

Part of parashat R'ei is devoted to laws concerning kosher food. Our rabbis and sages derive lessons from these verses concerning our interpersonal relations.

In addition to instructing us how to recognize kosher mammals – they must have split hooves and must chew their cud - the Torah reading gives us examples of both permitted and forbidden meat animals. E.g., "... the camel, the hare, and the daman – for although they bring up the cud, they have no true hooves – they are impure for you; also the swine – for although it has true hooves, it does not bring up the cud – is impure for you."<sup>1</sup>

It is a principle of Torah study that there are no wasted words in Torah. So, having instructed us on how to recognize kosher and non-kosher meat animals, why do we need these examples? Rabbi Yissocher Frand<sup>2</sup> cites the Midrash to give the answer that

...the Torah is trying to teach us that even when something is not kosher, we should find a way to mention something praiseworthy about it first. Even something as treif as chazir (pig) deserves to have its positive trait pointed out. If the Torah does so for nonkosher animals, how much more do we have to learn to have this consideration with regard to people?

Bosses, employees, children, students, coworkers, and neighbors will invariably have some negative traits. It might be our job, from time to time, to deliver a negative message.

This Midrash is teaching us that even when we have to deliver a negative message to others – to tell them that they are "nonkosher" in some way – we should always find a way to point out their positive attributes or qualities first.

Rabbi Yisrael Kaniel notes<sup>3</sup> that the stork is listed among the non-kosher birds. The Hebrew for stork is **חסידה** – *Chasidah*, from **חסיד** – *chasid*, kind. Citing the Gerer Rebbe R. Yitzchak Meir Alter, who cited Nachmanides: non-kosher birds are so designated because of their tendency toward cruelty. So why is the "kind" bird non-kosher?

Rabbi Kaniel cites Rashi, who notes in Shmini, "Why has its name been designated as 'kind one'? For it does kindness with its companions with food." But, Rabbi Kaniel continues, "the Gerer Rebbe explains that the problem lies in the fact that the stork only concerns itself with its immediate companions. True kindness, especially when it comes to providing another with sustenance, must not be limited to one's immediate friends and family – an inappropriate tendency of the stork that deems it non-kosher. One who truly cares, who is truly compassionate and kind, will not distinguish between a friend and a stranger. If another needs help, a kind person will offer it without bias."

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 14:7-8 – *Etz Hayim*, p. 1073

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.torah.org/learning/ravfrand/5772/reeh.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.byisrael.net/stork-is-not-kosher/>