When we heard the bitter news we cried. Father has died. It is appropriate for us Talmidim to speak of Rav Lichtenstein as father in the same manner that Elisha spoke of Eliyahu HaNavi upon the latter’s departure from this world, Avi Avi Rechev Yisrael Ufarashav (II Melachim 2:12). Rav Aharon was more than a Rebbe to us; he was a powerful father figure. We feel as if we lost a father, a revered father.

I know from firsthand experience Rav Lichtenstein regarded his Talmidim as his children. In 1993 after receiving written authorization to administer Gittin from Hacham Ovadia Yosef zt”l and, Yibadeil LeChayim Aruchim, Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg I immediately traveled to Rav Lichtenstein’s home (at that time in the Katamon section of Yerushalayim) to show him the Haskamot. Rav Lichtenstein read the documents and remarked “I feel like a proud parent”.

Great Trepidation

It is with great trepidation that I approach the task of eulogizing our great Rebbe, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l. Delivering a proper Hespeid for any Jew is an awesome responsibility. The Midrash (Kohelet Rabbah 12:13) records that none other than the Malachim are charged by Hashem with the mission of listening to a deceased person’s Hespeid and reporting its contents to the Creator! Moreover, the Gemara (Shabbat 105b) records that “One who is indolent in eulogizing a Talmid Chacham deserves to be buried alive”.

This is ever so more the case with regard to our beloved Rebbe Rav Lichtenstein. Rav Lichtenstein was adamant about the necessity of delivering a proper Hespeid. Rav Lichtenstein in November 1985 conveyed at a convention of the Orthodox Union his deep upset at hearing the Hespeidim delivered in honor of Rav Aharon Kotler at his death in 1962. Rav Lichtenstein bitterly complained than other than Mr. Irving Bunim, each speaker simply repeated the same mantra of how learned Rav Kotler was, how saintly was Rav Kotler, how devoted to his learning, without noting any of the unique characteristics of that great man. It was very rare to see Rav Lichtenstein become angry. However, on this occasion there was a rare of flash of anger at the failure to properly evaluate someone who made such an enormous contribution such as Rav Kotler.
As such, I humbly present my thoughts about Rav Lichtenstein zt”l and hope to add something substantial and significant to the many eulogies delivered in his honor.

A Powerful Role Model

Although I never heard Rav Lichtenstein express this point, I strongly sense that Rav Lichtenstein felt a very deep responsibility to serve as a role model. He knew that everyone in our community admired him and looked for him for guidance and leadership. Rav Aharon rose to the occasion and served as quite the example in a stunning variety of ways. There are at least fifteen points of light that Rav Lichtenstein shined upon the world.

1. **Developing a Relationship with Hashem** – In his Shiurim, talks, writings and personal demeanor Rav Lichtenstein showed us how to forge a deep and meaningful relationship with Hashem. One could learn how to Daven simply by watching Rav Lichtenstein Daven. Moreover, Rav Lichtenstein taught us how to seek the Ribono Shel beyond the conventional arenas of Tefillah, Talmud Torah and Mitzvah performance. During a question and answer session with North American Talmidim at Yeshivat Har Etzion, Rav Lichtenstein described encountering the Divine when boarding a bus and watching children play in a park at dusk. A most stunning revelation, though, is Rav Aharon’s poignant discussion of Emunah (in an impactful essay entitled “The Source of Faith is Faith Itself”, Jewish Action 1992 and reprinted in Leaves of Faith 2:363-367) in which he writes “The greatest source of faith, however, has been the Ribono Shel Olam Himself”.

2. **Hatmadah** – Rav Leibel Dulitz, a classmate of Rav Lichtenstein, recalled (during his Shiur at Yeshiva University High School for Boys in 1978) Rav Aharon’s learning regimen during the years he studied at Yeshiva College. He recounted that Rav Lichtenstein would learn in the Beit Midrash until 1:30 A.M. and then retire to his room and devote two hours to his university studies. On Thursday evenings, though, Rav Lichtenstein would learn until 4:30 A.M. and forego attending to his secular studies that evening. Rav Yitzchak Lichtenstein shared in the Hespeid he delivered in honor of his father, that he never saw his father not engaged in some productive activity.

3. **Dikduk B’Mitzvot** – We Talmidim witnessed Rav Aharon’s passionate adherence to Mitzvot. We saw the sacrifice he made to adhere to the stringent opinions regarding Chadash and community Eruvin. We saw how extraordinarily careful Rav Lichtenstein was to give a significant contribution to each and every Ani he
encountered. A vivid description of Rav Lichtenstein devotion to Mitzvot is presented by Rav Lichtenstein’s Israeli Talmid Rav Shmuel David in his collection of responsa entitled She’eirot UTeshuvot MeiRosh Tzurim (20:1). After Rav David presents the various opinions as to whether one must dip the bread upon which he recited HaMotzi even during the week, he concludes that it is preferable to make an effort to do so “and I have seen Mori V’Rabi Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zealously (‘Tar Harbeih’) arrange for salt to be available before he recites the Bracha of HaMotzi”. A humorous exchange happened in the first year I learned at Yeshivat Har Etzion that demonstrated Rav Lichtenstein’s deep devotion to Shemirat Mitzvot. Rav Lichtenstein had delivered a beautiful Shiur on Tevilat Keilim on the Motzaei Shabbat of Parashat Toledot 5742. During this Shiur Rav Aharon addressed the well-known challenging of immersing electric equipment such as a toaster. Rav Lichtenstein mentioned that he solved this problem in his home by declaring his toaster to be Hefkeir, thereby obviating the requirement to immerse Keilim that one owns. The following Purim, one of the students visiting Rav Lichtenstein’s home unwisely chose (as a Purim prank) to grab the toaster. The next day at Yeshiva the student presented the toaster (not an inexpensive item by Israeli standards of the time) to Rav Lichtenstein who, in turn, refused to take it. Rav Aharon explained that if he were to accept the toaster it would indicate that his declaring the toaster Hefkeir was insincere. This week in preparation for reading Parashat Tazria-Metzora this Shabbat we turn our attention to the prohibition of Lashon Hara. In all of my interactions with Rav Lichtenstein, he never spoke a word of slander. Rav Yitzchak Lichtenstein also remarked that he never heard Rav Aharon utter even a bit of Lashon Hara. Rav Lichtenstein conveyed that Mitzvah observance truly reflects the Divine Will which we must adhere to scrupulously.

4. **Vast Torah Knowledge** – Rav Lichtenstein’s mastery of Torah, especially of the Rishonim whom most Yeshiva students do not intensely study such as the Ra’avan and Rabbeinu Yerucham, inspires his Talmidim to strive for high levels of Torah knowledge. Rav Aharon was able to inspire his Talmidim to want to be like him not dissimilar (L’havdil) to the manner in which youngsters seek to emulate their sports idols. Yet, despite the vast reservoir of Torah information, Rav Lichtenstein bore and presented his knowledge in a modest fashion, never even mildly appearing to be showboating.

5. **Modesty** – An entire book can and should be written describing Rav Aharon’s genuine and legendary modesty. It is simply stunning how such a great man could be so modest. In a Shiur devoted to study of Avot D’Rabi Natan, Rav Lichtenstein
indirectly indicated how he maintained his modesty. He stated that even if one were to develop into a great Talmid Chacham he should still bear in mind that he pales in comparison to greats such as Rabi Akiva Eiger. One story will suffice to illustrate Rav Aharon’s modesty. Once two students (one of whom were named Aharon) were passing in the Yeshiva halls and one of the students said to the other “Aharon Yeish Lecha Gafrur?” (Aharon do have a match). Rav Lichtenstein, thinking that the question was addressed to him, responded “Mitzta’eiir Ein Li”, I am sorry I do not have one.

6. **Kibbud Av Va’Eim** – Talmidim who learned in the Yeshiva in the years when Rav Aharon cared for his elderly parents witnessed the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch come to life in the manner in which our Rebbe fulfilled the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av Va’Eim. We saw how Rav Aharon treated his parents with such kindness, sensitivity and joy. A few years ago, I witnessed Rav Aharon’s children treating him with the same kindness when our Rebbe was frail.

7. **Outstanding Parenting** – Rav Lichtenstein exhorted us to follow his well known example of devoting time to learning Torah with our children. I witnessed a lesser known facet of his parenting at a Sheva Berachot of one of his children who chose a Chareidi lifestyle. Rav Lichtenstein openly and candidly acknowledged this difference and even embraced it. He noted that a parent’s job is to set a child on a Torah path and the child then has the legitimate choice as to which Torah path to continue. How remarkable is this attitude, especially in light of the fact that many parents do not react in this manner when a child chooses to follow a somewhat different Torah path. Rav Lichtenstein set an example of healthy parenting which allows a child to follow the Torah path best suited for their personalities.

8. **A Loving and Caring Spouse** – Although the Lichtensteins adhered to the highest levels of modesty, the mutual feelings of deep respect, love and affection of the Rav and the Rabbanit for each other was obvious to Talmidim.

9. **A Doctorate in English Literature from Harvard University** – Rav Lichtenstein on many occasions stated that he found his intense secular education to have been spiritually enriching, famously quoting Chazal (Midrash Eichah 2:13) that “there is wisdom among the nations of the world” adding that “we ignore it at our loss”. There is, however, another mostly unstated spiritual side of Rav Lichtenstein’s secular accomplishments. Rav Lichtenstein’s impressive secular credentials have fortified the Emunah of many Talmidim including this author. I will speak of my own
experience of my family becoming observant as a child. We had a relative who was highly respected and regarded as the family intellect. He had earned a doctorate in mathematics from New York University and even helped design the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. This relative, however, ridiculed Torah observance and the Talmud. It was difficult to resist such proclamations by an admired relative but my faith was sustained in great part by Rav Lichtenstein’s doctorate from Harvard. As a very impressionable youngster I had confidence that my Rebbe, who had earned a doctorate at a more prestigious institution than my uncle, understood life better than my uncle. If such a learned, brilliant and saintly man believed in Torah, then it surely must be true.

10. The Crown of Torah – The Rambam (Hilchot Issurei Bi’ah 21:32) explains that one should not marry a daughter of an Am HaAretz since “She does not recognize the crown of Torah”. The Rambam teaches that it is crucial for every Jew to have an appreciation for the greatness and profundity of Torah. Perhaps the most important aspect of an extended period time devoted to learning from Rav Lichtenstein was experiencing the crown of Torah. I do not think that there is in any other discipline, L’havdil, such parallel depth and profundity. The crowning experience of the Keter Torah was the two hour Shiur Kelali Rav Lichtenstein delivered at Yeshiva every other week. One can reasonably say (paraphrasing Succah 51b) “that one who never heard a Shiur Kelali from Rav Lichtenstein never fully experienced and appreciated the crown of Torah”.

11. Religious Zionism – Rav Lichtenstein’s passion for Eretz Yisrael was contagious. Who can forget the stirring conclusion of Rav Lichtenstein’s magisterial essay ( Tradition Fal 1981) extolling the virtues of Yeshivot Hesder, which combine intense Torah study with service in Tzahal: “Standing in tears atop Har Hazeitim, the bleak sight of Kol HaMekudash MeHavera Harev Yoter Mehavera stretching before him, what would the Ramban have given to head a Yeshivat Hesder? What courage it took to leave a secure and prestigious position in New York, without the encouragement of his great Rebbe and father-in-law Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, to assume a position at a little known Yeshiva located on a sparsely populated bleak hill in Israel! Who can be unmoved by merely contemplating this awesome move! Moreover, Rav Lichtenstein changed the face of Religious Zionism infusing it with the vision of not loving Torah less than their Chareidi peers but loving Eretz Yisrael more. Rav Lichtenstein insisted that we not forsake great achievement in our beloved Torah in our devotion to our beloved homeland. Great contemporary Religious Zionist Torah leaders such as Rav Yosef Rimon and Rav Re’eim haKohein, not to mention Rav Moshe and Meir Lichtenstein,
have emerged in the decades since the Lichtensteins made Aliyah, following the bold example set by Rav Aharon.

12. **Dedication to Am Yisrael** – Only a heartless individual could have failed to be moved by Rav Lichtenstein’s stirring speech delivered immediately before Megillah reading of Purim eve 5443. Rav Aharon exhorted us to follow the example of Esther who risked everything to save her people in their hour of need. Rav Lichtenstien’s cry “Chayavim Litrom L’Am Yisrael”, one must contribute to Am Yisrael, still loudly rings in my ears.

13. **Tolerate the Intolerance** – During a particularly moving and meaningful question and answer session with North American Talmidim at the conclusion of our two years of learning with the Yeshiva, Rav Aharon was asked how to react to those in the Chareidi community who disparage Religious Zionist/Modern Orthodox Bnei Torah. Rav Lichtenstein immediately responded “tolerate the intolerance”. This was but one example of Rav Lichtenstein consistently taking the “high road” in a situation of internal conflict. What a shining example of pure and unadulterated Ahavat Yisrael!

14. **Morality, Integrity and Authenticity** – These powerful words most appropriately portray the exemplary character of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein.

15. **Two Kings Wearing One Crown** – Rav Neriah was once asked if there are Nissim Geluyim (open miracles) in our time. Rav Neriah quipped that one need only visit Yeshivat Har Etzion and witness Rav Amital and Rav Lichtenstein jointly lead the Yeshiva without rancor and jealousy, but rather in peace, harmony and love. I have heard of situations when Rav Lichtenstein was asked a question to which he stated that he feels he must consult Rav Amital and when Rav Amital was asked a question and he responded that he must consult Rav Lichtenstein. Perhaps the greatest moment of my period of study at the Gush was witnessing a dramatic scene at the end of Yom Kippur 5444. Rav Lichtenstein came with a big smile to wish Rav Amital a hearty Yasher Kochac for leading of the Ne’ilah service. Rav Amital refused to shake Rav Lichtenstein’s hand, instead planting a kiss on Rav Lichtenstein’s forehead.

**Conclusion**

It was so sad to see our Rebbe slowing down in later years. Rebbe was so strong dashing to Shiur while carrying his not so mini-Shas and Rambam under his arm. It
was so sad to see such a powerful man him deliver his last Shiur at Torah Academy of Bergen County in 2010 during which he struggled to walk and to deliver the Shiur.

Father is gone. A great man has gone. Chazal teach (Chullin 7b) teach Tzadikim are Greater in Death than during their Lifetime”. We never fully appreciate the greatness of those who dwell amongst us until they leave us.

Father expected much from us. We hope that we met, at least partially, his lofty expectations. Rav Lichtenstein continues to serve as a powerful role model for all of us. Rav Lichtenstein will serve as a role model even for those who born after his death in the manner in which Rav Lichtenstein stated that Rav Chayim Soloveitchik served as a powerful role model for him even though he never met Rav Chayim. May all of us continue to act in a way that pleases father so that we may please Father, Avinu Shebashamayim.