“Bearing the Burden of Others”

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv of the Kelm School of Mussar and the Ba’al shem Tov

(Everyday Holiness, page 155)

Upon his death a man was given a tour of both heaven and hell, so he could select his final destination. First he was taken to hell. He saw a group of people sitting at a long banquet table loaded with all kinds of delicious food. However, he noticed that all the people seated were unhappy, and looked emaciated. They each had a fork strapped to the left arm and a knife strapped to the right arm – they had no elbows. Each had a four-foot handle which made it impossible for them to eat. With all kinds of good food in front of them they were not able to taste any of it. After this scene in hell he was taken on a tour of heaven. He noticed that the people in heaven were also seated at a long banquet table loaded with all kinds of delicious food. There was a difference here because he noticed that the people there were cheerful and enjoying themselves. They also had forks and knives with a four-foot handle – and they also had no elbows. They were busy eating because they were feeding each other. Each person in heaven was feeding the one across the table from him and was being fed in return. The people in hell were unable to eat because they were trying to feed only themselves.