

Story 2148 (1999 Tape 5)

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Hell and Its Public Relations

When a certain man died, the angels¹ came to his grave to question him about the life he had just ended. They found that he had had as many virtues as sins during his life, and so they decided to allow him to choose his destination, either heaven or hell. They asked him, "To which place would you prefer to go?"

He answered, "Let me go and take a look at each place before I make that decision."

"Very well," they said, "we shall give you a brief tour of both heaven and hell." They took him first to heaven. He discovered that heaven was filled with beautiful trees, cool streams, and birds that sang continuously. He observed some old men who were chatting pleasantly and children who were playing. Everything there was calm and

¹In Muslim belief the questioning angels who always come to the grave of a newly buried corpse are Münkir and Nekir. Their names are not given in this tale, but there is no doubt about their identity. One standard reference work in the West which describes these interrogators is Ebenezer C. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (1885); several modern editions are available.

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quiet.

Then they took him down to hell. Everyone there seemed to be enjoying the singing, dancing, and other entertainment that went on continuously. Occasionally there were flashes of flame, but no one was particularly bothered by them.

The man said, "I have decided to stay here in hell."

The angels asked, "Are you certain about that? Are you certain that you will not later regret your decision?"

"Yes, I am positive," said the man. "I like this place."

"All right," they said, and they assigned him to hell.

But when the man took up residence in hell, he discovered that it was different from what he had been led to believe it was. Hot flames were everywhere, and people were screaming and crying. The newcomer complained to one of the custodians. He said, "The hell that I was shown before I moved here permanently was very different from what I see here now. There was very little fire, and no one was bothered by it. People here were singing, dancing, and enjoying themselves."

The custodian answered, "That was just the advertisement that you saw."