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### The Difference Between Heaven and Hell

I am told the story of a Rabbi. His name was Rabbi Haim, a preacher who traveled from town to town delivering religious sermons that stressed the importance of respect for one's fellow man. He often began his talks with the following story:

I once ascended to the firmaments. I first went to see Hell and the sight was horrifying. Row after row of tables was laden with platters of sumptuous food, yet the people seated around the tables were pale and emaciated, moaning with hunger. As I came closer, I understood their predicament. Every person held a full spoon. But their arms were splinted with wooden slats, so they could not bend either elbow to bring the food to their mouths. It broke my heart to hear the tortured groans of these poor people, as they held their food so near but could not consume it.

Next I went to visit Heaven. I was surprised to see the same setting I had witnessed in Hell — row after row of long tables laden with food. But in contrast to Hell, the people here in Heaven were sitting contentedly talking with each other, obviously sated from their sumptuous meal. As I came closer, I was amazed to discover that here, too, each person had his arms splinted on wooden slats that prevented him from bending his elbows. How, then, did they manage to eat?

As I watched, a man picked up his spoon and dug it into the dish before him. Then he stretched across the table and fed the person across from him! The recipient of this kindness thanked him and returned the favor by leaning back across the table to feed his benefactor.

I suddenly understood. Heaven and Hell offer the same circumstances and conditions. The critical difference lies in the way the people treat each other.