

Fast 21: Angels — their functions

- Here we deal with some functions of angels as mentioned in the Holy Quran.
- The most prominent function of the angel, in the spiritual realm, is the bringing down of Divine revelation or the communication of Divine messages to the prophets. The prophet not only sees the angel but also hears his voice, and the angel is to him, therefore, a reality. This was the universal experience of humanity through their great religious figures in all ages. As the angel is an immaterial being, the prophet sees him sometimes in the shape of a human being and sometimes in other forms.
- According to the Holy Quran, the angel who brought revelation to the Holy Prophet is known by the name of Gabriel (2:98), the Arabic form of which is *jibrīl*. Gabriel is also mentioned in the Quran as *Rūḥ al-Amīn* or the Faithful Spirit (26:193–194), and *Rūḥ al-Qudus* or the Holy Spirit (16:102). In all these places, Gabriel or the Faithful Spirit or the Holy Spirit is said to have revealed the Quran to the Holy Prophet. The revelation to the prophets that appeared before him is said to have been granted in a similar manner (4:163).
- Angels also brought revelation to other righteous servants of God who were not prophets, as for example the Quran says about Mary:

“And when the angels said, O Mary, surely Allah has chosen you and purified you...” — 3:42, see also 3:45.
- Angels generally are said to bring revelation to righteous Muslims:

“As for those who say, Our Lord is Allah, then continue in the right way, the angels descend upon them, saying: Do not fear, nor grieve, and receive good news of the Garden which you were promised.” — 41:30
- Angels strengthen the righteous servants of God, prophets as well as others, and give them comfort in trials and affliction. Jesus Christ, because of the serious allegations of the Jews against him, is mentioned in the Quran as being strengthened with the Holy Spirit (2:87, 2:253, 5:110), and the believers generally are said to be strengthened with the Holy Spirit:

“These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and strengthened them with a Spirit from Himself...” — 58:22

It was in this sense, i.e., to strengthen the believers, that the angels were sent to help them in their struggle against the unbelievers, as in the verse:

“When you sought the aid of your Lord, so He answered you: I will assist you with a thousand of the angels...” — 8:9

The Holy Quran itself explains why the angels were sent:

“And Allah made it only a good news for you and that your hearts might be at ease thereby.” — 3:126, 8:10

It was through the strengthening of the believers’ hearts that the angels worked (8:12).

- Angels pray for people in this life:

“...the angels celebrate the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth.” — 42:5

“Those on earth” include both the believer and the unbeliever. And while this prayer by the angels is all-comprehensive, it grows stronger in the case of believers. For them, angels pray:

“Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so protect those who turn to You and follow Your way... make them enter the Gardens of perpetuity which You have promised them and such of their fathers and their wives and their offspring as are good... and guard them from evil” — 40:7–9

And as regards the Prophet, the angels bless him:

“Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe, call for blessings on him...” — 33:56

Thus the angels’ connection with man grows stronger as he advances in righteousness. As regards people generally, the angels pray for their forgiveness so that punishment in respect of their evil deeds may be averted. As regards the faithful, they lead them forth from darkness into light, as stated in 33:43, and thus enable them to make progress spiritually. And as regards the Prophet, they bless him and are thus helpful in advancing his cause in the world.

- The different functions of angels in the spiritual world are connected, in one way or another, either with the awakening of the spiritual life in man or its advancement and progress. This is why faith in angels is required along with a faith in God. Faith in angels means that there is a spiritual life for man, and that he must develop that life by working in accordance with the promptings of the angel. It means that every good suggestion occurring in one’s heart — and such is the suggestion of the angel — must be accepted and acted upon, because it leads to the spiritual development of man.