# 843 - Angels in Islam

**the question**

What do you believe about angels regarding their function, appearance, form and powers?

**Summary of answer**

Angels in Islam are a part of the world of the “Unseen” which we cannot comprehend. Allah has told us about them in many places in the Quran and via His Prophet Muhammad. Belief in angels is one of the six pillars of faith without which there is no faith.

**Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

## Belief in angels is one of the six pillars of belief

Belief in angels is one of the six pillars of faith without which there is no faith. Whoever does not believe in any of these pillars is not a believer (*mumin*). These pillars are belief in: Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and that predestination, both good and bad, comes from Allah.

## Who are the Angels?

Angels are a part of the world of the “Unseen” which we cannot comprehend. Allah has told us about them in many places in the Quran and via His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). There follows a number of proven reports concerning the angels, which hopefully will make you realize the greatness of the Creator and the greatness of this religion which has told us so much about them:

## Of what are the Angels created?

They are created from light, as ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘The angels are created from light, just as the jinn are created from smokeless fire and mankind is created from what you have been told about.’" [Muslim].

## When were the Angels created?

We have no knowledge of precisely when they were created, because there is no text to tell us this. But they were created before mankind for certain, because the Quran says (interpretation of the meaning): "Behold, your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’" [2:30] The fact that Allah told them of His intention to create man indicates that they already existed.

## The great size of Angels

Allah says concerning the angels of Hell:

**"O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern and severe, who flinch not (from executing) the commands they receive from Allah, but do (precisely) what they are commanded." [66:6]**

The greatest of all the angels is Jibreel, upon whom be peace, who was described in the following report:

"From ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ood (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw Jibreel in his true form. He had six hundred wings, each of which covered the horizon. There fell from his wings jewels, pearls and rubies, only Allah knows about them." It was reported by Ahmad in al-Musnad, and Ibn Katheer said in al-Bidayah that its isnad (chain of narrators) is jayyid (good).

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, describing Jibreel:

"I saw Jibreel descending from heaven, and his great size filled the space between heaven and earth." [Muslim].
Among the greatest angels are those who carry the Throne (of Allah), who were described in the following report:
"From Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who said: ‘I have been given permission to speak about one of the angels of Allah who carry the Throne. The distance between his ear-lobes and his shoulders is equivalent to a seven-hundred-year journey.’" [Abu Dawood].

## Description of Angels

### Angels have wings

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"Praise be to Allah, Who created (out of nothing) the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels messengers with wings - two, or three, or four (pairs) adds to Creation as He pleases: for Allah has power over all things." [35:1]**

### Beauty of the Angels

Allah said, describing Jibreel, upon whom be peace (interpretation of the meaning):
"He [the Prophet] has been taught by one Mighty in Power, Dhoo Mirrah (free from any defect in body and mind), then he rose and became stable." [53:5-6]
Ibn ‘Abbas said: "‘Dhoo Mirrah means that he has a beautiful appearance." Qutadah said: "He is tall and beautiful."
The idea that angels are beautiful is firmly established in all people’s minds, so much so that they liken a beautiful human to an angel, as the women said about Yoosuf:
". . . When they [the women] saw him, they did extol him and (in their amazement) cut their hands: they said: ‘Allah preserve us! No mortal is this! This is none other than a noble angel!’" [12:31]

### The differences in size and status of the Angels

The Angels are not all of one size or status; there are differences between them just as there are differences in virtue. The best of them are those that were present at the battle of Badr, as is stated in the hadith narrated by Mu‘adh ibn Rifa‘ah al-Zuraqi from his father, who had been one of the people present at Badr. He said: "Jibreel came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) and asked, ‘How do you rate the people among you who were present at Badr?’ He said: ‘They are the best of the Muslims,’ or something similar. [Jibreel] said: ‘So it is with the angels who were present at Badr.’" [al-Bukhaari].

**The Angels do not eat or drink**

This is indicated by the conversation between Ibrahim, the "friend" of Allah, and the angels who visited him. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"Then he turned quickly to his household, brought out a fatted calf, and placed it before them. He said, ‘Will you not eat?’ (When they did not eat), he conceived a fear of them. They said: ‘Fear not,’ and they gave him glad tidings of a son endowed with knowledge." [51:26-28]**

Elsewhere, Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"But when he [Ibrahim] saw their hands went not towards the (meal), he felt some mistrust of them, and conceived a fear of them. They said: ‘Fear not: we have been sent against the people of Lut.’"** [11:70]

**The Angels do not get bored or tired of remembering and worshipping Allah**

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"They celebrate His praises night and day, nor do they ever slacken." [21:20]**

**". . . For in the presence of your Lord are those who celebrate His praises by night and by day. And they never become tired (nor feel themselves above it)." [41:38]**

## Number of Angels

The angels are many, and their number is known only to Allah. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, describing the Much-Frequented House (al-Bayt al-M'amoor) in the seventh heaven:
"Then I was taken up to the Much-Frequented House: every day seventy thousand angels visit it and leave, never returning to it again, another [group] coming after them." [al-Bukhaari].
'Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'Hell will be brought forth that day by means of seventy thousand ropes, each of which will be pulled by seventy thousand angels." [Muslim].

## Names of Angels

The angels have names, but we know only the names of a few of them. We have to believe in the names reported in the Quran and Sunnah (prophetic teachings) texts, as a part of general belief in the angels. Among the names of angels that are known to us are:

(1) Jibreel and (2) Mikail
**"Say: Whoever is an enemy to Jibreel - for he brings down the (revelation) to your heart by Allah's will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings to those who believe -**
**Whoever is an enemy to Allah, and His angels and prophets, to Jibreel and Mikail - Lo! Allah is an enemy to those who reject faith." [2:97-98]**
(3) Israfil
From Abu Salamah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf, who said: "I asked 'Aishah, the Mother of the Believers, about what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to start his prayer with when he got up to pray at night (qiyam al-layl). She said: 'When he got up to pray at night, he would start his prayer (with the words): 'O Allah, Lord of Jibreel, Mikail and Israfil, Creator of heaven and earth, Knower of the unseen and the seen, You are the Judge of the matters in which Your slaves differ; guide me with regard to disputed matters of truth by Your permission, for You guide whomever You will to the straight path.'" [Muslim].

(4) Malik

He is the Keeper of Hell, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "They [the people in Hell] will cry: ‘O Malik! Would that your Lord put an end to us!’" [43:77]

(5) Munkar and (6) Nakeer

From Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘When the deceased is buried (or he said: when one of you is buried), there come to him two blue-black angels, one of whom is called Munkar and the other Nakeer. They ask him, ‘What did you used to say about this man?’ and he says what he used to say: ‘He is the slave and Messenger of Allah: I bear witness that there is no god except Allah and that Muhammad is the slave and Messenger of Allah. They say, ‘We knew beforehand that you used to say this.’ Then his grave will be widened for him to a size of seventy cubits by seventy cubits and it will be illuminated for him. Then they tell him, ‘Sleep.’ He says, ‘Go back to my family and tell them.’ They tell him, ‘Sleep like a bridegroom whom no-one will wake up except his most beloved,’ until Allah raises him up. If (the deceased) was a hypocrite, he says, ‘I heard the people saying something so I said something similar; I do not know.’ They say: ‘We knew beforehand that you used to say this.’ The earth will be told to squeeze him, so he will be crushed until his ribs are interlocked, and he will remain like that until Allah raises him up.’" [al-Tirmidhi].

(7) Haroot and (8) Maroot

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**". . . and such things as came down at Babylon to the angels Haroot and Maroot . . ." [2:102]**

**". . . and none can know the forces of your Lord, except He. And this is nothing other than a warning to mankind." [74:31]**

## Power of Angels

The angels have great powers given to them by Allah, including the following:

The ability to take on different forms. Allah has given the angels the ability to take on forms other than their own. Allah sent Jibreel to Maryam in the form of a man, as Allah says:

**". . . Then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects."** [19:17]

Angels also came to Ibrahim in human form, and he did not know that they were angels until they told him so. Similarly, angels came to Lut in the form of young men with beautiful faces. Jibreel used to come to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) in different forms: sometimes he would appear in the form of Dihyah al-Kalbi, a sahaabee (companion) who was very handsome, and sometimes in the form of a Bedouin. The sahaabah (companions) saw him in his human form, as is reported from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) in the two Saheehs Al-Bukhari and Muslim). (‘Umar) said:

"One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black; no signs of travel were to be seen on him, and none of us knew him. He walked up and sat down by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Resting his knees against his and placing his hands on his thighs, he said: ‘O Muhammad, tell me about Islam.’..." [ Muslim].

Many other ahadith (report) refer to the angels taking human forms, such as the hadith (report) about the one who killed a hundred, in which it says ". . . there came to them an angel in human form . . ." and the hadith about the blind man, the bald man and the leper.

## Speed of Angels

The greatest speed known to man today is the speed of light; the angels are able to travel much faster than this. Hardly had an enquirer completed a question to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but Jibreel would bring the answer from Allah.

## Duties of Angels

Among the angels is one whose task it was to convey the revelation from Allah to His Messengers; this is al-Rooh al-Ameen, Jibreel, upon whom be peace. Allah says:

**"Say: whoever is an enemy to Jibreel - for he brings down the (revelation) to your heart by Allah's will. . . " [2:97]**

**"Which the trustworthy spirit has brought down, Upon your heart, that you may be (one) of the warners." [26:193-194]**

Another is responsible for rain, directing it wherever Allah wishes. This is Mikail, upon whom be peace. He has helpers, who do what he tells them, by the command of his Lord; they direct the winds and clouds, as Allah wills.

Another is responsible for blowing the Trumpet , which will be blown by Israfil at the onset of the Hour (the Day of Judgement).

Others are responsible for taking people's souls: these are the Angel of Death and his helpers. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): **"Say: 'the Angel of Death, put in charge of you, will (duly) take your souls, then shall you be brought back to your Lord.'"** [32:11] There is no proof in any saheeh hadith (authentic report) that his name is 'Azrail.

Others are responsible for protecting the slave throughout his life , when he stays home and when he travels, when he is asleep and when he is awake. These are the "angels in succession" concerning whom Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"It is the same (to Him) whether any of you conceals his speech or declares it openly, whether he be hid by night or goes forth freely by day.**

**For each (person), there are angels in succession, before and behind him. They guard him by the Command of Allah. Verily! Allah will not change the good condition of a people so long as they do not change their state of goodness themselves (by committing sin and by being ungrateful and disobedient to Allah). But when Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning back of it, and they will find besides Him no protector." [13:10-11]**

Others are responsible for recording the deeds of man , good and bad. These are the "honourable scribes" (kiraman katibeen) and are referred to in the ayat/verses (interpretation of the meanings):

**". . . and He sends guardians (angels guarding and writing all of one's good and bad deeds) over you . . ." [6:61]**

**"Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private counsel? (Yes, We do) and Our messengers (appointed angels in charge of mankind) are by them, to record."** [43:80]

"(Remember!) that the two receivers (recording angels) receive (each human being after he or she has attained the age of puberty), one sitting on the right and one on the left (to note his or her actions).
Not a word does he (or she) utter, but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it)." [50:17-18]

**"But verily, over you (are appointed angels in charge of mankind) to watch you, Kiraman (honourable) katibeen - writing down (your deeds)." [82:10-11]**

Others are responsible for testing people in the grave. These are Munkar and Nakir . From Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'When the deceased is buried (or he said: when one of you is buried), there come to him two blue-black angels, one of whom is called Munkar and the other Nakeer. They ask him, 'What did you used to say about this man?' . . ." [The hadith is quoted in full above]

Some of them are the keepers of Paradise. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say: Salamun 'alaikum (peace be upon you!). You have done well, so enter here, to abide therein."** [39:73]

Some of them are the keepers of Hell, the "guards of Hell", whose number is nineteen and whose leader is Malik, upon whom be peace. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

**"And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups, till, when they reach it, the**

**gates thereof will be opened. And its keepers will say, ‘Did not the Messengers come to you from yourselves, - reciting to you the verses of your Lord, and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?’ They will say: ‘Yes, but the word of torment has been justified against the disbelievers!’" [39:71]**
**"Then, let him call upon his council (of helpers), We will call the guards of Hell (to deal with him)!" [96:17-18]**

**"And what will make you know exactly what Hell-fire is? It spares not (any sinner), nor does it leave (anything unburnt)! Burning the skins! Over it are nineteen (angels as guardians and keepers of Hell). And We have set none but angels as guardians of the Fire, and We have fixed their number only as a trial for the disbelievers - in order that the People of the Scripture may arrive at a certainty and the believers may increase in faith . . ." [74:27-31]**

**"And they will cry: ‘O Malik (Keeper of Hell)! Let your Lord make an end of us.’ He will say: ‘Verily you shall abide forever.’" [43:77]**

One of the angels is responsible for the sperm in the womb, as is mentioned in the hadith (report) of Ibn Mas‘ood (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), whose truthfulness is confirmed, said:

‘The way that each of you is created is that he is gathered in his mother’s womb for forty days as a sperm drop, and then for a similar length of time as a blood-clot, and then for a similar length of time as a lump of flesh. Then an angel is sent and he breathes the spirit into (the foetus), and is charged with four commands: to write down his provision, his life-span, his actions, and whether he will be wretched or happy. By the One besides Whom there is no other god, one of you may do the deeds of the people of Paradise until he is just a cubit away from entering it, then his fate will overtake him and he will begin to do the deeds of the people of Hell, so he will enter Hell; and one of you may do the deeds of the people of Hell until he is just a cubit away from entering it, then his fate will overtake him and he will begin to do the deeds of the people of Paradise, so he will enter Paradise." [al-Bukhaari, Muslim].

Some angels carry the Throne of Allah, as He describes in the Quran (interpretation of the meaning):

**"Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah) and those around it glorify the praises of their Lord, and believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah) (saying): 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who repent and follow Your way, and save them from the torment of the blazing Fire!'"** [40:7]

Some of the angels travel throughout the world, seeking out gatherings of dhikr (remembrance of Allah). Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) said:

'Allah, be He blessed and exalted, has angels who travel the highways seeking out the people of dhikr. When they find people remembering Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, they call out to one another, "Come to what you hunger for!" and they enfold them with their wings, stretching up to the lowest heaven. Their Lord asks them, and He knows better than them, "What are My slaves saying?" They say: "They are glorifying, magnifying, praising and extolling You." He asks, "Have they seen Me?" They say, "No, by Allah, they have not seen You." He asks, "And how would it be if they saw Me?" They say, "They would be even more fervent and devoted in their praise and worship." He asks, "What are they asking me for?" They say, "They ask You for Paradise." He asks, "And have they seen it?" They say, "No, by Allah, O Lord, they have not seen it." He asks, "And how would it be if they saw it?" They say: "They would be even more eager for it and they would beseech You even more earnestly." He asks, "And what do they seek My protection from?" They say, "From the Fire of Hell." He asks, "Have they seen it?" They say, "No, by Allah, they have not seen it." He asks, "And how would it be if they saw it?" They say: "They would be even more afraid and anxious to escape it." Allah says: "You are My witnesses that I have forgiven them." One of the angels says: "So-and-so is not really one of them; he came (to the gathering) for some other reason." Allah says, "They were all in the gathering, and one of them will not be excluded (from forgiveness)."" [al-Bukhaari].

Some of them are responsible for the mountains. ‘Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): "Have you ever faced any day more difficult than the day of Uhud?" He said: "I suffered at the hands of your people and the worst that I suffered was what I suffered at their hands on the day of ‘Aqabah. That was when I went to call Ibn ‘Abd Yalayl ibn ‘Abd al-Kalal to Islam, and he did not respond. I left, feeling depressed and hardly knowing where I was going. I did not recover until I found myself in Qarn al-Tha‘alib. I raised my head and saw that I was being shaded by a cloud. I looked, and saw Jibreel in the cloud. He called me and said: ‘Allah has heard what your people said and how they responded to you. He has sent the Angel of the Mountains so that you can tell him to do to them whatever you want.’ The Angel of the Mountains called me and greeted me, then said: ‘O Muhammad, tell me what you want me to do. If you want, I can crush them between two mountains. ’"The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "All I hope for is that Allah will bring forth from their loins people who will worship Allah alone and not associate any partner with Him." [al-Buhaari].
Some of them visit the Much Frequented House (al-bayt al-m’amoor). In the lengthy hadith describing the Isra and M’iraj (the Night Journey and the Ascent to Heaven), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:
"Then I was taken up to the Much-Frequented House: every day seventy thousand angels visit it and leave, never returning to it again, another [group] coming after them."

There are also angels standing in rows, who never get tired or sit down, and others who bow or prostrate, and never raise their heads, as was reported by Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘I see what you do not see and hear what you do not hear. The heaven makes a noise like groaning, and it has the right to (or it is no surprise), for there is no space in it the width of four fingers, but there is an angel there, placing his forehead in sujood (prostration) to Allah. By Allah, if you knew what I know, you would laugh little and weep much, you would not enjoy your relationships with women and you would go out in the street praying to Allah.’" [ al-Tirmidhi]

This is a summary of Islamic teachings concerning the noble angels of Allah. We ask Allah to make

us believe in them and love them. May Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad.

For more, see the following answers:

Angels

Reality of Belief in the Angels

Gender of Angels and Do They Die?