Rav Lichtenstein: A Jewish communal tribute

By ALAN JAY GERBER

KOSHER BODKORN

With the passing of Rabbi Aharon Licht-

enstein, z’t, this week’s essay will deal with a collection of tributes by several community, rabbinic and educational personalities who in one way or another had their lives touched by the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Lichtenstein.

First, a few biographical works as penned by Rabbi Shlomo Zuker of the Slika Center of Yale University and Rabbi Shalom Carmy of Yeshiva University in the current issue of Tradition:

“Rabbi Lichtenstein was born in France in 1933, from which his family escaped in 1941 to the United States, finally settling in New York. At Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin he made his mark as a younger. There he studied with, and was deeply influenced by, Rabbi Ahron Soloveitchik and Rabbi Yitzchok Hut-

ner. Entering Yeshiva College at 16, he stud-

ied with Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes and, more 
fearfully, with Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.”

“Rabbi Lichtenstein would receive his semi-

chita from Rabbi Soloveitchik to assume over the next years several teaching and leader-

ship positions at Yeshiva. He was also to gar-

ner a doctorate at Harvard in English litera-

ture in 1957.”

By 1971, both he and his family moved to 

Israel where he assumed the position as rosh a yeshiva to Israel where he assumed the position as rosh yeshiva with Rav Yeche
diel Abramsky with whom he consulted func-

tions.

According to Rabbi Zuckier and Carmy, “The primary arena of Torah study, for Rabbi Lichtenstein, as for the mainstream of Jewish thought, is the study of legal texts: Talmud, its commentators and codifiers. And when Rabbi Lichtenstein extols Talmud study, he has particularly in mind Talmud study pur-

sued in the Eastern European tradition, and has particularly in mind Talmud study pur-

Rabbi Lichtenstein extols Talmud study, he 

spoken with him in learning on a number of 

subjects. His mastery of the entire range of 

Talmudic subjects, including such esoteric 

areas as Zera’im and Taharas was incredible. 

Once, when he gave a shiur on a complex 

subject, his summation and conclusion elic-

ited the following reaction. ‘It was as if light-

ning bolts illuminated the sky.’

“Further, his brilliance was mirrored by 

beautiful midos. He spoke with great humil-

ity and was respectful to everyone. I once 

heard an ideological opponent of his say that 
‘he is such a gentleman.’

“I remember a number of conversations 

we had about our beloved common rebbe 

and mashich, Rav Hurner, z’t.”

He spoke with such reverence and derech eretz about him that one could just imagine that he was still a talmid in Yeshivas Chaim Berlin. Interestingly, he also spoke with
guidance regarding halachic she’alot and life 

questions, some of which had many facets 

and dimensions that needed to be consid-

ered. He was always a powerful voice sup-

porting women’s Torah learning at the high-

est levels, and was an advocate for women to take leadership roles in Jewish education.”

“I was privileged to be with Rav Aharon Licht-

enstein over the years. … had been his Talmid at Yeshiva University in 1933, from which his family escaped in 1941 to the United States, finally settling in New York. At Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin he made his mark as a younger. There he studied with, and was deeply influenced by, Rabbi Ahron Soloveitchik and Rabbi Yitzchok Hut-

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