



## Have You Been Touched by an Angel?

by Scott C. Rubin

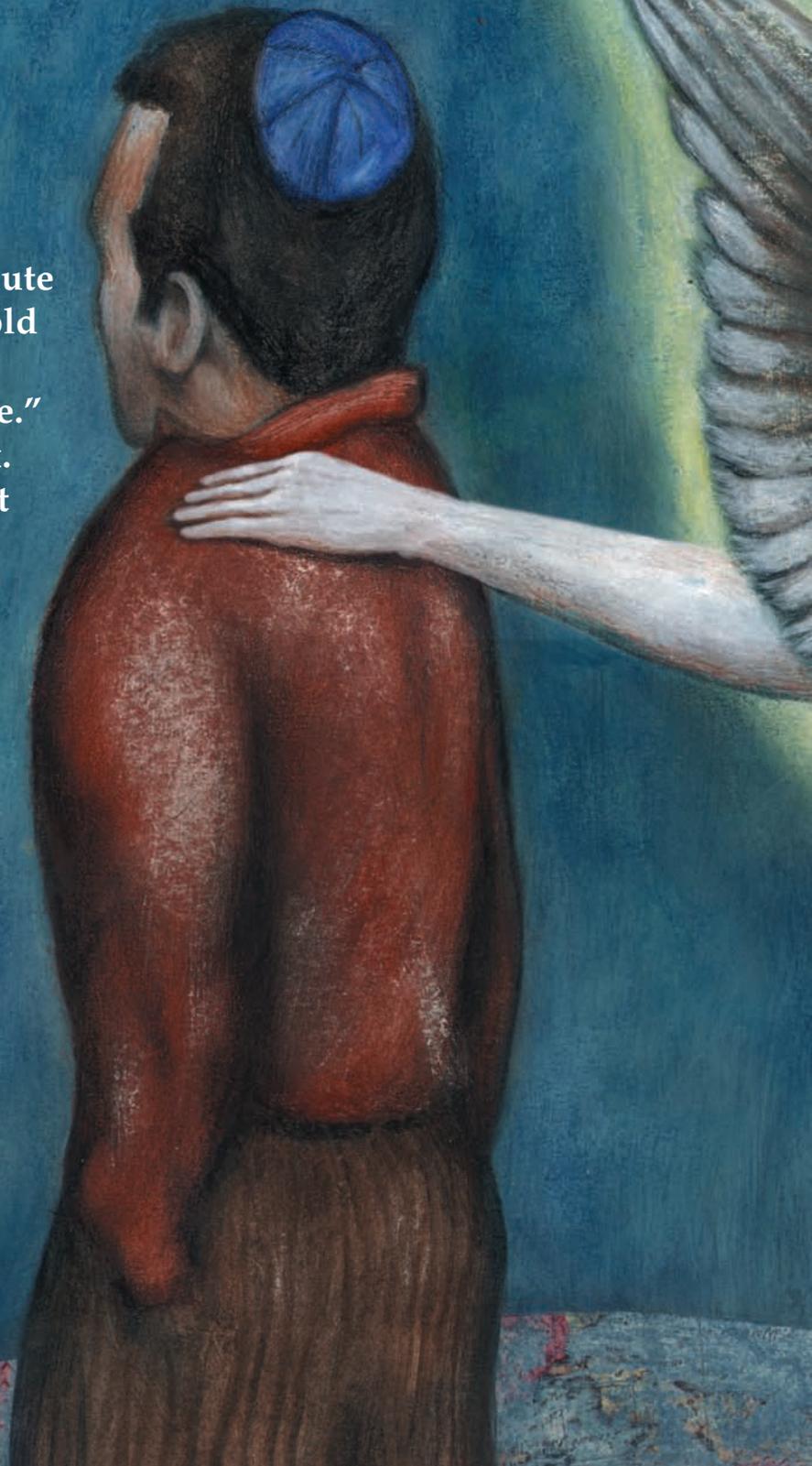
"I don't know what made me change my airplane ticket. I didn't have a reason to make that last minute change of flight. Something just told me to do it. It must have been an angel who brought me that message."

"My life was a downward vortex. I was headed for disaster. And then it was as if I felt someone tapping on my shoulder. That touch forced me to think about the wrong way I had chosen. Could that have been an angel sent to warn me?"

"The bus was really crowded, and I didn't see an empty seat anywhere. But all of a sudden it was like someone was guiding me, and I found an open seat next to this guy. I took one look at him, and I could almost hear a voice in my head saying, 'He's the one.'"

Maybe you have heard people talk about experiences like these. Perhaps you have experienced something like that yourself, when you have had that unexplainable feeling

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that someone was looking out for you, that someone had a message for you. If you have felt that way, you are not alone. Our whole society seems fascinated with the idea that messengers from the spiritual world come to people with words of warning or comfort. Pop culture is quick to pick up on these kinds of “spiritual trends.” Recently there have been more than a few movies, television shows and merchandising gimmicks featuring angelic beings who come to deliver a message. Many in our society are convinced that they have been “touched by an angel” or at least know someone who has!

Such fascination with the idea of spiritual messengers is nothing new. Philosopher Mortimer Adler suggests that humans have always been fascinated with the thought of an intelligent life apart from a human body.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that in the past this quest was confined to the supernatural, while in modern times this search has led to a preoccupation with science fiction. Even among legitimate scientists, there is a great interest in receiving messages from beyond.

Much has been made of SETI, the Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence, wherein giant parabolic receivers are pointed to the heavens, scanning the skies like amateur short wave radio mavens hoping to pick up some extra-terrestrial message transmitted to us through space. The popular movie “Independence Day,” among many others, was built on such a premise. For many people, the idea of supernatural messengers is an interesting “what if . . . ?” At least the modern media scriptwriters have one theological point of accuracy about angels—they are messengers. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for angel are best translated, “messenger.”

Those who believe the Bible insist that heavenly messengers are real and that they really do make contact with us. They’re called angels, and they exist to serve God on our

behalf. Yet if we believe that angels are real, what real life messages are we to receive from these beings?

## Messages of Hope

Torah relates one early encounter between an angelic messenger and a human—in this instance, the slave woman Hagar, the maidservant of Abram’s wife Sarah. (Genesis 16) God



had promised Abram a destiny through a son, and for Sarah there was the promise of motherhood. Nevertheless, Sarah was well past the normal child-bearing age. She wanted to assist God in fulfilling his word to her in the only way which seemed possible. So she arranged to present Hagar as her proxy to be a surrogate mother for Abram’s promised son.

Abram assented to Sarah's plan, and soon Hagar conceived. Now glowing with pride in her pregnancy, she showed contempt for her mistress. Stung by Hagar's scorn, Sarah began to treat her harshly. Hagar feared Sarah's anger and fled to the desert. Alone, exhausted, and thirsty, she sat down by a spring in the wilderness to ponder her plight. There she received a visit from an angel of the Lord. The angel brought her a message of hope: God had seen her distress. The angel told Hagar to return to her mistress and submit to her will, for God had plans to bless Hagar and give her many descendants through the child in her womb. The angel also related that though her son would have difficulties, he would dwell in the presence of all his brethren. She was to name him "Ishmael," meaning "God hears."

For Hagar, the visit from the angel was proof not only that God hears, but also that God sees. So she called the place, "El Roi," meaning "You Are the God Who Sees." The story of Hagar beside the spring reveals one of the main jobs of angels: to carry good news from heaven to earth. Angels serve as messengers from on high who convey words of encouragement from a God who cares.

## Messages of Judgment

Besides bringing news of God's compassion, angels are also messengers of God's warning and judgment. For instance, in the period of the Kings of Israel the Hebrew Scriptures record that Ahaziah, the king of Samaria, took a terrible fall through the roof of his upper room and became desperately ill. (2 Kings 1)

Wondering if his wounds would be fatal, the king sent some of his own messengers to Baal-Zebub, the false God of Ekron, in order to divine his fate. However, the Lord God of Israel sent an angel to the Hebrew prophet Elijah with a specific message for the messengers. Elijah was told to ask them, "Is there no God in Israel, that you must

go to Ekron to inquire of Baal?" Furthermore, Elijah was to tell the king's messengers that his injuries would prove to be fatal; indeed, he would not leave his bed alive. Elijah faithfully delivered the message he had received from the angel. The authenticity of the message soon became apparent: Ahaziah died.

From this incident recorded in Scripture, we see that not every message from an angel is a word of comfort or hope. Sometimes angels bring word of terrible judgment. Yet whether conveying words of hope or of judgment, true angels will always bring true messages that are consistent with the word and character of God. After all, that is the duty of messengers: to accurately convey the message, to be faithful to the wishes of the one who sends them.

Sometimes God's truth can be troubling, even alarming. Yet if we love God, we will want to hear the truth. Even though God's word sometimes comes as a warning, all of God's news is good news.

## False Messages

We can't judge the truth of a message by whether or not we find it agreeable, for there are angels who bring false messages, too—messages that are intended to deceive. One of the most famous deceiving angels in the Bible is Lucifer. While there isn't much information on him in the Scriptures (liars prefer anonymity) this chief angel of deception shows his true colors in several instances.

The most famous instance is in the Genesis account of creation. There Lucifer appears to mother Eve in the form of a snake, intent on deceiving her. He asks a devious question: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" He deliberately misrepresents the command of God. When Eve explains to him the prohibition concerning the tree "in the midst of the garden," Lucifer denies the truth of God's word to Adam



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and Eve, while at the same time questioning God's motives. "You will not surely die," the false angel lies, "for God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). We all know the results of Eve listening to that message; they are with us to this day.

Moreover, lies and false messages are still being circulated today. For instance, the New Age movement encourages people to seek information from "the beyond," from a past life or from a being in the spirit world. The assumption is that such beings will tell the truth—a dangerous assumption indeed. The religion of Mormonism is based on a false message by a false prophet, Joseph Smith, who alleged to have unearthed golden tablets in 1827. He said that those tablets were inscribed with holy writings that he translated. It has been documented that these words which became the Book of Mormon were substantially gross plagiarism. Over 25,000 of the words were taken from the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Smith received further "revelations" by an angel, which led him to found his new religion.

Many people genuinely believe they have received "a word" from an angel or a message from God. Whenever we hear about such a message, it is our duty to apply the truth test: does the message, however pleasing or comforting to hear, accord with God's word? Is it consistent with God's character? Just because the message purports to come from an angel doesn't mean that it is true. How many serial killers have purported to receive messages to perform their heinous crimes from angels or other supernatural beings?

## Messages of Salvation

There can be no doubt that when God sends an angel, the message being communicated is not only true, but of life-changing importance. Angels bring urgent messages of how to avoid death or disaster and how



to find life. Angels bring messages of salvation, but they are not saviors. They are only servants, heralds of change, messengers of deliverance. Some of the most important messages ever brought by angels are recorded in the New Testament portion of the Scriptures.

Joseph was in the midst of the premarital betrothal to Miriam. Imagine his hurt when he became aware that she was bearing a child. He had not consummated the marriage with her; it was obvious to him that she had been with another man. His fiancée had promised herself, in purity, in marriage to him. Now she had broken her promise. What was he to do? For all his sense of injury, Joseph treated Miriam gently. To spare her the pain of public humiliation, the Scripture tells us that he decided to "put her away secretly"—meaning that he would provide for her but would not marry her.

He prepared his heart to accept this great disappointment, but in the night an angel was sent by God with a message: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Miriam your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit [Ruach Ha-kodesh]. And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Y'shua, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21). This was a message of life. What had appeared to be a terrible and distressing situation was in fact good news, a promise of life.

Miriam, too, had received a peace-filled promise from an angel: "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to . . . Miriam. And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Miriam, for you have found favor with

God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Y'shua. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end'" (Mark 1:26-33).



That same message was conveyed to shepherds in the fields and to countless others who were waiting to hear good news. The message of the Messiah's birth is a message of good news, for all people at all times.

vvvHowever, God also used an angel to explain the meaning of the Messiah's death.

After Y'shua had been executed and laid in his tomb, God sent an angel to the burial site. Seated upon the huge, heavy stone which had covered the entrance to the burial cave but was now thrust aside, he had a message for the grieving women who had come to visit the tomb: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Y'shua who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead . . ." (Matthew 28:5-7).

He is risen from the dead. This message was not simply for the women at the tomb; it is for all those who would follow God. Messiah is risen. This was a life-changing message for those who heard the news that day, and the good news of that message can change the lives of those of us who are looking for Messiah today. The message of the angel resounds down the ages: "He is risen!" What remains for us is whether we will choose to hear this message and incorporate its meaning

into our lives.

We would do well to believe the words spoken by that angel, for to those of us who believe, another angel will come someday with another message of hope. His message will not come in word or in song, but with a mighty blast of the shofar he will sound forth the call to assemble and rise. It will all come to pass "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

## Angels and Us

Angels are real, and true angels speak the words of the one true God. Sometimes their messages come bringing hope and comfort; other times angels bring dire messages of warning and even judgment. Most people would gladly hear the messages of hope; few are ready for the warnings. While not all can distinguish between true and false messages, we know that the message of salvation in Y'shua is the very truth of God. Even today, if we listen carefully we will hear the message of the one who has brought salvation. "You shall call his name Y'shua for he will save his people from their sins." "He is not here; for he is risen!" Those words from the angel are still echoing in the ears of those who are open to hear the good news.

Let's not become so fascinated by messengers that we miss this message. God may well send an angel to speak to you, but he's already provided an angelic message that cannot be matched. Are you ready to hear from God today?



### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, *The Angels and Us*, New York, MacMillan Publishing, 1982, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1965,

# Hollywood: The City of Lost Angels

by Jhan Moskowitz

The American film industry has always had difficulty portraying a truly biblical picture of angels and what they do. The recent flood of spiritual offerings don't improve Tinsel Town's track record.

In the past, angels were portrayed as somewhat benign characters who would intervene in the life of a hapless character who was either about to cast off all hope or lose his soul for an unworthy cause. Perhaps the best known and most loved of this genre of film is Capra's "It's A Wonderful Life." The story is about an angel who earns his wings by saving the life of a mortal and demonstrating how important it is to live. Aside from the sentimental, feel-good aspects of the movie, the angel was there to show our hero, James Stewart, that human relationships are worth living for and that family and friends are the saving grace of life.

While it is true that the Bible upholds the value of friends and family, these are not the primary reasons why God sends angels into our lives.

The 1947 classic, "The Bishop's Wife" and its current re-make, "The Preacher's Wife" also feature a very likable angel. Cary Grant and Denzel Washington respectively played Dudley, the angel who was sent in answer to a prayer for a pastor named Henry, his failing church and his faltering marriage. The angel's job was to teach the minister how to rekindle his love for his wife and ministry. "The Preacher's Wife" director, Penny Marshall, was quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle as saying, "[This movie is] about the importance of family and community. It has a fable quality. It's very magical."

Despite their good and noble themes, such as family and community or the rekindling of love, these films don't support the biblical view

of what is the role of an angel. Today's big screen angel is often cast into the role of arbiter of romantic love. In these instances, the angel becomes a quasi-cupid instead of the messenger of the Most High God. A good case in point is John Travolta's rendition of Michael as a fallen Olympian god who indulges in the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure through the gratification of the senses. By the end of this film, we realize that Michael's mission, aside from enjoying the pleasures of this world, is to reconcile two lost souls who find true love in each other's arms. Here, if there is a secondary message, it is only to "live life now and enjoy all that you have here and now. For when you get to heaven, you become like an angel and can't enjoy the benefits of your senses." Romantic love is then elevated to being the ultimate reason why we are here.

Romantic love has driven Hollywood since its inception and has filled our culture with its prime rationale. It is as though the word "love" never meant anything more than the romantic feelings a man and a woman have for each other. Sometimes it might refer to a person's commitment to his or her family or country—but that is only sometimes.

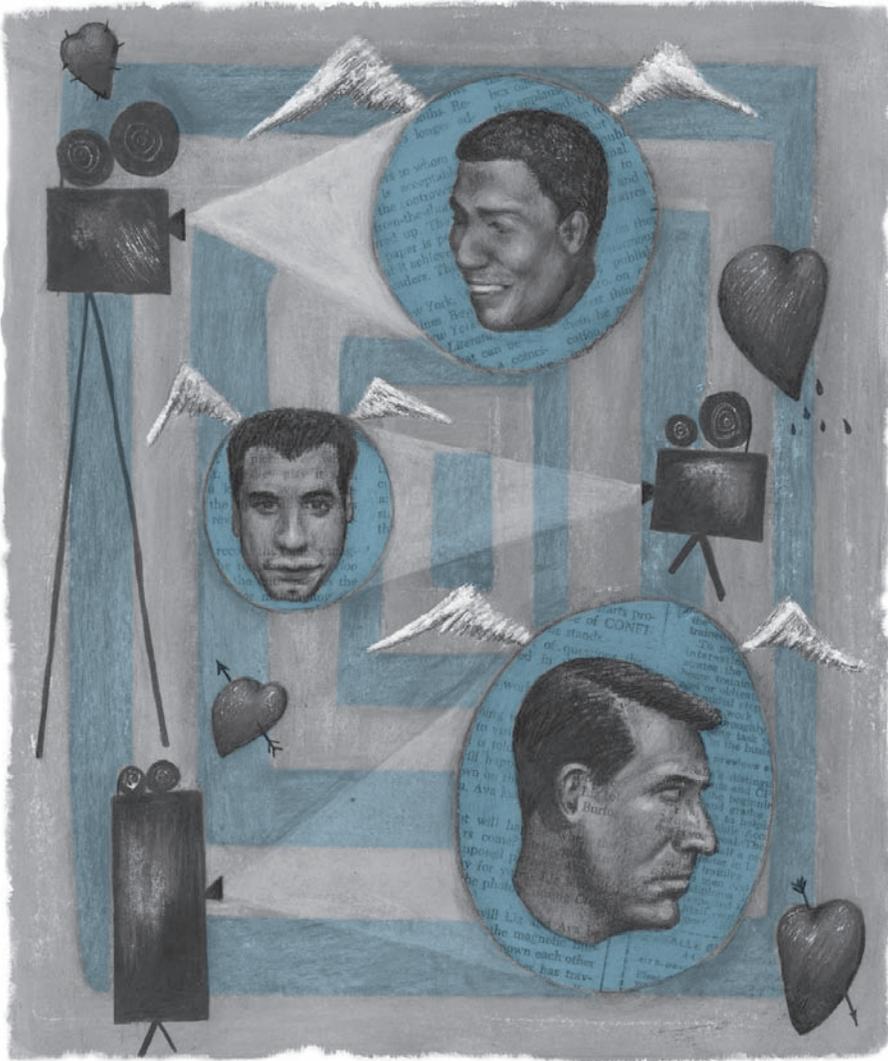
The Greeks had different words for each of these types of love: *philos* for brotherly love, *eros* for romantic love, and *storga* for the love parents have for their children. Hollywood has used the motif of angels to capture each kind.

What is missing from the screen is a portrayal of the special love that God has for us, called *agape*. Hollywood has rarely depicted an angel as one who was sent as a messenger from God to his creation to tell us that he loves us and expects something from us. The exceptions have been few. Films like "The Ten Commandments" and "The Robe" hold true to the Scriptural account in Genesis and the New Testament gospels, respectively.

There are also some positive angel models that have surfaced on the smaller screen. Both "Highway to Heaven" and more recently "Touched by an Angel" have meaningful lessons to offer. Here, the angels are in some ways closer to the real thing inasmuch as they are seen as ambassadors of God's love to a lost

world. They talk about forgiveness and mercy and a God who loves us and will not forsake those who turn to him. The only criticism is that the recipients of their messages don't necessarily have the appropriate response to them. Yet the television scriptwriters want a Cinderella ending in which everyone ultimately makes it to "happily ever after" land—and these TV angels oblige.

avoid being voluptuous only by their total insipidity—the frigid hours of a teatable paradise. They are a pernicious symbol. In Scripture the visitation of an angel is always alarming; it has to begin by saying "Fear not." The Victorian angel looks as if it were going to say, "There, there." \*



Perhaps we can't fault the modern scriptwriters for a transformation in the angel model that has occurred over centuries. C. S. Lewis, in commenting on the shift in how angels have been portrayed in art, said:

Fra Angelico's angels carry in their face and gesture the peace and authority of Heaven. Later come the chubby infantile nudes of Rafael; finally the soft, slim, girlish, and consolatory angels of nineteenth century art, shapes so feminine that they

So what are real angels like? And should Hollywood take note? There is no lack of drama in the real life angel accounts. The Bible gives us many examples:

Jacob has a dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder. It is there that God promises to be with him as he goes into exile. Jacob responds with an oath to serve the living God and to build an altar in his place when he returns from exile. Gideon encounters an angel of the LORD who calls him to lead Israel against idolatry and to restore correct worship to Israel. An angel meets Hannah and promises her that she will have a child and that she is to dedicate that child to the service of the Lord. She obeys with the birth of Samuel.

Hollywood angels are super human agents of good who intervene in people's lives with a blink and a wink or a waving of the wing. They move some mountain or change some circumstance so

that we humans can have an easier life or see the love of our life more clearly. In truth, angels are much more than that. They are the messengers of the Holy Creator of the Universe. Their story should make a Stephen Spielberg or a Ron Howard rush to get the movie rights. ■

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\* C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, New York, The MacMillan Company, 1961, pp. viii-ix.



## In The Little Shtetl Of Vaysechvoos

Everyone in Vaysechvoos knew Malkah. It seemed that she was everywhere, all the time. There was never a wedding, a bar mitzvah, a funeral, a yom tov—any event that was celebrated—which Malkah failed to attend.

If you looked at her, you would notice nothing unusual; she appeared ordinary. Yet there was something extraordinary about her. And while people in Vaysechvoos lived to learn and tell their discoveries about other people, there didn't seem to be the slightest bit of curiosity about Malkah. No one ever asked where she lived or if she was married or a widow. Chaike the Matchmaker never talked to Malkah about making a match. No one could recall Malkah buying clothes for herself or, for that matter, washing her own clothes. Everyone knew that Malkah was from Vaysechvoos, but no one seemed to recall her being born or meeting any of the members of her family. She just always seemed to be there. And things were always more pleasant when Malkah was there.

At weddings and celebrations, she was cheerful and giving. She always brought sweets. Older people especially felt comfortable around her. She seemed to have the wisdom of years without the difficulties of agedness. She was the very picture of health and was constantly helpful. If a mother was sick, she would come and cook the meals and wash the clothes and take care of the household.

While she had hands that were always ready to help, she also said a lot with a smile. She didn't engage in the usual gossip—not Malkah. If someone would cite the misfortune of a neighbor, Malkah would nod a little bit and say, "The Almighty knows all about it." And then she would smile and that smile would spread through the group

as others would nod with approval of her wisdom.

When someone was concerned or worried about the weather, the poor crops, the lame horse, the sick cow, Malkah would nod and say, "Heaven will provide," and she would smile, and everyone else smiled knowing that was exactly true.

For the sick and the dying, Malkah had special care. She would go and sit by the sick bed of the ailing one and soothe their pains with songs that sounded like lullabies. Most of the people of Vaysechvoos died with smiles on their faces—at least those that Malkah was seen to attend.

The pious sage of Vaysechvoos knew more than the others about this curious woman. He would see Malkah and nod and give a small smile acknowledging her presence. For he was the only one in all of Vaysechvoos who truly recognized who she was. She was the *Guardian Angel of Vaysechvoos*—whom the Almighty sent as a comforter to the community.

