

# HERE'S my STORY

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## FIVE MINUTES LATE IS ALSO LATE

**RABBI NOCHEM KAPLAN**



After I was married in 1968, I enrolled in Chabad's *kollel*, the institute for advanced rabbinic studies for married men. It was a small fledgling group — there were just ten of us, sitting at a couple of tables in Chabad headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway studying Torah together. But during the same week that I was married, there were five other weddings, so immediately the group increased by fifty percent. Soon, the room we were allotted wouldn't be able to accommodate all who'd want to join.

Since the *kollel* was functioning under the auspices of *Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch*, Chabad's central educational arm, I went to see Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Hodakov, the head of the Rebbe's secretariat, to discuss this situation. I explained the problem and my solution: "There is a building across the street that *Merkos* just purchased. Allow us to go into that building and learn." He listened to me and said, "I'll get back to you."

The next day, he called me in and asked, "Who is going to take responsibility for the activities in that building? Will you? If so, I will give you the key."

"What do I have to do exactly?" I asked, and he said, "In the morning you open up and at night you lock up."

I agreed and got the key. We brought a couple of tables and chairs into the building, and we sat down to learn.

About a month later, I had just finished the afternoon prayers and was making my way back to the *kollel*, when I saw the Rebbe coming out of the building, followed by two of his secretaries. He didn't say anything, but as he passed me, he gave me a very sharp look.

When I went inside, I came upon two *kollel* fellows looking dumfounded. "The Rebbe was just here," one of them stammered out.

It seems that the Rebbe made a surprise visit to inspect the premises. He walked around the tables, looked at the books, asked the only two who were there what they were learning, and walked out.

"Oh, no," I thought. The Rebbe came in at exactly 3:30 p.m. when the *kollel* studies were supposed to resume, but only these two fellows were present. I knew there would be repercussions.

Sure enough, we were all summoned to Rabbi Hodakov's office.

"The Rebbe came to visit the *kollel* and he was very disappointed," Rabbi Hodakov told us. "Number one, he wanted to know why you have no library. You only have the books you are learning from, but what if you have to look something up in other sources? Number two, why are you all studying different things? You should learn one subject together. Number three, where was everybody?"

*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

And then he turned specifically to me. "The Rebbe said I should tell you, Kaplan, that five minutes late is also late."

I took that very much to heart, and his comment that "five minutes late is also late" has informed my life throughout the fifty-two years since then.

While I continued to learn in *kollel*, a father came over to me with an issue relating to his daughter who was leaving the path of Torah and causing great anguish to him and his wife. He had already written to the Rebbe about this issue and received a blessing, but he desperately needed to know what he should be doing to help his daughter. So he requested that I go to the Rebbe on his behalf and ask for advice.

I asked Rabbi Hodakov if I could stop the Rebbe as he was leaving the synagogue after prayers and going to his office. Occasionally, people would do this, but I didn't want to unless I had permission. He told me: "Stand at a respectful distance where the Rebbe can see you. If he looks at you, consider that an invitation to come over to him."

So I stood where he said. But I was very nervous — my knees were knocking together as I tried to formulate what I would say to the Rebbe.

He noticed me immediately and gave me a quizzical look as if to ask, "Do you want something?"

I came over and posed the father's question. The Rebbe replied, "G-d gives parents the strength and the ability to cope with issues such as these. He never places burdens upon people that they can't handle. So they should decide what to do and trust that G-d will guide them on the right path."

As the Rebbe walked away I wasn't sure what to tell the father because his question had not been answered. The Rebbe did not say what he and his wife could or should do. But then it dawned on me that, really, the Rebbe was telling him and his wife that, as parents, *they* have been granted the ability to handle this situation. And, indeed, they were most grateful to get his message and ultimately things worked out well.

His message applies to all of us as parents. It teaches that we all have the ability to deal with the challenges that come with raising our children. We have been granted the strength needed to respond to anything that is thrown our way. At times we might think it is too much for us to handle, but the Rebbe assures us that this is not so;

*You shall teach them to your children... [Devarim 6:7]*

Dedicated by the Chabad Flamingo community  
in honor of Rabbi **Nochem Kaplan**, the esteemed  
father of our spiritual leader Rabbi **Mendel Kaplan**.

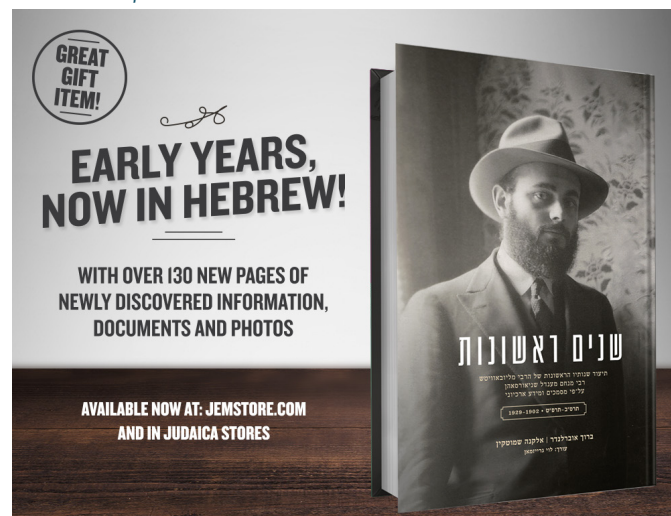
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& abundant Yiddische *nachas*.

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if we trust in G-d, He will surely help us make the right decisions.

I have given this advice to many parents over the years. When they tell me that they feel overwhelmed, I tell them, "If G-d sent a challenge your way, He also sent you the ability to deal with it — to pass the test. Be assured that you can emerge victorious."

*Rabbi Nochem Kaplan is the director of the education office of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Chabad's central educational arm, which provides guidance and professional training to Chabad-run schools. He was interviewed three times in September and December of 2020.*



## This week in....

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

> **5718 - 1958**, during a Shavuot *farbrengen*, the Rebbe announced that all the children should say *I'chaim* and sing together. The Rebbe explained why the Chabad Rebbes throughout the generations dedicated so much attention to children: the essence of the Torah is expressed specifically through children. "Therefore," the Rebbe concluded, "those who were appointed by the [Previous] Rebbe to be teachers, must know that they are not 'descending' to the level of their students. On the contrary, teaching Torah to children is the greatest privilege." <sup>1</sup> 7 Sivan

1. *Torat Menachem* vol. 23 page 42

MY ENCOUNTER  
with the **REBBE**

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

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