



Without you, the *Forward's* stories don't just go unread — they go untold.

LETTERS

The Real Reason Rabbi Lookstein Retreated From the RNC



Not Political: Rabbi Haskel Lookstein has been, unwittingly, at the center of two major political controversies in July, 2016. *Image by YouTube*

By **Amy Neustein**

July 19, 2016

To the Editor:

Kudos to Bethany Mandel for pointing out the travesty that resulted in Rabbi Haskel Lookstein having to forfeit giving the invocation at the RNC ([“Rabbi Haskel Lookstein Would Have Schooled Donald Trump at the Republican Convention — If You'd Let Him”](#), July 17, 2016).

I was privileged to study under Rabbi Haskel Lookstein when I attended Teacher's Institute back in the 70s. The man I knew then, and the man I would encounter years later, was a person of dignity, determination and fortitude. I also learned that Rabbi Lookstein was a man who cherished the importance of teaching Torah while showing strong resolve about shying away from politics. In fact, I learned this lesson in a rather painful way.

It was in the late 80s and I found myself embroiled in a messy family court and child welfare situation which had palpable elements of agency malfeasance, causing the dire and painful (and unfortunately permanent) separation of myself from my own daughter, who I cherished with all my heart. I had approached Rabbi Lookstein urging him to help me get the ear of the then Attorney General, Bob Abrams, who was an esteemed member of his congregation.

Rabbi Lookstein's response, though at the time devastatingly disappointing to me, was “I don't mix my religious duties with politics.” His answer was not at all what I had hoped for. But he was sincere in his response, and I knew at that moment that he would not lead me on a wild goose chase as others had.

Though I am deeply saddened that Rabbi Lookstein will not be giving the invocation at the RNC, I can say that I truly understand the man: it was not weakness or cowardice that forced him to retreat, but a deep respect for his role as a teacher, educator, and beacon of light for all us in the Jewish community.

Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

Editor, *Tempest in the Temple* (Brandeis University Press, Jonathan Sarna Series in American Jewish History, Culture and Life)

Fort Lee, NJ