

Angels,

Non-Corporeal, Physical or Alien?

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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The Torah (Gen. 18:2) relates an episode that Avraham is visited by three guests. The text and later commentaries make it clear that these guests are most unusual and extraordinary. They are not human beings although they appear to be such in every which way. Yet, in spite of appearances they are not human. They are angels.

Now, here is where our inquiry must begin. The Hebrew word for “angel” is Malakh. It simply means messenger. Anyone can be a messenger be it from G-d or from a mortal human. These Malakhim are G-d's personal envoys. Yet, just who they are, what they are and where they come from is the topic of much discussion in religious, theological literature. Religious philosophers are at their preposterous best when they try to speak with authority about the existence and nature of a group of entities with which they have absolutely no first hand information or experience whatsoever.

Talk about Malakhim abound, but is any of it real? Just because a teaching can be found in a book; does this make the teaching to be so, just because it is written in a book? Would it not be better to learn about a subject from one who has actual hands-on knowledge and experience with it? What do religious thinkers know about the actual nature of G-d's messengers? What can they tell us; what do they really know and how did they come about to know these things?

For centuries since Biblical times, there has long been a tradition passed down through the prophetic, and then later Merkava and Kabbalistic schools teaching how to commune directly with G-d's messengers, the Malakhim. Those who have access to these teachings and who make use of them discover that they can indeed commune with the Malakhim today just as the ancients did a long time ago.

Modern Kabbalistic literature goes to extremes trying to define and describe the various classes of angels. One mystically philosophical opinion rigidly held to today (that actually stems from Greek philosophy) is that angels are entirely non-corporeal entities with absolutely no physical substance whatsoever. They are thought to be entirely cerebral entities with no type of body at all. When they would make their appearance to the likes of Avram they merely cloaked themselves in a body for the moment and then upon completion of their mission, disrobe and return to their natural non-corporeal matter-less “non-forms.”

While the description here of how these entities appear corporeal and then seem to disappear is accurate, we still have to understand what exactly it is that they are doing, not in light of

the modern beliefs, which are philosophically based, but rather upon older beliefs which are based on much more experiential knowledge. The older Kabbalists (ref. Sefer Ohel Mo'ed & Hilkhot Malakhim from Sefer Sodei Razia of Ba'al HaRokeah) did not teach that angels are completely non-corporeal. Most understood that angels also had material bodies, but not of any material that we may recognize.

According to the ancient beliefs all physical matter is divided into the four elements: fire, air, water and earth. We know these forms by their modern names as states of matter, earth=physical, water=liquid, air=gaseous and fire=plasma. The old literature states that while we human beings inhabit bodies made of all four types of matter, angels inhabit forms made up of only the air and fire forms. In other words, sentient "angelic" life-forms inhabited bodies made of gaseous and plasmic elements. This would be a life-form totally different from our own and totally inconceivable according to standards of modern science.

To think that there could actually exist sentient energy or sentient gas, each consisting of a molecular structure is far beyond our present limited understanding of sub-atomic physics. What kind of gas or what kind of plasma would these "bodies" consist of we cannot even begin to guess. All we can say, at least what we think we can say, is that their forms would be constructed from atomic material and molecular forms of which we are not presently aware.

Science now considers the existence of parallel universes to be reality. It is believed that these alternate universes may be inhabited by beings of unknown natures. Torah has long ago acknowledged this reality. What science discovers today, Torah revealed centuries ago. Science is (believed to be) discovered by humanity; Torah is revealed to humanity from beyond the present confines of our humanity.

Whether we speak from a scientific or Torah point of view, one thing is certain; we human beings are not alone! Whether it be in other places in our universe, or in a parallel universe, there are other sentient beings and while science postulates their existence Torah proclaims it. Rabbi Pinhas Horowitz, one of the top students of the Gaon of Vilna writes in his Sefer HaBrit, that such "extraterrestrials" may be "ba'alei sekhel u'medah" (masters of intelligence and science). More than just this, Torah teaches us that these other sentient entities travel regularly in space and between parallel worlds and come to Earth regularly. In fact, our Torah itself comes from one of these parallel worlds, and these other sentient entities are the ones who delivered it here. They are the Angels of the Torah.

These sentient "ba'alei sekhel u'medah" entities travel back and forth to our world using whatever forms of technology that is known to them and that works under the natural laws that rule their domain. Angels just do not pop in and out by magic. They are not omnipresent and omniscient like G-d is. If an angel has to get around it has to use some means of transport. Just what kind of vehicle this may be we should not jump to conclusions to consider that we may understand. After all, there are all too many movies and television programs made about topics like these, with each one presenting the imagination of its writers. Yet, these Hollywood fantasies only detract our minds from understanding the true awesome and ominous reality that surrounds us.

In modern times most Rabbinic and Kabbalistic literature consider Ezekiel's chariot and the horse drawn chariot that took Eliyahu to Heaven to both be symbolic imagery describing a

completely spiritual reality without any corporeal essence to it. However, as we have learned above, not everyone agrees with this rather didactic position. Being that angels do need some type of transport to get around because they are not omnipresent, it is possible to suggest and to consider that maybe Ezekiel's chariot and the chariot of Eliyahu are actual transportation devices and not mere symbolism or imagery.

Granted, they do not have to be flying saucers or other types of space ships as some modern authors like Von Daniken have suggested. However, just because these chariots are not flying saucers piloted by "little green men from Mars" does not mean that they are not another form of vehicle for either galactic or inter-dimensional transportation.

Just because we do not understand a thing does not give us the right to condemn a thing or deny the possibility of its existence. Prejudice is akin to ignorance; both block the mind from exploring possibilities no matter how strange they seem at first.

The Biblical record is clear that angels travel through some means of transportation device. Just what this means is anyone's guess. But no one should be so quick to dismiss the possibility of their possessing some highly advanced space/time transportation device. Yet, just what kind of transportation device would be used by beings whose makeup is considered to be only of gaseous material and plasma is beyond our present imagination.

Modern opinions wish to adamantly claim that all Biblical records of angelic visitations were exclusively visionary experiences and that there were absolutely no physical materialization at all. The majority of Torah opinions disagree with this view. The majority believe that non-corporeal angels corporealize to come down to Earth and then revert to their normal non-corporeal state as they leave the planet (ref. Judges 13:9-20). Maybe this is an accurate expression of their travels but this says nothing about their natural state in their natural habitat. Let me explain.

If I wished to travel to another world whose environment was absolutely alien to my natural being, there are two ways I could approach the trip. First, I could prepare a big enough space ship that would carry all my survival needs, including food, water, air and other necessities for life. I would need a ship of sufficient size for all this and have it powered by a large enough propulsion system. It would require a lot of work and effort. Yet, there is a second more convenient and economical way.

Let's say that I could detach my soul, my conscious essence from my physical body and enable it to transport itself through space and time at the speed of thought, a speed that is documented in science to be faster than light. If I were an entity formed exclusively of gaseous material and plasma such a separation might be the easiest of things. I could then project my consciousness to whatever place I chose and then then using the force of mind combine the molecules of the place to form for myself a body and form that is indigenous and most suitable for that environment which I am presently visiting. In this way I am fully adapted to the local terrain, and I have no need of a transport ship or for environmental support technology. I could fit in locally and even go about unnoticed and I could leave in the same way with the same ease as I came.

This second method is how the entities which Torah refers to as angels come to Earth. In most cases when these entities appear, as was the case with Avram and later with the parents of Samson, they are referred to as men. They look like human beings and act like human beings; they even partake of a meal with Avraham, eating human food. Their identities are somehow intuited, but if not for such “spiritual” sensitivity on behalf of Avraham and Sarah their true identities would have gone unnoticed, as it was in Sodom.

When messengers from G-d come to Earth from whatever domain, abode or planet of their origins, they use some means of transportation that transports their essence and enables that essence to materialize in a compatible form for life here on Earth. As such their perceived form would not be that of a gaseous or plasmic form or possibly just mere matter-less energy. Yet, while we see them as they are embodied here as human, there are those who are spiritually sensitive enough to perceive them in their original gaseous or plasmic forms prior to becoming corporeal. However, their present pre-corporeal gaseous or plasmic state by no way concludes or confirms that their indigenous form in their domains of origins is anything of the kind. Astral projections of astral bodies can be perceived, but this does not mean that the astral body does not inhabit a physical body somewhere else.

To us, an angel is a messenger sent for a reason to accomplish a purpose, but then what? Is the angel/messenger no more than a computer program, designed to mindlessly perform a function and that's it, then to return to the oblivion from which it came? Are angel/messengers no more than some super advanced form of “alien” artificial intelligence, merely programmed and limited by the boundaries of such programming? If this is so it would explain why some Sages have commented that angels have no free will. Yet, we see through Biblical example and later Midrashic teachings that angels do rebel against Heaven and challenge the accepted order.

Were the fallen angels spoken of in Genesis 6 programmed to fall? Did they not rebel against Heaven, apparently indicating that maybe they came to this conclusion of behavior on their own? In the Book of Daniel we read that the angel Gabriel was dispatched from Heaven to deliver a message to Daniel and he was prevented from carrying out his mission by another angel, the Angel of Persia. Who gave the Angel of Persia the mind and ability to block Gabriel, the angel/messenger of G-d. And then the story relates how Gabriel had to go and get Mikhael and then the two, Mikhael and the Angel of Persia “duked it out” until Mikhael won. Is this how computerized programmed technology is supposed to work? I would think that G-d the Great Programmer would have a better operating system!

I have often wondered how the fallen angels mentioned in Genesis 6 (the “sons of G-d”) were tempted to come down to Earth to take human wives for themselves (ref. Zohar and other midrashim). I can understand their being gaseous or plasmic entities which corporealized into human form; but how would this alone fill them with such an overwhelming sexual desire that it would cause them to completely abandon their original and natural state. This sound most peculiar. Since when would one species become so sexually enamored by the opposite sex of another species so completely alien and bizarre? When was the last time a human being fell in love with an octopus, a lizard or a vulture. We might view these animals as cute, beautiful or majestic, but we do not view them as mates. We do not want to marry them and sire children with them, leaving behind us everything it is to be human.

We learn from our own example. If we are attached to our sense of beings; would not higher life forms, like angels, be attached to theirs? Maybe these “sons of G-d” were no such gaseous or plasmic beings. Indeed, I have seen that Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchick, quoted a ninth century text of a Rabbi Yehuda that indeed the “sons of G-d” mentioned in Genesis 6 were actually physical “flesh and blood” humanoids who came to Earth from another planet. This makes the alien/angel connection even more obvious.

There is obviously more to these matters than meets the eye and much more than we mortal human beings presently entrapped here on our planet can possibly understand about the true nature and workings of the greater universe. RaMBaM, the Zohar and others enumerate an entire spectrum of different angelic races. Many are familiar with the more popular names of Cherubim, Seraphim, and Ofanim but there are at least seven other angelic species enumerated in most sources. We are told that there are infinite numbers of such messengers. How many divisions and races of them exist, we have no idea. Are some “smarter” than others? Are some merely artificial intelligences programmed for a mission that when complete ceases their existence? Are some intelligent and somewhat independent entities capable of rebellion and challenge?

Our knowledge of these beings who we have religiously come to call angels and messengers from G-d is severely limited and the true nature of their existence, while not contested is certainly still a great mystery. One thing is for certain, these beings are real, they do interact with us and that are as extraterrestrial as that word can be stretched. Many of us have had close encounters of the third and fourth kind and we are so totally unaware of it. What we are dealing with, we are totally unaware of. But dealing with something not of this Earth, we certainly are!

So, what conclusions can we draw? Not many! We know that we are not alone. We know that we are being watched (ref. Daniel 4). We know that they are all around us, even now! Just who they are, we do not know! What they are, we do not know. Why they are here, this we do know! They are G-d's messengers and their purpose is simple; they are here to carry out their respective missions and to perform the Will of G-d. This much is certain.

Maybe our entire Earth, and even our entire universe and even all existence is nothing more than one grand programmed function of the Divine Mind. Think about it, all existence is nothing more than the individual operations in the greatest of all computers. If this is true, I wonder, what is the purpose of the Grand Program? I wonder if we will ever know?

I guess we may have to wait around and ask Mashiah when he comes. And being that the Bible is clear that he comes with an army of angels, I wonder from where is it does he come from?