**TIPPING THE BALANCE**

Shouting and bickering echoed through the heavens. The angels had fallen out seriously this time. The Seraphim thought that human beings were a horrible waste of space. "All they do is cheat, steal and lie; they are always fighting and gossiping and being mean to each other."

The Cherubim did not agree. "There are good humans too. Look at all the generous and loving behavior. They look after their friends and family, raise money for charity, recycle and even show kindness to strangers."

The two gangs of angels just could not agree and eventually decided to put their opinions to the test. The approached God and asked: "Will You be the judge of our dispute? We are going to set up a huge set of scales, one side for all the mitzvot (good deeds) of humanity and the other for all their wrongdoings."

The Seraphim believed that the bad side of the scale would be the heaviest and the Cherubim were convinced that the good side would outweigh the bad. God accepted their plan and agreed to help them judge the outcome.

For a whole week, the angels frantically travelled the earth, collecting all the wrongdoings and the good deeds of humanity. When they gathered to place everything on the huge scales, the arm of the scales balanced itself perfectly in the middle.

The Seraphim could not believe their eyes and accused the Cherubim of cheating. They had had enough of this game. But the Cherubim were determined to show that human beings were a good species. They asked God for some advice.

"Did you check among the children," God suggested, "I think you will find a lot of mitzvot there." Immediately, a pair of energetic Cherubim, named Uriel and Rafael, dashed back down to earth to find more evidence for the scales.

Uriel and Rafael noticed a small boy, named Adam, walking down the main street in Golders Green. "Look," whispered Uriel, "He has his hand in his pocket and a big grin on his face. I wonder why?"

"He has a two pound coin in his pocket," Rafael whispered back, "and he is smiling at the thought of the ice cream he is going to buy."

Uriel was distracted by another person on the street. "I wonder what he will do when he passes that Big Issue seller?"

"Let's follow him and find out," suggested Rafael.

Adam paused as he approached the Big Issue Seller. His mother always bought the Big Issue and he knew the money helped homeless people who were trying to make a living. He felt the coin in his pocket and imagined himself eating a huge chocolate ice cream. Then he imagine the Big Issue Seller buying food for his dinner. The two images fought fiercely inside Adam. He began to draw the coin out of his pocket. Then he put it back again. Again, he took it out and again, he put it back. The angels waited anxiously.

Finally, Adam handed the coin to the Big Issue Seller and said Thank You as he took as copy of the paper home for his mother. He angels breathed a sigh of relief and flew straight back to heaven with the new mitzvah. The scales quavered ever so slightly but it was not enough to make them tip in the direction of the good deeds.

"We need more mitzvot," exclaimed Uriel, "Let’s go straight back to earth to keep looking. I'll take a sack to put them in." They landed in a playground in Birmingham where a group of children were playing football.

"It's my turn in goal," said Talia.

"No, it's my turn," insisted Sam.

"IT"S MY TURN!" shouted Talia.

"IT"S MINE!" yelled Sam.

"Oh dear," whispered the angels, "arguments and fights are not a good sign."

Suddenly Talia had a change of heart. "This is silly," she announced, "I don't want to fight. Sam can go in goal."

"Neither do I," said Sam, "I'm sorry. Talia should go first."

"No, really, it's your turn," said Talia.

No, no, please, it’s your turn," said Sam.

"Here's an unusual problem," whispered Rafael, "I wonder how it will be resolved?"

"There's no time to wait about to find out," Uriel replied, "We have a double mitzvah to put in our sack and we have to move on quickly to find more!"

They collected many more mitzvoth that day. They saw children learning about Tikkun Olam, children volunteering in animal shelters, children helping their parents with their computer problems and children visiting their friends in hospital.

Just as they were about to return to heaven, they noticed a girl walking home from school in a dusty street in Tel Aviv. Shira opened the door to her apartment and the angels peered in as Shira's mother asked her how her day had been.

Shira opened her mouth and was just about to start telling her mother how Yoni had stolen Maya's calculator and Liora had tried to get it back by hitting Yoni. But just in time, she realised that this would be *lashon hora* or idle gossip.

As Shira closed her mouth again, the angels dashed back to heaven with the last of their mitzvahs and were dismayed to see the Seraphim already piling their collection of wrongdoings onto the bad side of the scales.

Quickly, Uriel and Rafael started to pile their dazzling mitzvoth on the other end. Just as the Seraphim ran out of wrongdoings, the scales reached the centre point again. Uriel placed the last mitzvah, Shira's excellent decision not to tell tales, onto the already huge pile and all the angels watched with baited breath.

Slowly, the scale began to move down, down, down. The good end was heavier than the bad. The angels rejoiced and sang out a chorus of Halleluyahs!

That evening, the Cherubim held a huge party to celebrate their success and the fact that human beings really are fundamentally good.

God watched them with a faint smile. "They could have just asked me in the first place. I knew that all along!"