

And the chasidah (11:19)

An interesting name for a non-kosher fowl. *Rashi* adds to the ambiguity with his reason for the name *chasidah*. This bird performs kindness with others of its species by sharing food with them. This is supposedly a compassionate bird, because it shares. Furthermore, its compassion is even noted by its given name – all the more reason that it should be included among the kosher birds. The *Chassidic* Masters explains that selective *chesed* with one's own species, while ignoring the plight of other species, is far from admirable. Jews are not exclusive in their *chesed* activities. We help everyone. This bird's name acknowledges its acts of kindness to its own species. Nonetheless, the name does not change the fact that its acts of kindness are flawed. This teaches us that that the reputation one enjoys might not always tell the whole story.

When one's *chesed* is selective, he is acting only to satisfy himself. *Chesed* must be selfless and objective. Otherwise, it is not true *chesed*. One's devotion to his fellow must be total. I always wondered why the bird is called *chasidah* with a *hay* at the end, which usually implies the female gender. A *hay* at the end of a word has a similar connotation as a *lamed* at its beginning. Thus, *chasidah* can also mean *l'chasid* – to the *chasid*. Could the Torah be implying that this fowl is concerned only with itself; that the kindness it performs with others (of its own specie) is only for itself?

Horav Yissachar Dov, zl, m'Belz, related the following anecdote to demonstrate the lengths to which one must go in order to conform to the Torah's standards for performing *chesed*. A medical student who had successfully completed his courses and was about to commence his internship was to take a final exam. Prior to taking the written exam, he was to take an oral test based upon a conversation with the dean of the medical school. He was an exceptional student, gifted and talented, an astute and analytical thinker, who should have no problem acing the test.

The dean asked him: "How would you respond to the victim of a stabbing who is bleeding profusely?" The student replied that he would put a certain medicine on the open wound, which would stop the blood flow. "What if you do not have this medicine available?" the dean asked. "I would use an alternative salve which works just as well," the student replied. "And if you have neither the medication of choice, nor its alternative – what would you do?" asked the dean. "I would grab a piece of cloth, burn it and place its ashes on the open wound," the student quickly responded – quite satisfied with himself. "Let us hypothesize that there is no available medicine or cloth to burn – what would you do then?" the dean asked. The young would-be doctor had no answer. All options had been exhausted. Surprisingly, the dean refused to grant him access to the internship.

The young man was incredulous. He had one of the best averages in medical school. How could he be denied his degree?

The dean replied, "When a doctor cannot locate a piece of cloth/material to burn for ashes, he

removes his own shirt and sets fire to it. A doctor who is not prepared to take off his own shirt to save a patient has no business in the field of medicine.” This is how we should relate to the problems of our fellow Jew.