

Inviting Angels In

Do Jews believe in angels? As with most theological questions, it depends on who you ask. Throughout Jewish history, thinkers across every era have wrestled with this concept, leaving us with a rich tapestry of perspectives. One of the classic debates on the topic took place between two giant medieval scholars: Rambam (12th century Maimonides) and Ramban (13th century Nachmanides).

Maimonides was a committed rationalist, heavily influenced by his philosophical hero, Aristotle. He maintained that God should never be anthropomorphized and that all of the physical descriptions of God in the Torah were just metaphors. God walking in the Garden of Eden? Metaphor. God's "outstretched arm"? A poetic symbol of divine assistance. When it came to angels, Maimonides applied the same rationalist lens: divine beings do not physically manifest in our material world. Even to our greatest prophets, angels appeared only in dreams and visions—they did not enter physical reality.

To Nachmanides, this was untenable. In [his commentary on Bereshit 18:1](#), he pushes back sharply against the idea that Abraham's three visitors in *Parashat Vayera* could have been just a vision. If that were true, Ramban argues, then "Sarah did not knead cakes, and Abraham did not prepare a calf!" He points to other angelic encounters to emphasize his point, such as Jacob wrestling with the angel: If that, too, was just a dream, "I do not know why Jacob limped on his thigh when he awoke!"

It is hard not to smile at Ramban's indignation—how dare anyone doubt that the Torah be read literally! But behind his outrage lies a more significant theological distinction. For Rambam, giving God or angels a body is a form of idolatry—you can't put infinity in a box. But for Ramban, the mystic, we must be willing to see God within the physical world. *Ein Od Milvado*—there is nothing beside God. The spiritual world isn't locked away in heaven; it's right here in front of us.

As [Rav Ezra Bick notes](#), the Ramban rejects the "separation of reality into the mundane and the extraordinary." If angels can come over dinner, then spiritual encounters are possible at any moment. For the Ramban, angels are not metaphors or abstractions. Believing in angels is not just a valid Jewish theology; it's an invitation to find God wherever we go.