

Why Angels are Flying in America

A Perspective on the Popularity of Angels in the 1990s

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When the movie *Angels in the Outfield* came out last summer in which a band of guardian angels really guard their inept baseball protégés, I knew that angelmania had gripped the nation, if perhaps a little too cutely. But we're blessed in this remarkable country in which you can market anything that angels are more seeable than the rash of astral savants we listened to in the channeling boom of the 1980s and probably less inscrutable than the Eastern guru imports of the 1970s. Anything that's seeable is marketable, which is why our new age bookstores are well-stocked with books, cards, pins, calendars, and other angel paraphernalia.

In actual fact, neither channeling nor angelmania nor devotion to sages are fads. Interest in speaking with spirits and blissing out with angels is as old as the human experience and in a deep sense we should feel buoyed that these archetypal encounters are with us again. For one, the theological history of most cultures shows a persistent interest in charting the angelic hierarchies and describing their divinely-appointed roles in the cosmos.

Some might remember the stirring lines of Rainer Maria Rilke in his *Duino Elegies*, that "beauty is only the beginning of a terror we can just barely endure" and "every angel brings terror." If an angel "suddenly held me to his heart, I would dissolve there from his stronger presence." We're just now in the midst of experiencing this beautiful terror of the angelic presence, as Rilke privately foresaw back in 1912.

So surely angels flying in America is evidence of a positive future even if it requires a refashioning of our Western scientific view of "reality" and a fair amount of personal transformation to accommodate the widening vista. We just need to pick our

way carefully through this latest evidence that as a culture we are making our way across a significant threshold in the evolution of consciousness. But first, let's visit the statistics.

The 1990s may prove to be the Decade of Angels, just as the 1980s was the Decade of Channels, and the 1970s the Decade of Gurus. A December 1993 poll of 500 adult Americans revealed surprising statistics regarding angels: 69 percent believe in the existence of angels (up from 50 percent, according to a 1988 Gallup Poll); 55 percent conceive of angels as "higher spiritual beings created by God with special powers to act as his agents on Earth;" 46 percent believe they have a personal guardian angel; 32 percent have personally felt an angelic presence; and 49 percent believe in the existence of fallen angels or devils. "Suddenly the heavenly host is upon us and in this New Age a grass-roots revolution of the spirit has all sorts of people asking all sorts of questions about angels," quipped *Time* in a year-end cover story on the subject.

"Angels are appearing everywhere in America," announced *Newsweek*, which also published a feature story on angels the same week as *Time*. They noted the subject's burgeoning marketability—"where angels walk, fearless merchandisers eagerly tread." Angels, according to mainstream journalists trying to make sense of an otherwise astonishing development, are attractive because they require no religious or denominational commitment, they are the rapturous answer to the "homelessness of secularity," and a good argument against the void of death, as our materialist culture has conceived it for centuries.

A growing collection of angel books are best-sellers, competing with the likes of John Grisham and Michael Crichton for megasales. There is Sophy Burnham's *A Book of Angels* and *Angel Letters*; *Ask Your Angels* by Timothy Wyllie, Alma Daniel, Andrew Ramer; Malcolm Godwin's *Angels, An Endangered Species*; Joan Webster Anderson's *Where Angels Walk: True Stories of Heavenly Visitors*; a trio of angel studies by Terry Lynn Taylor including *Messengers of Light*, *Guardians of Hope*, *Answers from the*

Angels; Eileen Elias Freeman gives us *Touched by Angels*; there is *Angels and Aliens*, by Keith Thompson; and much more on the way.

Since it was first published in 1975, Billy Graham's *Angels: God's Secret Agents* has sold 2.6 million copies. Angels gained prominent, even iconic, expression on Broadway in 1993. Tony Kushner won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize (and 9 Tony awards) for his Broadway play *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*, which was about homosexuals, AIDS, and the nation's spiritual hypocrisy. In the play, an angel appears on stage greeting a young man dying of AIDS and declares: "Greetings, prophet; the great work begins: the messenger has arrived." And in addition to *Angels in the Outfield*, we've seen cinematic angels in such recent cult classics as Wim Wender's *Wings of Desire* and *Faraway, So Close*.

Why are the angels flying in America now in the mid-1990s? Just look at what else is happening around us at an accelerating rate. Many people are having Near-Death Experiences (and writing best-sellers about it) in which their sense of life, its purpose, and their destiny are turned inside out and for the better. Many are brought to the threshold of death at unusually early ages through the immunological collapse of AIDS; when you die in your 30s and 40s, you're bound to think about death a lot more deeply than if you're 80. UFO sightings are increasing, bizarre reports of alien abductions and cruelty are surfacing, and something is creating the most amazing crop circles in the English wheatfields.

Unusual weather patterns, geological turmoil, political instability, rampant gang warfare, ethnic cleansings, droughts, floods, storms, the return of old diseases like tuberculosis and the Bubonic Plague—it all suggests heightened uncertainty, a radical reshuffling of life on Earth, and, one ardently hopes, a positive transformation. Everywhere you look there are clear signs that we are walking wide-awake across the Threshold, almost eagerly entering a domain where once only mystics and madmen stumbled. Perhaps the English pundit Samuel Johnson had it right in his famous quip:

“Depend on it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”

Maybe we should amend the good Doctor’s bromide and say when you know you’re going to be *transformed* in two weeks’ time, it wonderfully concentrates your attention on the important issues. According to social historian Michael Grosso in his new book, *The Millennium Myth: Love and Death at the End of Time*, we are surrounded by “Endtime anomalies.” The weight of Western prophecy suggests that when a time of profound change is upon us, “unusual phenomena will attend the catastrophic breaking up of reality and anomalies will appear that indicate a new model of reality is in the offing,” Grosso writes.

Allegorically speaking, it’s been such a long time since the beatitudes of the Garden of Eden that we’ve pretty much forgotten what Heaven on Earth was like. What Grosso heralds as a new model of reality may in fact be a startling *remembering* of reality as it really is. After all, mystics often say that enlightenment is a kind of apocalyptic awakening of memory. Most of our Western esoteric traditions, for example, have always taught that the macrocosm equals the microcosm, which means, the nature and design of the cosmos is replicated in the organization of the human being. Astrology is right: we are made of the stars and they live and weave their celestial life inside us, whether it’s through our organs or psyche.

I think the angels are flying in America today to remind us of this old connection. With the greatest delicacy and love, they’re giving us the number for phoning home. It’s as if the mere presence of angels is saying this: “The reality that is breaking apart everywhere you look is a false reality, so why worry? The new reality that is forming is your once and future true reality.” I think that’s part of the message the angels are bringing us.

Message-bearing, it turns out, is at the heart of the angelic mission. It’s encoded in the very name of angels itself: *malaha*. According to the well-known scholar of

Aramaic Biblical traditions, Rocco Errico, Ph.D., a Santa Fe resident and director of the Noohra Light Foundation here in town, *malaha* means “messenger.” Angels bear the messages of God, they are God’s clear thoughts, personifications of the divine Mind, says Errico. “The angel is a representation or substitute for God but not God itself. The scriptures warn us against *worshipping* the angels, putting them up in shrines in place of God. The angels are God in disguise, nothing but God.” The paradox, Errico points out, is that God, which is ineffable, invisible, and unknowable, needs angels because we have a better chance of seeing them and thereby getting the message.

Errico is both a scholar and a mystic because he speaks of angels out of his own life-transforming experience with them. Now 58, when he was about 20 and just beginning his ministry as a pastor, Errico was troubled by the way all the early Christian traditions disagreed with one another. Pouring over his books, Errico was startled when the room filled with a bright white glow. He knew it was an angelic presence even though he couldn’t make out the details. “It was terribly dramatic for me because the angel then spoke to me clairaudiently. I heard its voice in the room, not in my mind, as if a person had just walked in and started talking.”

What the angel told Errico determined the course of four decades of study, writing, and public speaking and it set him straight about the conflicting religious philosophies. “None of them are right,” the angel said. “Follow me.” Ever since, Errico has been able to count on the angel guiding him in his work *from within*. He’s never seen that bright white glow again but that sense of inner knowing and certainty that the angel first gave him has never left. “The angel’s simple but unexpected advice set the tone for my scholarship, intuition, and inner trust at a crucial age. I’ve always been confident that this angel is still there, guiding me from within.”

This core experience also gave Errico an idea about the true reality of angels. Sure, it seemed at first that the angel appeared before him, gave him advice that he didn’t know beforehand, and thus seemed by all accounts to be a spiritual being outside of him.

Errico doesn't think so anymore. "The angel is a part of each of us, the finer essence of ourselves that is cosmically oriented. The angel is a projection of what people call the Higher Self or Overself. When you meet a guardian angel, you're really meeting the *malaha* or messenger of the part of you that is always God."

It's the same with the archangels such as Michael and Gabriel, whose names are back in circulation on angelic rosters. "I see these as spiritual archetypes, doorways into deeper areas of the human self which, remember, is nothing but God. Seeing angels is a good sign. It shows us that we're getting closer to home." At the end of our conversation, I asked Errico to tell me more about guardian angels, but for that he deferred to his long-time friend, Richard Hill, who manages the Noohra Light Bookstore on St. Michael's Drive. Before moving here a year ago from Southern California, Hill spent the last 18 years working as a popular but iconoclastic metaphysical teacher. And, like his colleague Errico, angel experiences are nothing new to him.

In fact, Hill first saw angels as a child, as probably many people have. They didn't have any messages for him, but they were fun to play with. It probably helped that his parents hung a framed picture over his bed of two children crossing a rickety bridge escorted by a lovely angel. "That's how angels usually appear to children in our culture, but I think as you get older and start to release all your belief systems, then the angels can start giving you a more straightforward experience of their energy essence and take you into a perception of them beyond our traditional forms."

That's precisely what happened with Hill about a decade ago. Two pillars of light suddenly appeared in his room one evening and spoke to him, mind to mind. "We are the angels of the crystalline light but one of us isn't," they said enigmatically. Fortunately Hill had some experience in metaphysical matters and soon caught on to the veiled message. He studied the light pillars carefully and realized that one was "living light" radiating from the inside out but the other pillar was "dead light" and though it had an external radiance it was essentially dark within. "This one was not the true spirit of the

angel,” Hill reflects today. “It was a test for me to learn how to discern living from nonliving light, the real angel from the masquerading spirit. Once I did the false angel vanished. So this living angel taught me to see what the living light is, what the radiance of God’s messenger truly is. It’s absolutely awesome.”

Most of us will probably not have to undergo this kind of occult discernment, but Hill’s experience is not unlike something we are likely to encounter. That is the meeting with our two guardian angels. An ancient quasi-Biblical text called the *Shepherd of Hermas* explicitly states that every human being has a good angel for guidance and a dark angel who tries to seduce us into committing evil. Similarly Jewish tradition teaches that each of us is accompanied by two angels as we walk through life. The *maggid* to our right comes from the Side of Holiness and inspires us to perform good deeds while the *maggid* on our left nudges us towards evil acts and is from the *Sitre Ahre*, the Other Side. How can you tell them apart? On the forehead of the good angel God’s Name burns like a white flame, but it burns like a black flame on the forehead of the dark angel. The point is, as Hill cautions, you have to learn how to tell them apart.

Even so, both angels have a deep purpose in our life. God creates the light angel to be its divine messenger within a human life, but *we* create the dark angel as the residue of our passionate experience, Hill says. Passionate in this sense means the cumulative effect of our psychological and emotional life, our desirings as a human being. In Hill’s view, the creation of the dark angel takes place over many lifetimes as a personified karmic accumulation. The popular mens’ movement guru and renowned poet Robert Bly has a similar idea when he speaks of the Shadow as the “long bag we drag behind us.”

Yet another name for the dark angel is the Guardian on the Threshold which is basically the monster within projected outwards that then scares us when we awaken to the inner planes. In fact, the Tibetan teachings on the death experience also talk of wrathful deities confronting us in the journey immediately after death advising us that they are products of our mind.

Hill's point is that, as distressing as it might sound, we put the dark angel in our path because we need to redeem it before we can move on. That's actually what a lot of initiation experiences are about and it's what happens in deep inner work along the lines indicated by the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung. It's also where the light angel comes in. "The good guardian angel is a messenger straight from God acting on our behalf and embodying the way our God-Self appears to us," says Hill. "It offers us the direct route to divinity, back to our true reality. The startling fact is that all of this happens *inside* your own auric field. Both angels are part of you, but it's a much larger you than you probably thought there was. Angelic encounters are a truly subjective experience but I mean this in the purest sense."

Anyway, there's good news in all this, Hill says. "The pure thoughts of the good angel can help you dispel the contents of your dark angel and open up a doorway for you into the Light." You can see angels in winged form or you can experience them as pure energy, which might be a sensation in your body or a subtle aroma, sound, or thought. It doesn't particularly matter what form they take; their presence in whatever guise is the message. So what is this message, I ask Hill, who is clearly warming to the subject. "You know, all of the angelic kingdom exists within you; none of it is separate from who you are as a cosmic being living on Earth. The point of it all, I think, is to help us reclaim our divine *memory*. The message of the angel is this: remember where you came from and who you are."

The funny thing is, says Hill, when you start to get the message, the message-bearers start to go away. When you remember that all the angels are actually part of you as a whole human being, you don't seem to see them anymore except occasionally. But the winged messengers do leave a calling card, Hill adds. "The end result of encountering angels is a direct inner knowing. *You know* without anyone having to tell you." You don't doubt it; you just know as if the angel had somehow become part of your mind, like it did for Rocco Errico. And that's a lot of knowing for after all what does an angel know?

Probably a great deal about what's going on in the cosmos, who's doing it, and why. Isn't this what we all secretly aspire to know at the end of the day? What else could we know?

“So that awesome angelic knowing becomes ours,” says Hill with a near angelic smile. “Just think how it would be if all of us had this direct knowing—what a blessing it would be for the world.” Indeed, it would be angels not only flying in America, but walking through America, down every street, through every supermarket, and in every encounter between people. Maybe that's the simple message the angels are bringing us in the 1990s.