

This is what you shall not eat...the chasidah. (14:12,18)

As the designated *Banim atem la'Hashem Elokeichem*, "Children to Hashem, your G-d" (ibid 14:1), we must act in accordance with our special status. It should serve as a source of pride and obligation. The Torah enjoins us with certain prohibitions which are entirely acceptable to the gentile world, but, to Hashem's children, are an anathema. Among these prohibitions are the Jewish dietary laws which prohibit us from consuming certain animals, fowl and fish. Among the fowl, the Torah lists specific fowl which are considered unkosher due to their "character" which, of course, only the Creator Who created them knows.

Among these non-kosher birds is the *chasidah*, translated as the stork. While the stork/*chasidah* may be unkosher due to a character defect that it possesses, one wonders why it is called *chasidah*. The word *chasidah* is closely related to *chassid*, which means an individual who embodies piety at its apex, or one who performs acts of *chesed*, kindness. Either way, the name *chasidah* for a character-defective fowl which is unkosher seems to be an unlikely name. *Rashi* (commentary to *Vayikra* 11:19) cites the *Talmud* (*Chullin* 63a) that the *chasidah* displays kindness towards others of its own species. It is surprising that a bird that exhibits such compassion should be deemed unkosher. The *Sifrei Chassidus* (attributed to the *Rizhiner Rebbe*, or *Chidushei HaRim*) explain that directing one's kindness efforts exclusively to one's own species/fellows, while simultaneously refusing to help others, indicates that its acts of *chesed*/kindness are selfishly motivated and not very kind. The true *baal chesed* is magnanimous and reaches out to all. He is not exclusive, does not limit his *chesed* endeavors to his friends, etc. He does not distinguish between individuals based upon his personal opinions, religious preferences, definitions of good and evil in people. We are all in this together. We should, thus, allow for *chesed* to be all-encompassing and directed toward all.

While this explains the reason behind the *chasidah's* name, it does not explain why it was not called by a name that does not focus solely on its deviant acts of *chesed*. *Chesed* is a term that focuses on kindness. It is a positive term. To call a fowl of deficient character by a positive term, simply because it distorts it, seems misguided. After all, *chesed* means kindness. Deficient kindness is not kindness. I think the resolution to this question is to be found in the *Radak's* commentary to *Parashas Kedoshim* (*Vayikra* 20:17) where the Torah admonishes us concerning aberrant, immoral relationships. In addressing the prohibition against incest, the Torah says, *Chesed hu*, it is a disgrace. Here the word *chesed* is defined as disgrace. Why is this? The *Radak* explains that *chesed* has two meanings: kindness; and disgrace. The immediate question is: What is the relationship between kindness and disgrace? *Radak* explains that the disgrace of immorality is the product of over indulgence. One who is too anxious to give pleasure and is reluctant to discipline himself/herself or others is in danger of falling prey to the evil of immorality. In other words, kindness requires discipline. Without some form of due diligence one can lapse into sin.

With this idea in mind, we understand why defective kindness can be referred to as *chesed*, not the *chesed* of kindness, but instead, the *chesed* of disgrace. The *chasidah* deforms the act of *chesed*

by deviating from the kindness as perceived by the Almighty – kindness to all, under all circumstances. Selective kindness falls under the rubric of disgrace.

We mentioned earlier that *chassid* also means pious, righteous. *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, zl*, adds that while *chasidah* refers to kindness, it also more importantly alludes to *chassidus*, piety. *Chassidus* means acting piously, going beyond the call of duty, beyond the letter (and, often, the spirit) of the law. The stork/*chasidah* does perform acts of kindness, but makes a big to-do out of its actions. It always feels that it is extending itself and doing more than it needs to do. The *chasidah* (or person who acts this way) thrives on accolades and attention. Heaven forbid should one benefit from the *chasidah* and not properly acknowledge its act of kindness. The *chasidah* always feels (and makes a point of allowing the beneficiary to feel) that it has extended itself. Such *chesed* is not focused on the beneficiary, but rather it is self-focused, attention-grabbing *chesed*. Since it is true that the *chasidah* could have chosen other activities to generate accolades for itself, it must be commended for selecting an area of endeavor that benefits others. The *baal chesed* who intimates by his actions that he/she derives great satisfaction in being referred to as a *baal chesed/chasidah* is still a *baal chesed* and should be acknowledged for his kind work. One must be aware, however, that since his kindness is self-centered, if the accolades stop, so will the *chesed*.