I stand before you as a representative of the many of us who, despite not being torah leaders, rabbis, teachers or prominent students of R. Aharon, were the majority of his students; simple, anonymous people who yearned, and continue to yearn, for torah study, torah leadership and an authentic, personal encounter with a true torah giant. There are, of course, innumerable luminaries whom he trained and mentored, and his legacy endures through them and their disciples. But we are also a testimony to his influence. For a 50 year old man to be able to stand before you and say that a person he encountered more than 30 years ago, directly for not more than one year, during years of behavioral and intellectual immaturity and emotional flux, for such a person to be able to say that R. Aharon was the greatest influence on his life outside of his family, and then to realize that there are thousands if not tens of thousands of others, not those in the webcasts or videos, in the papers or in journals, just like me, is a great testimony to the sphere and magnitude of his influence.

Trying to speak about R. Aharon now, as was the case trying to speak with him then, one feels a profound sense of inadequacy and embarrassment. Not the kind that a bench player feels when he gets in because the starter is injured, but one of not even belonging in the arena. He referred to one of his rebbeim, R. Hutner, as a gavra d’mistapina minei par excellence, and this phrase came up more than once in the hespedim delivered this morning in the yeshiva. In regard to R. Hutner one gets the sense that he meant a person before whom one shrank in fear. That was not the case with R. Aharon, though he too was a gavra d’mistapina minei. Nobody feared R. Aharon in that sense. He was a towering intellectual force, but a gentle giant. He exuded humility, understanding, compassion and moral sensitivity. He was concerned only about kavod haTorah, not kavod atzmo- honor to the torah not to himself. He appeared not to have a capacity for anger, and he had an undying patience, which as an educator of a much different sort myself I appreciate increasingly all of the time. You felt small in his presence, mistapina minei, not shrinking of fear, but simply because of the magnitude of his intellect. You would go to him with a question and realize that not only weren’t you ready for an answer to your question; you didn’t even understand what you were asking. If you could manage to formulate a question that he could answer, that itself was an accomplishment. His answers were never black and white (with one exception that I vividly remember because it
proved the rule), and more than anything they would spur you to investigate further, having received a perfectly outlined summary of the issues needing clarification, and the points on which they hinged. Every answer would produce a bibliography of sources, from the breadth of Torah and Literature, with references you would then need to look up to be able to start to understand what he was driving at, and where he was coming from.

He would frequently try to dilute the sense of being so far above you by using metaphors from common experience: sports, love and marriage. He described the difference between a korban olah and korban shelamim (two types of sacrifices brought in the ancient temple) as analogous to the difference between the flowers one gives his girlfriend when courting her, and those he gives to his wife for their anniversary. An action demonstrative of the nature of the halachic marital bond would be sitting on the couch eating popcorn and watching a movie with your spouse. The chet ha'egel (sin of the golden calf) was compared to a marital affair with an old fling on one's honeymoon. His literary metaphors would have had the same effect were it not for the fact that more often than not we didn't understand them, if we even recognized their sources. These allusions would give us the impression that he too lived in the same world as us, enjoying the same pastimes and recreation, but we quickly realized that he had unfettered himself of the bonds of that world years ago (at least in part by means of the shevirat ha'aratzon that Rabbi Millen referred to earlier), and was speaking as somebody who was familiar with it but had long since moved out of town.

He had an unparalleled intensity and work ethic, such as I have yet to encounter again since. He did not shrink from facts or the truth, and yet always maintained an unwavering faith. Ethicists refer to a moral theory, more practical than Deontology or Utilitarianism, called Virtue Ethics. In the context of a virtue ethic, one may identify another person whom one considers a paragon of ethical behavior and virtue, and moral quandaries can be resolved by answering the question “What would X do in this situation?” For many of his students there was no better model for a virtue ethic than R. Aharon.

I cannot summarize his uniqueness in any amount of time, due to lack of ability, insufficient exposure, and because truthfully nobody could. Like a twelve-lead ECG which gives you a complete picture of the heart by looking from a dozen different directions, we will get a full picture only by reading and listening to the dozens of hespedim and divrei zcharon that are already online, and the hundreds more to come. I would like to just leave you with four lessons learned from him that I have tried to internalize and carry with me, though certainly not always successfully. These are of course not the only ones, but they are something to wrap your head around.

1. **Aseh lecha Rav**: Everybody needs a mentor and guide. When R. Aharon moved to Israel, away from his 3 main mentors, R. Hutner, R. Aharon Soloveitchik and the Rav, he chose a new guide, R. Shlomo
Zalman Auerbach. RS"Z was from a more right wing orientation than R. Aharon’s religious Zionist bent, but that did not deter him. A Gadol is a gadol. (As centrist orthodox Jews, he would say, we differ more from the right, but more with the left). The story is told that when he and one of his daughters debated the halachic permissibility of piercing one’s ears- she, not surprisingly, in favor and he opposed- rather than tell her that I am a Rabbi and this is the answer, they went to RS"Z to resolve the dispute (and she won, and he acceded). What better way to teach your children that everybody needs a Rav, and that deference must be given to true rabbinic authorities and torah giants.

2. **It’s ok to live with uncertainty:** One cannot fear facts that don’t appear to fit with your world view. You must always try to understand, but you never will fully do so. This is where emunah (faith) must take over; emunat chachamim (faith in our sages) and emunah in Ha’kadosh Baruch Hu (G-d). Regarding the former, you can read the story he tells of R. Chaim Soloveitchik waking to check if any foundlings had been left at his doorstep, and how this knowledge strengthened him, R. Aharon, when he was questioning the ethics of certain halachot (Jewish laws) as a young man. Furthermore, one’s emunah should be strengthened not despite the uncertainties and doubts, but precisely because of them.

3. **Family:** Many people who excel at the highest levels as masters in their field do so at the expense of family life. Frequent, travel, late nights in the lab, hours closeted in a library or study researching and preparing all come at the expense of those closest to us. Listening to his family this morning, one sees clearly that this was not the case with him. One never senses that they felt they took second place to the yeshiva or his other pursuits, and he repeatedly stated that they were his greatest accomplishment and pride. (I would be remiss not to add here that I have learned this from my own family as well, of course.)

4. **Torah study is not for your free time:** He often quoted the Mishnah in Avot, “Al tomar l’kh’she’efneh eshneh, shema lo ti’paneh.” (Don’t say I will study torah when I have free time, lest you not have free time.) And he would add with his characteristic resonant voice, pointing his finger at us, “VADAI lo tipaneh.” (You definitely won’t have the free time)

If you didn’t know him, you missed an opportunity for an encounter with a singular individual, the likes of whom doesn’t come around often. If you did know him, you know that nothing I can say will encapsulate the magnitude of his intellect, yirat shamayim (fear of heaven) middot (ethical character), integrity and humility.

Even if we were not in touch with him over the years, we were all comforted by the knowledge that he would be able to address the most challenging questions of our time, with courage and faith. His was always the final word for us, because he was always so far ahead in the depth and comprehensiveness of his analysis
of any issue. We no longer have him to answer our questions. The best thing we can do to honor him at this point, and continue to receive his counsel, is to learn his Torah, and to commit ourselves to more Torah study, in general, on a regular basis. For those less able to manage the technical sources, try his essay on Robert Frost's "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening," easily available with a simple google search, which gives you a feel for his analytic style, poetic sensitivity, implementation of torah u'madda (torah study coupled with non-torah sources) and an important insight into one aspect of his world view. For those wanting more, but not facile with Hebrew, Leaves of Faith will enlighten and expose you to various aspects of his halachic and philosophic thought, with selected essays that he chose to publish. Be forewarned, these are not easy reading that can be picked up in a few free, tired moments before nodding off at night, or with one's feet kicked up and a beer in hand. For those with better Hebrew, but still not with the background in halachic terminology and methodology, the book by R. Sabato, Mevakshei Panecha, is a true delight, and a very recent explication of his thought, arranged topically. For those who learned Torah at his feet in the yeshiva, now is the time to commit to reinvesting in study at those levels with essays from Minchat Aviv, or by studying an entire masechta with one of his Shiurei Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, sources in hand. We were able to do it then, and we can still do it now. We should not compromise on that, whatever effort it takes. He certainly never would.

Yehi zichro baruch. May we all merit that he be a meilitz yosher on our behalf.