

HERE'S *my* STORY

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THE OUTSIDER ON THE INSIDE

RABBI EMANUEL QUINT



In the various collections of the Rebbe's correspondence, quite a few of the Hebrew and Yiddish letters are signed "On behalf of the Rebbe, E. Quint."

"E. Quint" was my father — Rabbi Eli Quint — who was not a Lubavitcher, and this is the story of how he came to write and sign all those letters.

My father was born and raised in Bialystok, Poland, which he left to attend the famed Slabodka *yeshivah* in Lithuania, and when that *yeshivah* relocated to Hebron, in the Land of Israel, he came along. After he received his rabbinic ordination — from the chief rabbi of the British Mandate for Palestine, Rabbi Avraham Kook — he married my mother, and they moved to New York, where I and my sister were born.

It so happened that, in the 1940s, we lived at 816 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, which was just

half a block away from Chabad headquarters at 770. Since the Chabad synagogue was so close by, my father would often pray there, and he befriended Rabbi Mordechai Hodakov, the head of the Rebbe's secretariat, who offered him a job. My father accepted and he became employed by Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, where his responsibilities included helping the Rebbe (who was not yet the Rebbe) in a variety of ways — such as editing various Chabad educational publications and handling the Rebbe's voluminous correspondence.

In the course of this work, he developed a relationship with the Rebbe and they became quite close. In fact, their offices were a few feet away from each other, and whenever the Rebbe walked through 770's main hallway to go anywhere, he passed by the office which my father shared with Rabbi Hodakov — so they spoke every day.

This arrangement continued after the Previous Rebbe passed away in 1950 and the Rebbe took over the leadership of Chabad-Lubavitch. To an outsider, it may have seemed a bit odd that a person like my father held such a high position even though he was not a Lubavitcher — he used to joke that he was the only non-*chasid* in the entire building — but because of his vast Talmudic knowledge, he was a very valuable asset.

In fact, my father was a Torah scholar of the highest caliber — having studied in the same class as some of the greatest authorities in Jewish law of the past generation — and he and the Rebbe frequently

continued on reverse



**EVENTS. IDEAS.
PERSONALITIES.**

*Marking 70 years from the anniversary of the Rebbe's leadership, each week,
JEM will be focusing on one event, idea or personality in the Rebbe's life.*



continued from reverse

engaged in deep discussions on Torah topics. I was privy to know this, because on occasion I would ferry notes between them, but my father did not make it public. In his books, when he referenced his discussions with the Rebbe, he identified him only as *ish gadol*, "a great man."

As for me, in addition to being a messenger for my father and the Rebbe, I also did some filing in the Rebbe's office, because the Rebbe was meticulous in keeping a record of all of his correspondence. While working, I would sometimes hear him say to my father, "Rabbi Quint, I need a letter written on this topic, will you prepare it?"

My father would ask what the letter should say, and then compose it, type it up and give it to the Rebbe. Typically, the Rebbe would sign his name and it would be mailed out. But sometimes my father would be the one to sign and he would write: "On behalf of the Rebbe, E. Quint ..." However, more often than not, the Rebbe signed the letters himself.

When I got the filing job, I was in my early twenties and attending Brooklyn College. I was also not a Lubavitcher and did not behave like a Lubavitcher. On one occasion, I was leaving 770 as the Rebbe was coming in, and I walked over to shake his hand. The *chasidim* who were present chastised me, "What are doing? You can't just shake the Rebbe's hand!" But the Rebbe said to me, "It's okay — you can shake my hand." He understood that I was coming from a different world.

He also knew that I did not pray in the Chabad synagogue, that I went to Young Israel of Eastern Parkway, and he would ask me about that community.

In 1959, after I graduated from law school and became engaged, my father shared the news with the Rebbe, who wished me *Mazal Tov* and asked to meet Rena, my future wife. At first, Rena was afraid to go because, back then, she was teaching in a Conservative school and she thought the Rebbe would not approve. But when we went, the Rebbe focused only on the positive. He said to her: "You're

doing a wonderful thing teaching Jewish children. It's a wonderful thing that you are doing."

That was the Rebbe — he never put anybody down — he was an exceptional person.

When my mother passed away in 1960 and my father was sitting *shivah* for her, the Rebbe came to our home to comfort him. And when my father passed away in 1974, the Rebbe came to the funeral to comfort me.

As the mourner, I knew I had to speak first, but here was the Rebbe standing in front of me and I didn't know what to say. I mean, what could I say to the Rebbe? So I said, "I know I'm supposed to speak first, but I don't have the words."

The Rebbe looked at me with his kind eyes and said, "I will tell you what to say."

Today, I do not recall what he said, but I do recall that his words brought me true comfort.

Rabbi Emanuel Quint (1930-2018) was the author of the ten-volume A Restatement of Rabbinic Civil Law. He was also the dean of the Jerusalem Institute of Jewish Law, which he co-founded with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. He was interviewed in April of 2014.

This week in....

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין

> **5746 - 1986**, upon his return from the Ohel, the Rebbe held an unscheduled *farbrengen*. He began by stating that according to Jewish Law, one should bless others during the month of Elul, and discussed the importance of this practice at length. Leading by example, the Rebbe shared his blessings as well: "May it be a year of light, a year of blessing, and year of happiness..." the Rebbe began, proceeding to say one blessing beginning with each letter of the *Aleph-Bet*.¹
30 Av

1. *Torat Menachem* 5746 vol. 4

MY ENCOUNTER
with the **REBBE**

While we have done our utmost to authenticate these stories, they reflect the narrator's recollection and interpretation of the Rebbe's words.

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