

## STORY

## What Bracha does one make on Lobster?

**By Rabbi Boruch Leff**

*Published in Yated (Feb 2017)*



Have you heard of Rav Motta Frank?

Not so many people know his name.

The truth is he doesn't allow people to call him Rav Motta Frank, at least not in his presence. He makes everyone call him Motta.

Rav Motta Frank is a rav and mashpia in the Breslov community in Meah Shearim and has a mossad called Be'eir Basadeh, but his appeal stretches far and wide to many lost Jews and to many Jews who may not be lost but who have lost their fire for keeping Torah and mitzvos.

Rav Motta knows just what to say and how to say it. He is able to inspire people to learn Torah, daven, and fulfill mitzvos with excitement and enthusiasm. He is able to motivate Jews who feel low, who have given up on themselves, to love themselves once again. As such, he comes into contact with many forlorn Jews, each with their story of disillusionment and tale of downfall. And then he works with them, most often finding the words to encourage and bring them back from the brink.

With this introduction, listen to a remarkable story.

Some years ago, Rav Motta was in America raising funds for his yeshiva. He was visiting shuls in the New York area speaking with people and giving shmuesen. After one

particular shmues, an older teenager approached Rav Motta and shared the following.

The young man had been a regular yeshiva bochur and things were going well. But somehow over the past few months he had fallen into the wrong crowd. He revealed to Rav Motta that he and his friends had developed a new 'custom' for every Shabbos at *shalosh seudos* time. One of them would take his father's car, (without permission, *Rachmana nitzlan*) and they would all pile in and head to a non-kosher seafood restaurant in order to have '*shalosh seudos*.' Each Shabbos a different bochur in the group would steal his father's car as part of a rotation.

Rav Motta listened without reacting; unfortunately, this wasn't the first time he had heard such a story. He began pondering what he should say to try and inspire the bochur.

But what happened next took Rav Motta completely by surprise and was indeed a first for him.

The young man continued his story.

"Every week when we go to the seafood restaurant, I always order lobster. I just love lobster."

Rav Motta was listening attentively wondering where all this was heading.

"Here's my question," the bochur said, "I love lobster so much and I want to know if I can say a bracha on it."

Rav Motta has been 'around the block' many times especially with situations and

continued on next page...

## SMILE!

### IT'S CONTAGIOUS



Well, I'm off to knock down the pyramids because Egyptians had slaves 3,000 years ago. Wish me luck!



So I got pulled over in the HOV lane and when the cop asked where's my passenger I told him that due to social distancing he was in the car behind me.



What did one ocean say to the other ocean? Nothing. They just waved.



As you get older three things happen. The first is your memory goes, and I can't remember the other two.



"Go to bed, you'll feel better in the morning" is the human version of "Did you try turning it off and turning it back on again?"



Parallel lines have so much in common... It's a shame they'll never meet.

people like this young man but he had never quite had anyone ask him such a question. At first, Rav Motta assumed this bochur was being spiteful and contemptuous of the halacha and of Torah. It appeared that he was just trying to anger Rav Motta. Rav Motta was tempted for a moment to 'put him in his place' and give him a verbal 'potch' for his chutzpah. But Rav Motta knew better than to add fuel to this bochur's fire of complaints against frum society. So he held back from responding for a bit.

Suddenly, Rav Motta had a brilliant insight and knew exactly what to tell the teenager.

"Your question is actually a very, very good question!" said Rav Motta. "The gemara (see Baba Kamma 94a with Rishonim) asks your question! It's a difficult issue to determine. There is actually an opinion in halacha that you would say a bracha. In the end, the conclusion is that we don't make a bracha on non-kosher food such as lobster. But I admire your desire to thank Hashem for the taste of lobster that you love. So let me tell you what you can do. Each time before you have lobster you should say to Hashem, 'I really love lobster and would love to thank You Hashem for the taste, but Motta Frank said that I can't.' Then, take a different kosher shehakol food or drink and say a bracha on that having in mind the lobster. In this way you can accomplish what you wish to do which is to show gratitude to Hashem."

The young man was impressed with Rav Motta's response. Whether he originally meant his question in spite or not, Rav Motta turned the question on its head and transformed the encounter into something with positive growth-laden potential. The bochur smiled and left.

Years passed.

One day at Rav Motta's mossad, a man in his mid-twenties entered wishing to speak with Rav Motta. He appeared to be a 'regular,' frum, put-together person, not from the 'clientele' that sought out Rav Motta and Rav Motta wondered for a moment why the man would want to speak with him.

"Do you recall years ago a question about making a bracha on lobster asked by a confused teenager?" the man asked.

Vague memories were returning to Rav Motta and were becoming more and more clear. "Yes, yes, now I do remember. I wonder what became of that young man," Rav Motta said.

"That confused teen became the person you are looking at right now!" the man said.

"When I asked you that strange lobster question," the man continued, "I knew I was being pretty brazen to ask a rabbi

to make a bracha on non-kosher food. I wasn't sure how you would react. I thought you might get upset with the question and send me off in a huff. But I was actually sincere in my question. Yes, I had gone astray from Torah but I never really had in mind to totally give up on Hashem forever. But had you answered me angrily that actually could have happened and I may never have come back to Torah. But you were brilliant and sensitive to my plight. You gave me praise for even asking the question! I was shocked when you did that. And then you gave me a way to somehow 'say a bracha' on the lobster by eating something else first.

"I did that years. My teenage buddies would make fun of me and tell me that I was a hypocrite. If I abandoned Torah then why say the bracha, they would taunt. But I was stubborn and still did it."

"I want you to know, Rav Motta," the man continued, "It was only because I had this connection to Hashem in some small way that I never completely gave up. And some years later, I got my life together in general and sometime after that realized that I wanted to return to Torah because deep down, though I was pretending for a long time. . . I never really left."

**Rabbosai, this story is ripe with lessons. No matter how low you may have fallen - NEVER LET GO OF HASHEM. Keep speaking to Him, keep doing at least something small--whatever you can, to hold on to Him. And if you do this, Hashem will pull you out in the end.**

## PRACTICAL TIP OF THE WEEK

### Make a written plan



Like any big project, working on breaking free deserves a good plan. By investing in a good plan, you'll be much better prepared when you get hit by an urge. A good plan should have a very specific goal, the reasons you've set that goal, and the steps you need to take to successfully deal with tempting situations.

## Direction is what matters



Someone sent us a point related to Parshas Masei and how the journeys of the Jewish people in the desert are a lesson to us about our personal travels through this world. He heard from Rabbi

Chaim Kaufman of Gateshead, who also spoke about this matter and emphasized how the Torah points out that the *Bnei Yisroel* went back eight masaos (travels) after Aharon Hakohen passed away, as seen in Rashi. This comes to teach us that even the fall-backs are part of the journey and are needed in order for one to reach his goal. This is the concept mentioned in Chaza"l of a "*Yerida L'tzora Aliya*" - "a fall for the sake of climbing higher".

Another interesting point that I noticed about the travels is that the Torah was given at the very farthest point from *Eretz Yisrael* that the Jewish people ever were in during their entire 40 years of wandering. And after the giving of the Torah, the Yidden began to climb closer and closer to the promised land. Maybe this comes to teach us that the moment of true "*Kabbalas Hatorah*" happens to a person when they are at the farthest point, when they "hit bottom". It is at that point, that they make the decision to be *mitchazek* and begin to climb.

This is also why (according to Kabbala) midnight-and-on is considered a time of *Rachamim* (divine mercy) even though it is still in the middle of the night. Yet midday-and-on is considered a time of *Din* (divine judgement) even though the sun is still high in the sky. Although this seems strange, the reasoning is beautiful. Mid-day-and-on is already facing towards the night and is therefore a time of *Din*, while midnight-and-on faces towards the morning and is therefore considered a time of *Rachamim* - even though it is still the darkness time of the night.

From both these examples we can see that it is the direction that a person is going that matters to G-d, and not where he currently stands.

## When it is a Mitzva to Make Shvuos

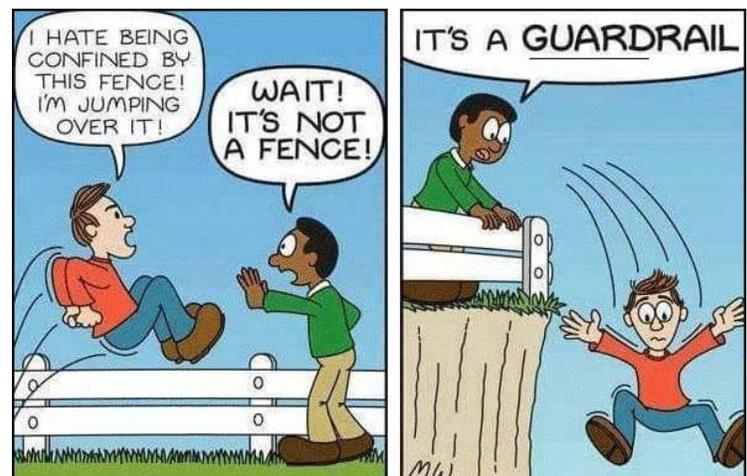
This week's Parsha discusses vows: **אִישׁ כִּי יִדַּר נֶדַר לַיהוָה אוּ הִשָּׁבַע** "A Man who makes a vow to G-d or an oath to forbid forbidden unto his soul, shall not make his words empty, like all that left his mouth he should do".

Normally making vows is frowned upon by our sages as with someone playing with fire, but when it comes to girding oneself from temptation, we find that making vows is praised by the Torah and by Chazal. The Mishna says in Pirkei Avos (3:13): **נְדָרִים סִיג לַפְּרִישׁוֹת** - "Nedarim are a fence for abstinence". And another Pasuk in Tehilim (15:5) says: **נִשְׁבַּע לְהִרְעוּ וְלֹא יִמָּר... עֲשֵׂה** "He who swears to prevent bad and does not nullify... he will never falter"

So it is clear that there are cases when making shvuos is actually a Mitzva that Hashem wants us to do!

However, as important and helpful as vows can be in fighting this powerful desire, they are also spiritually dangerous. The *Yetzer Hara* can be more powerful than vows. Therefore, it is vital that we learn how to make vows in a way that will work and be spiritually safe. Instead of fighting the *Yetzer Hara* head-on, we can make vows that will help us "walk around" the temptation. For example, if you know you will be in a dangerous situation, make a vow just for that day not to go somewhere or do something that you know may cause you to stumble. Use the vows to keep yourself away from the edge of the cliff, because once we're already at the edge, it's often too late.

## INSPIRATIONAL IMAGE OF THE WEEK



## Life giving waters



This week's Parsha is called Masei - meaning "Travels" and the Torah outlines the journeys

of the Jewish people through the wilderness. Although these journeys happened on a national level, they also occur on an individual level throughout each of our lives. It is the will of G-d that each of us make a journey throughout our life time that takes us from the bondage of Egypt to the promised land.

In the struggle for purity in our day and age, this journey can be felt in a very clear-cut way. People find themselves caught up in the "Egypt" of desire and watch themselves become slaves to the evil inclination. They become aware that it is falsehood and destroying their lives, but they find they can't break free. Finally, like the Jewish people in Egypt, they "hit bottom" and cry out to G-d. And G-d hears these prayers that come from the depths of the heart, and he helps those people break free of the bondage of Egypt against all odds. But even then, the journey through the desert is not always an easy one.

After leaving Egypt [read; stopping the destructive behaviors],



the first place that one must arrive is "Sukkot", as we see in the Parsha.

Sukkot refers to the clouds of glory which surrounded the Jewish people and provided them with a total protection and dependency on G-d. Sukkot, in the journey through the desert, symbolizes giving oneself over to the care of G-d, which is the first step in recovering from the bondage of desire. At a later stage, the Parsha tells how there was no water for the people to drink. This place was known as "Mara" - meaning "Bitter". Often, after breaking free from life-long habits and desires, one goes through a stage of "withdrawal" where he may feel dried out. And G-d showed Moshe a branch and he placed it in the water and the water became sweetened. The branch, refers to the Tree of Life which represents "G-d and his Torah". As one progresses on his journey to purity, he is able to connect with G-d and the Torah in ways he was never able to before. It is this spiritual connection, this branch from the "Tree of Life", that sweetens the desert waters and replaces the lust and self-gratification that he had become so accustomed to, with the truly life giving waters of spirituality, joy and a true freedom.

## DESIRES ARE AN ILLUSION

### Which line is longer?

Would you believe they are the same size?

Our eyes are a tremendous blessing that allow us to perceive the world around us. However our eyes can trick us as well, making us believe that we need things that in reality it may be very bad for us. Let's train ourselves to use our eyes for good and not let them trick us to turn after our hearts desires!

