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**Do you have a guardian angel?**

**Do you believe in guardian angels? A surprising number of women are turning to the spirit world for guidance**

Anita Chaudhuri

Wanna know what the next big thing in publishing is? Angels. There are books on angel cats, angel babies, angel visions — you name it, there’s a related tome. “In the book world, angels have become the new misery memoirs,” says Jo Lal of Hay House, which publishes many of the leading angel authors. It’s hardly a surprise, then, that according to a recent Mori poll, 58% of British women believe they have a guardian angel, with the majority claiming they have received help from them.

Flicking through the pages of these books is a revelation. Apparently, angels don’t exist solely to act as divine messengers or to provide comfort during illness or loss; they are there to assist with everything, from landing a dream job to getting a date with Mr Right, losing weight, and even finding a parking space. These angels are far friendlier than the sometimes vengeful creatures of biblical times. There are guardian angels who protect us, cradle to grave, plus a whole host of other angels we can “channel”, from arch­angels — the psychic big guns you can call on to deal with a crisis — to “odd-job” angels who can help you find lost car keys.

Intrigued, I consult Jenny Smedley, author of Angel Whispers, who is in worldwide demand for her readings. “Oh yes, you can ask the angels for help with anything,” she insists. “I had one woman who was earning a very low wage and she wanted a particular designer handbag.” After a series of twists and turns that included picking up a reward for a lost cat, the woman found the bag in a charity shop. This, apparently, was an angelic intervention.

Smedley claims her own life was radically transformed after she turned on to angels. She went from “fat, suicidal and talentless” to landing a job as a TV presenter, losing several stone and becoming a songwriter. That’s in addition to writing a string of bestselling books and magazine columns.

Why does she think so many people are turning to angels? “Lack of fulfilment is a common problem in the women I see. They have the husband and the kids, the house and the job. But they’re left feeling tired and empty, and asking, ‘Is this my life for the next 18 years?’” Smedley puts people in touch with their angels by creating a digital painting just from hearing their voice. She offers to create one for me, and two hours later the image lands in my inbox. The result is surprising. No blonde cherub for me; my angel has black rock-chick hair and a psychedelic gown. If this is, as she suggests, a reading of my soul, I am happy to own her.

My “angel reading” is equally alluring. Apparently, in 2010 all my dreams will come true: fame, fortune, international travel and romantic adventures. I’m beginning to understand why she’s a global phenomenon. Inspired, I decide a digital image isn’t enough; I want to meet my angel in, er, person. The quest leads me to Sabi Hilmi, 30, who works as a banker by day and runs Purely-angels.com in her spare time. She operates from her “angel sanctuary” in north London.

Hilmi had her first divine experience when her mother was seriously ill 10 years ago and an angel appeared by her side. “My mother ­returned to full health, and I began my training as an angel practitioner,” she says. Small wonder that stressed-out City colleagues are beating a path to her door for readings and dinner parties. There’s angel music, scented tea in painted cups and tiny squares of iced angel cake.

The session reminds me of being nine years old, ­cocooned in a cosy world of make-believe. Hilmi begins by connecting to my angels and passing on their messages. It’s like having a celestial personal trainer — down-to-earth, goal-oriented and ever so gently bossy. “Your angels don’t like all these deadlines, you need to do something about it,” she advises. Oh dear. We go on a guided journey to meet my guardian angel.

Alas, lolling on her couch, I am perhaps too full of tea and cake to reach a higher spiritual dimension. However, I do leave feeling like I’ve been on holiday. And it seems I am not the only surprise convert to the angelic realm. Menna van Praag, author of Men, Money and Chocolate, attended an archangel workshop during a low point. “At the time I thought the whole thing was completely loopy. However, during the workshop we did an exercise where we had to imagine what our angels were like. I became aware of the presence of two tall, muscular men; it was a strong protective feeling that I have been able to access again whenever I need help.”

There is something very comforting about the idea that these magical creatures are sitting around in heaven waiting to grant my every wish. But really it seems too good to be true. There are no rules, moral codes or consequences. What happens if you ask for your ex-boyfriend to be turned into a toad, or for Javier Bardem to leave Penelope Cruz and just happen to turn up at your local gym?

I decide to consult Professor Chris French, a psychologist at Goldsmiths College, and a regular sceptic on Angels, the Sky Real Lives series. “Angels are just a fad,” he says. “A while ago it was alien abductions that fascinated people, now it’s this. There’s also evidence to suggest people turn to superstitious thinking during hard times. Anything that gives people an extra sense of control is going to be psychologically comforting.”

Surely angels are a better coping strategy for life’s challenges than, say, hitting the bottle or popping Prozac? There’s no harm in them, is there? French agrees, albeit reluctantly. “The only real issue is that if you get too caught up in relying on angels for guidance, you are relying on something outside yourself to make things happen. It’s far better to be the master of your own fate.” He might have a point. Just let me check with my angel first.

*Angels is on Sky Real Lives at 10.30pm on Fridays.*

*The new series starts on Monday December 21 at 9pm*

**Three steps to angel heaven**

**1** According to the experts, we need to adopt rituals to get in the habit of “raising our vibration” to angelic levels. Make an angel altar with flowers, crystals and other sacred objects. Try burning incense or lighting a scented candle. You could also choose a piece of music that you find particularly moving.

**2** Before you begin, make an angelic shopping list of all the things you want your angels to bring into your life or help you achieve. Don’t be vague. “New frock” won’t do it. “Paul & Joe little black flapper dress, the one that costs £880 on My- wardrobe.com”, is much easier for angels to find.

**3** Close your eyes and imagine inhaling violet-white light. Don’t inhale anything else; drugs aren’t respectful to the angelic realm. Try to visualise your guardian angel standing before you. Focus on what you need help with. Thank your angels. You can even do this late at night when stuck for a cab. Afterwards, look for signs that angels are around you — white feathers, rainbows and angelic voices.

*Further reading: An Angel to Guide Me: How Angels Speak to Us from the Beyond by Glennyce Eckersley (Rider £6.99)*