Delivered at Columbia University’s Memorial Service for HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, ז”ל, April 20, 2015 (10 other students of Yeshivat Har Etzion and Migdal Oz eulogized as well)

It's not everyday that we have the chance to come together as a community to commemorate the massive influence one man had, has, and will continue to have on all of us here.

Much of what Rav Aharon epitomized is ingrained in his style of learning and I wanted to share one idea of Torah that Rav Lichtenstein shared at the end of the year I was in yeshiva. You may be surprised my words will not be taken from his ספרים, ספרי ספראים, which are the areas of ש”ס I most adore, as it's truly unbelievable what Rav Aharon was able to contribute on topics never explored on such a level. But instead, I will share with you a general concept from יש נוחלין, much of which was relayed to me by Rav Moshe Taragin in a shiur given to reinforce Rav Lichtenstein’s most salient points on the פרק.

Rav Lichtenstein and the rabbis that gave shiur at yeshiva who constantly quoted him would reference the idea of what it really meant to be a מנהיג, one who bequeaths. The פסוקים are ambiguous, indicating both an active role of מוריש as it says in the words כי תצא ביום הנخيلו את בניו versus a more passive one in פינחס when man is completely out of the equation as the divider of inheritance. On one hand, if one dies without ever worrying about inheritances, acquisitions, property, etc., the money trickles down to his or her closest descendants automatically, the deceased not having to do anything; on the other hand, the משנה calls those who bequeath מניחילים, people who give over inheritance actively. Even though the חכמים do not allow the מניחיל to change up the proportions of inheritance, nor deny the הבכור any money, they must recognize that the one who passes clearly needs to be a מניחיל – one who influences and leads the next generation.

Rav Lichtenstein is the ultimate מניחיל. Had he not for a moment envisioned what would ensue after his death,迪ינו and more than that – the world of Modern Orthodox would anyway have improved dramatically. But actively setting up a yeshiva model with several ראשי ישיבה in place, planning and advising how his students and the general Jewish people should lead Torah-centric communities… that was Rav Lichtenstein’s legacy.

On a personal note, I spoke with Rav Aharon as I was leaving yeshiva, and the one thing he told me was the importance of time management in these next stages of life. It’s true he was preaching
to the choir, as that characteristic is one I place above all others in my college life. But it was that very notion that we shared the priority of prioritization of time, the connection that we had that so inspired me. His model of learning from his surroundings and becoming a deeper and more thoughtful absorber of Torah and his advice that within the learning I was every day, the classes I would take, and the friendships I would forge, I could gain immensely in my growth as a בן תורה – and knowing how to never waste a moment – that was what Rav Aharon bestowed unto me, and what he himself epitomized that forever will have an indelible effect on me.

– Jeremy Cooper