Why is there a requirement for the מצורע to go to the כהן? Why not any doctor? Why not any individual specialist in the הלכות of צרעת? It's just a diagnosis!

The המחבר writes: "עליך יתק מוסר מאהרן הכהן ויראה מה בינו לאהרן כה

The מצורע goes to the כהן, not merely as a clinician, a technical observer of the blemish, who will render the individual טמא if the necessary criteria are met. Rather, the מצורע goes to the כהן to be in his presence, to have an opportunity to witness and interact with a more spiritually sensitive individual.

The מצורע, plagued with various sins and religious shortcomings, needs to engage in a process of תשובה, of correcting his behaviors and recalibrating his religious character. The goal of the מצורע-כהן interaction is that it will jumpstart this process of תשובה. After all, המחבר writes: "כ"-שפתם כל ושם-דעת ווחט הבקש מפיו ימשר ובקשה מפיו ימשר ובחוק. והוא. Outside of two weeks working in the מקדש, the כהנים were the teachers of עם מצורע ובקשה מפיו ימשר ובקשה מפיו ימשר והוא, in speech and in action. The כהן is the מלאך מפיו ימשר ובקשה מפיו ימשר והוא from whom theמצורע can learn to be a better Jew.

There are times in life when we come in contact with people who profoundly impact us. We are not merely impressed or in awe of them; we are changed forever.

Our community – our generation – lost a true גורל this week, an absolute giant, someone who towered over us all, in his אハבת הוהו וירשת הוהו וירשת הוהו, in his humility, in his ethics, in his י réseau, in his passion, in his sweeping knowledge and understanding of Western thought and writings and in his integrity.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ז"ל was someone who, like the אדריכל הכון in our parsha, you approach and you are transformed. Being in his presence – whether in person or through his writings – made us want to be better people, greater" nossoי ה".
with greater holiness, greater integrity, greater sensitivity and nuance and greater humility.

Shabbos is not a time for הספדים and I’m sure many of you have already heard about some of facets and stories of Rav Lichtenstein. My goal for the next few minutes is not to mourn our collective loss, but to focus on how Rav Lichtenstein changed us all for the better.

I speak for myself, but I know I speak for many of Rav Lichtenstein’s talmidim as well. We were tremendously inspired by Rav Lichtenstein and wanted to become more like him, even if we could never reach his level. We wanted to be as passionate as he, to daven as he did, to know כל התורה כולה as he did, with as much understanding and analysis. We wanted to make sure that our lives were guided by his perspectives and insights. We wanted to be as nuanced and comprehensive as he was. We wanted to be as humble as he was. We wanted to be as respectful and tolerant as he was.

And, therefore, as much as possible, we listened to every שיעור he gave, every שיחה and every press conference, to learn his Torah, his methodology of learning and his perspective on the topics which were relevant to us.

We watched his every move because that’s how we wanted to live: his unbelievable focus while learning; the way he ran up the stairs to the בית מדרש in his 60’s and beyond, all while carrying many ספרים under his arms; the way he danced on Shabbos and, of course, on שמחת תורה, when he would jump while carrying the ספר תורה and both his feet would be off the ground; the way he was מקריא the קולות for תקיעת שופר with such intensity; the way he recited "אור זרוע לצדיק" on יום כיפור; and the way he would enter the חדר אוכל after we arrived there, yet leave before we finished.

We listened to the stories about Rav Lichtenstein: Picking up garbage from the floor of the bus in 1967 when returning from a rally in Washington at 1am, so the bus driver wouldn’t have to do it himself...; returning money left over which he didn’t use when traveling abroad...

Rav Lichtenstein sang a lot. (It is a major mistake to confuse his penetrating intellect and quiet personality with being unemotional. He was so emotional, so passionate. Key lines during his שיחות would be conveyed with a thunderous voice.) One of the songs he would sing was: "אשרי איש שלא ישכחו ונו אחריך וידיהם אל ניך: אשרי איש יאש לי וידיהם אל ניך וידיהם אל ניך. He put all his strength in הקב”ה and towards serving הקב”ה. He had such willpower and he endeavored to transmit that to us. He would give שיעורים for 2 hours and beyond; he used to deliver שיחות during the last 20 minutes of morning סדר, which were humorously called 20/20 שיחות because they went 20
minutes overtime into lunch. He would always finish שיעור late, running into lunch, teaching us priorities in life. I have mentioned before the story about Rav Lichtenstein on מוצאי תשעים 베ב. The two most noticeable things we don’t do on שיעור are eating and learning Torah. What happens afterwards? Most of us eat as soon as תשעים 베ב is over; Rav Lichtenstein learned. He would give שיעורים right after landing in America and immediately upon returning back to Israel.

We wanted to be as passionate and principled, compassionate and complete like Rav Lichtenstein. But, being a towering giant doesn’t necessarily translate into being a role model. How was he such an impactful force in our lives if he was so much greater than us?

In his famous article, “The Source of Faith is Faith Itself,” Rav Lichtenstein wrote the following about his own rabbeim who influenced him, namely Rav Hutner, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and Rav Ahron Soloveitchik:

The Rosh Yeshiva (as his talmidim invariably called Rav Hutner), gavra d’mistafina minei par excellence, simply overwhelmed. The Rav overawed. I could entertain no rational illusions about attaining their status or stature. But Reb Ahron [Soloveitchik], while an inspiring vision, yet somehow seemed within reach, and truly presented a model. It wasn’t so much what he said or did. I was simply enthralled by what he was – a remarkable fusion of mastery and simplicity, of vigor and humility and, above all, a pillar of radical integrity.

How could Rav Lichtenstein be both like Rav Hutner and the Rav for us, as well as like Rav Aharon Soloveitchik? We couldn’t be him, but we still wanted to be like him.

I believe there are a number of reasons:

1. In part, it’s because Rav Lichtenstein was so approachable and full of tremendous warmth, even as we dreaded (and craved at the same time) the "נו סטבסקי תאמר in שיעור.

2. Rav Lichtenstein also took his role as very seriously. His idea of ינכן, to raise his תלמידים, was, to raise his תלמידים up to be able to learn on their own once they left yeshiva, as well be able to live passionate and commanded lives of ‘עבודת ה. A תלמיד who was in both Rav Lichtenstein’s for the Kollel told me that Rav Lichtenstein was much more deliberate and explicit about teaching his methodology during his regular שיעור and קוללא שיעורים. For the Kollel, he streamlined the presentation; but for the younger students, he was focused on making sure the שיעור raised our level of ילמוד תורה, not just our amount of ילמוד תורה.
In chats as well – whether about learning Torah, responsibility towards the קהל, maximizing potential, staying focused on our dreams even if the reality is not there yet or any other topic – his goal was never to impress, but to charge us and guide us to be passionate and responsible.

3. However, even more significantly, I believe we wanted to be like Rav Lichtenstein because of who he was: a person of extraordinary שילמות, passion and authenticity. He achieved שילמות and we saw beauty there. He lived the most impressive integrated life. He was profoundly passionate about everything he valued. Fatigue was not part of his lexicon. And he was authentic._Total אמת. No frills, ulterior motives, wanting to position himself in some way or caving in to challenge. Who is not drawn to that? He was a living model of how to live with a broad set of values, all rooted in a passionate עבדי הוהי יראת שמי and the world).

In one of the הספדים for Rav Lichtenstein, the following was quoted:

וכן אם דקדק החכם על עצמו, והיה דבורו בנחת עם הבריות, ודעתו מעורבת עמהם, ומקבלי בכר פניס יומת, ונעלמה מותו, מכרב 한국 תפוקולינו, ולא יורא תמריהם ולא תסיק בחרוה עשו, וביעיתו ב detalles, ולא ראה מחלים ואוילינו, וממחוז אומרים וייר شيئאנא כל ממקלי ואוילינו אתו, וממחוז לעמינו, וייר קדוש ואתו, ועלי החכמיםormsg.tld

It’s as if the Rambam wrote this entire description about Rav Lichtenstein... עד "למעשיו". We loved Rav Lichtenstein and desired his actions. He lived a life of קידוש הוהי.

Everyone recognized it, not just his תלמידים. I share with you a few lines from MK Tzipi Livni’s eulogy for Rav Lichtenstein: He was "a man of stature who left after him an inspiring and admirable Jewish world outlook... His Judaism was one of wisdom that listened and reconciled without compromising his beliefs."

On Yom Kippur, when singing מראה כהן, the best image I can conjure up for what the כהן גדול must have looked like when leaving the קהל is Rav Lichtenstein in his Kittel on Yom Kippur, radiating קדושה like a מלאך ה’ צבקות. He was for us the ארון, the one in whose presence לקחנו מוסר and learned and strove to be more authentic, more passionate and more integrated 'عبادיה. We will probably never again meet a דוד like him. And, although, Rav Lichtenstein would want us to find others with whom to connect to motivate further religious growth – and we should, his impact upon us will continue to inspire us. Not only his תורה and his writings, but the fullness of his personality.