distinguished: that which produces a discernible, material effect . . . and that which only creates the illusion of such an act or its effect . . . ; or, as a further observation defined them, the one operates without the aid of demons, the other requires their assistance. The practitioner of the first type merits the Biblical penalty of death; the second is forbidden but not so punishable. Still a third kind of magic, "permitted from the start," involved the use of "the Laws of Creation," a term which was later interpreted to signify the mystical names of God and the angels.

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The use of the names of angels constituted a wide-ranging practice within Judaism, from simple and superstitious folk magic to the more serious and powerful communication with both angels and demons. The rapid production of angel names in noncanonical writings was fueled largely by the many Jewish legends pertaining to their power. In Jewish traditions, to know the name of a spirit was to exercise significant power over it. If a person were to learn the name of an angel or a demon, he could call it forth—or, conjure it—and it had no choice but to come. One of the most famous legends has King Solomon conjuring a demon and demanding to know the names of the other demons who were persecuting the temple workers, as well as the names of the angels who had power over those specific demons.

And so, inevitably, in each tradition the discussion of angels sometimes merges with the discussion of magic and superstition. This is true in all three faiths, but the volumes of angelic/magical material in Judaism can be attributed to the fact that it is the oldest of the three. Rabbinic teaching did not condone magical practice, just as the Church Fathers forbade it in Christianity; yet Jews and Christians alike succumbed to superstition and were at times tempted to look for supernatural means to deal with life's hardships. This was particularly true during the Middle Ages, when magical thinking ran amok and so many people sought magic spells and charms to exert some sort of control over their circumstances.

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In any religion there are fringe movements—this is as true today as it was centuries ago. In any religion there are groups of people who claim secret knowledge that is unattainable by most other people. Sometimes fringe movements involve interaction with the entities of the spirit world, whether angels, demons, or spirits of the departed dead. Devout Jews, Christians, and Muslims are usually wary of such interaction, and their leaders often warn against the dangers of seeking supernatural power that does not issue from prayer and personal holiness.

In searching the Internet or the typical bookstore for material on angels, you are much more likely to stumble upon non-traditional material than on traditional. That is, I would categorize much of this material as Tier Four. For instance, there are a number of popular books and well-developed Web sites that claim to help you communicate with your angel guide or that provide a hodgepodge of information with little or no reference to sources. Thus you might read about the Archangel Gabriel on the same site that offers ritual prayers for conjuring him.

But in the mainstream of the Abrahamic faiths, angels are God's servants, not ours, and good angels are obedient to God, whereas fallen or evil angels (demons) are those who try to grab glory for themselves, who do not obey God, and who are antagonistic toward God's creation. They do not exist so that we can conjure them to do our bidding or to help us succeed in our endeavors. They are by no means on the same level as God, and, although we may include angels in our prayers—in the same way we

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include the saints or our departed loved ones—they are not the focus of our prayers or other devotions. Thus, in researching this book, I have relied chiefly on the sacred scriptures and on the traditions (more accurately, on authorities on the traditions), avoiding almost all occult sources while acknowledging some of the better-known occult sources in the Encyclopedia.

### A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SOURCES

For sacred stories and texts in the Jewish tradition, I have used the Tanakh—the Jewish Scriptures as translated and published by the Jewish Publication Society. For stories and texts from the Christian tradition, I have used the Catholic Bible, New Revised Standard Version. I used Mohammad Picktall’s English translation of the Qur’an for the sacred text of Islam, although I know that any English translation is a far cry from the Arabic text, in both literary form and spiritual power.

Once you move beyond the sacred scriptures of these three faiths, and the traditional teachings about them, material about angels is found in several categories of literature.

**Apocryphal** texts are those that were ultimately rejected for inclusion in a collection of sacred Scriptures. There are various reasons for exclusion—heretical doctrine and questionable authorship being the main two—but not all apocryphal books were considered such all the time and by all groups. Thus, we have several books in the Catholic

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Bible that were excluded from both the Hebrew Bible and the Protestant Bible. The one book of this set that has had the most impact on our belief in angels is the Old Testament book of Tobit, which gives us a warm, human story about the angel Raphael.

There are numerous apocryphal “acts” and “gospels,” and some of them have references to angels. For instance, the Gospels of both Bartholomew and Nicodemus describe in detail Jesus’ descent into hell after he was crucified and before he was resurrected; Bartholomew especially describes angels and demons. The Gospel of Peter gives a specific account of angels descending and ascending at the Resurrection and assisting Christ out of the grave.

A **pseudepigraphical** text is a work that is attributed to a historical figure—in the case of Judaism, a work done under the name of a patriarch. Several of these works have contributed significantly to angel lore, such as the books of Enoch, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the Testament of Solomon.

One important subset of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings is the apocalyptic literature. We have visions of the end of time ascribed to everyone from Abraham to Peter. Apocalyptic literature includes some combination of the following: end times and the destruction of the world, the final struggle between good and evil, the last judgment, and the establishment of God’s kingdom. The very nature of apocalyptic writings guarantees that angels, demons, and heavenly realms will be involved.

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Here are just a few examples of some apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works that have contributed to angel lore:

**Ascension of Isaiah:** This book (more likely two different works) describes Isaiah's battles with the devil, and his ultimate martyrdom. And it gives us a detailed description of Isaiah's journey through the seven heavens and his subsequent discussions with angels in those heavens.

**Apocalypse of Paul:** claims the apostle Paul as its author and describes his extensive tour of heaven and numerous conversations with angels.

**Book of Jubilees:** talks of the angel Michael's explaining to Moses aspects of the Book of Genesis; also explains how angels assisted people on earth.

**Books of Enoch, 1–3:** Written at different times and by different authors, these writings give accounts of Enoch's vision of heaven. 2 Enoch, also called The Book of Secrets of Enoch, gives an account of the fall of Satan and his angels; it also describes Enoch's journeys through the seven heavens and his encounter with God and the angels.

**Gospel of Bartholomew:** gives an account of Jesus' descent into hell following the crucifixion and contains much information that is forced from Satan about the realms of angels and demons.

**The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness:** from the Dead Sea Scrolls, gives intricate instructions for battling against the "sons of darkness, the army of Belial."

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**Testament of Solomon:** This claims King Solomon as its author, and is an early primer on demonology, naming many demons as well as the angels who have power over them.

Why even acknowledge sources whose origins are questionable and which have never been accepted within an orthodox faith tradition? These writings are important because, even though they did not become part of sacred canon, they did influence belief within the traditions. For instance, the Jewish belief that the patriarchs became angels upon entering heaven goes directly to the chronicles of Enoch, in which the man who “walked with God and was no more” went to heaven and was transformed. Our most common concepts of heaven have developed from accounts of journeys through the celestial realms and into the presence of God and the angels. So although we know that the books of Enoch were in fact written by various authors at different times and even in different regions, something about their message has rung true for centuries, and it has become part of our collective vision about heaven and its inhabitants.

I have attempted to sort out for readers what beliefs have been more enduring within the traditions. I have tried to point out when the material consists less of doctrine and more of legend or is even occult in origin. Many contemporary sources on angels do not make such distinctions, probably because the lines are so blurry. To people who believe that all the beliefs are mere mythology anyway, such distinctions are not important. And to people