When you hear the word ‘angel’, what do you imagine? How are they shown in books and films? Do those depictions reflect how religious believers perceive them?

Muslims believe in angels because they are described in the Qur’an. In Sunni Islam this belief is one of the six beliefs (see 1.1).

**What is the nature of angels?**

*Malaiakah* are beings created by Allah to perform various tasks, particularly governing the universe and laws of nature. Unlike humans, angels have no free will and can only obey the commands of Allah.

There is a degree of mystery surrounding the nature of angels, which is why Muslims have varying opinions about them. Many Muslims believe that angels do not possess any fixed material form, and therefore cannot be seen with physical eyes. However, when they appear to human beings (such as in a vision), they appear in ways which can be imagined by them.

For instance, the angel Jibril (Gabriel) appeared to the Prophet Muhammad in the form of an ordinary human being, and to Isa (Jesus) as a dove.

> Praise be to God, Creator of the heavens and earth, who made angels messengers with two, three, four (pairs of) wings (Surah 35: 1)

In this verse, angels are described as having pairs of wings, but whilst some Muslims would read this literally, others would understand this to be a metaphor for having power or ability.

Angels are believed to help those whose faith is strong:

> As for those who say, “Our Lord is God,” and take the straight path towards Him, the angels come down to them and say, “Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised. We are your allies in this world and in the world to come.”

There are numerous angels in Islam; those that are considered higher in rank are called ‘archangels’. These include Jibril, Mika’il (Michael) and Izra’il (Israel).

**KEY TERMS**

 Kiraman katibin: two noble scribes, the angels who note good and bad deeds for every person

 *Mala’ikah*: the Arabic name for angels

 *Revelation*: communication from Allah, often through an angel

**Specification focus**

*Malaiakah*: the nature and importance of angels for Muslims; how angels Jibril, Izra’il and Mika’il are shown in the Qur’an and their significance for Muslims today.

**SUPPORT**

Read these verses carefully and answer the following questions:

- Who do the angels come down to visit?
- Why do the angels tell them to ‘have no fear’?
- What does this passage tell us about the nature of angels?
How are Jibril, Mika’îl, and Izra’îl shown in the Qur’an?

Jibril

Jibril has a very important role: when Allah wants to communicate with his prophets (see 1.4), he does so through Jibril. It was Jibril who said:

“We only descend (with revelation) at your Lord’s command – everything before us, everything behind us, everything in between, all belongs to Him.”

(Surah 19: 64)

Jibril delivered the whole Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad over 23 years, starting with the very first revelation ‘Iqra’ (‘Read!’) (Surah 96: 1) when he appeared to Muhammad in a cave called Hira. Jibril is called ‘the Trustworthy Spirit’ (Surah 26: 193), which shows how highly Allah values him.

Izra’îl

Izra’îl is known as the angel who controls death. He is referred to in the Qur’an in this verse:

“This shows that Izra’îl, as the ‘Angel of Death’, is responsible for taking the soul of every person and returning it to Allah. However, Muslims believe only Allah knows the time and place of every individual’s death. Izra’îl is not mentioned in the Qur’an by name, but this doesn’t mean he isn’t important. In Islam, it is essential to believe in all the prophets whether they are referred to in the Qur’an by name or not. The same applies to angels.

Mika’îl

Mika’îl has the responsibility of overseeing the provision and maintenance of life. Jibril and Mika’îl are mentioned by name in the Qur’an:

“If anyone is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, of Gabriel (Jibril) and Michael (Mika’îl), then God is certainly the enemy of such disbelievers”

(Surah 2: 97–98)

This passage shows that it is important to believe in the angels and to have respect for them. To oppose them is to oppose Allah.

Why are angels significant for Muslims?

- Belief in malaikah is the second most important article of faith for Sunni Muslims. Like Allah, their true nature might not be fully known but they play a crucial role in operating and maintaining the whole universe.
- All Muslims are required to hold angels in high reverence, which is why they say ‘peace be upon him’ after any angel is mentioned. In fact, when Muslims enter their own homes, they say ‘peace be upon you’ as a greeting to the angels.
- The Qur’an says that two angels known as kiraman katibin accompany each person – one on each shoulder – who take a note of good and bad deeds, which will be presented to Allah on the day of Judgement (Surah 82: 10–12). This also shows the important role of angels in helping Allah to decide what happens to every individual in the afterlife.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS

1. Summarise how the following angels are shown in the Qur’an in a single sentence for each: Jibril, Mika’îl, and Izra’îl.

2. What effect might having two accompanying angels have on Muslims? Discuss with a partner.

3. Explain what you think is the most important teaching about angels for Muslims.

4. Are metaphors the best way to understand angels? Explain your answer.

SUMMARY

- Angels are spiritual beings created by Allah to perform various tasks.
- Important angels include Jibril, Mika’îl, and Izra’îl.
- The Qur’an says that angels keep a note of every person’s good and bad actions which helps decide their fate.