

And the chasidah (11:19)

The *chasidah* is a bird which the Torah declares not be kosher. This is enigmatic, since it is called *chasidah* as a result of the *chesed*, kindness, that it performs toward the members of its species. If it is so compassionate and shares its food with other *chasidos*, why is it deemed unkosher? One would think that such a noble trait would be reason to render it kosher. A well-known explanation – attributed to varied commentators – is that, while the *chasidah* does indeed direct its kindness towards members of its species, it does so exclusively to them. It distinguishes between “its kind” and others. This form of selective *chesed* is reprehensible. Thus, it is characterized as non-kosher.

The *Rav* of Lodz, *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, zl*, offers an explanation that defines *chesed*. He posits that the mere fact that this bird is called *chasidah*, a name which underscores its act of performing *chesed*, is in and of itself the reason for its non-kosher status. Feeding others, performing acts of kindness to those in need, is not *chesed*. It is *mentchlichkeit*, human decency. To cloak acts of decency and obligation under the veneer of kindness is revolting. To do what is correct and proper does not deserve a pat on the back. It is only right.

My friend, Reb Mendy Klein, whose fifth *yahrzeit* will occur in a few weeks, was a *baal chesed* in a league all of his own. Anyone in need, large or small, was acutely aware that he was the most prominent address for *chesed*. He never said “No,” because he felt that someone in need should be helped. It is only *mentchlech*. Mendy redefined *chesed* and transformed it into *metchlichkeit*. He was a *mechayev*, obligated, to act kindly – not because it is a glorious act of *chesed*, but because it is proper for human beings, especially Jews towards their brothers and sisters, to act kindly. *Yehi zichro baruch*.