

I'm No Angel

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

During the *kedushah*, the central moment in the Jewish prayer service, we stand with feet together and say, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.” Rising on our toes, we pattern ourselves on the angels of Isaiah’s vision. Do we wish to be angels? The answer is yes. And no.

Angels do have some advantages. They do not sin. They dwell in ethereal realms with God. In Hebrew, the word for angel is *mal’ach*, which means messenger. In the bible, angels are messengers of God.

But angels do not sin because they do not yearn. They cannot strive. In the midrash the Rabbis imagine the angels protesting God’s giving the Torah to human beings. Moses argues with them that they do not need a Torah. Human lives are messy, fraught, uneven, grand. We need the Torah. We may aspire to the condition of angels for a moment, but ultimately our failures are inseparable from our grandeur. On the verse “You shall be holy men to me,” (Ex. 22:31) the Kotzker Rebbe comments, “God says ‘I need you to be holy as men. I have enough angels.’” So as we say “Holy, Holy, Holy” we rise up on our heels. But when the prayer ends, we are back on Earth, trying to live an imperfect, aspiring life of mitzvot.