

“THE ANGELS SURROUND YOU”

According to his biographer, Richard Holmes, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge used to recite the following prayer as a child: “Four angels round me spread, Two at my foot & Two at my head.” This echoes the Kabbalistic prayer appealing to four guardian angels: “In the name of the Lord, God of Israel: To my right, Michael; to my left, Gabriel; in front of me, Uriel; behind me, Rafael; and above my head, the presence of God.”

Each of the angels represents forces. Michael, “merciful and forbearing,” is commander in chief of the angelic host, guardian of Israel. Gabriel is the master of courage. Uriel is the angel of light, whose name means “God is my light.” Raphael is the healing angel.

The prayer is a tribute to the idea that much of what surrounds us is impalpable. It is a protest against the vulgarity of materialism -- that only what we can see is important, and there is nothing beyond our senses or above our intellect. Coleridge remembered the prayer because, as a poet, he never forgot its lesson, that the greatest reality is that which we cannot see. Invoke them or not, the angels surround you.