"Since R. Aharon’s passing, not a day, an hour, barely a moment passes in which I do not feel a sense of loss..." – Rav David Brofsky

The following is based upon impromptu hesped I delivered moments after hearing about the passing of our teacher, R. Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l. Although I spent many years in Yeshivat Har Etzion, and live in Alon Shevut, which was blessed by the presence of R. Aharon and his family, I did not have a close, personal relationship with R. Lichtenstein. Like most of us, I was in fear of R. Aharon's greatness - I observed mostly from afar, and respected his privacy. I submit these thoughts in trepidation, and with full awareness that I, and my words are unworthy and inadequate for this task. I hope and pray that they capture even a bit of his greatness, and that they provide some direction for the future.

It has been rather difficult to live in Alon Shevut in recent years. Those of us who learned in Yeshivat Har Etzion remember R. Lichtenstein as a type of “superman”: both physically (I recall how after hours, literally, of hakafot on Simchat Torah, we would sit down to rest, and R. Aharon would pull us back into the circle, sending us the message that if he wasn’t tired, then we certainly shouldn’t be...) and spiritually. In learning, in religious devotion, in morality and in ethics, R. Lichtenstein was a giant. Yet, we watched as his health slowly declined. Over the past year, a small group of us would gather around his desk on Shabbat afternoons listening to him teach us about parasha and halakha. Even in his poor health, R. Aharon needed to share, to teach. Sadly, in recent months, R. Lichtenstein could no longer deliver the shiur, deepening the sense of loss, of sadness, in our community. Still, the news of his passing came as a shock. How could R. Aharon, a symbol of strength, commitment and dedication, be taken from us?

Since R. Aharon’s passing, not a day, an hour, barely a moment passes in which I do not feel a sense of loss. Thousands of students around the world share this feeling. We congregate in the back of shuls, in the supermarket, or on-line, telling stories, and comforting each other. For those of us who knew R. Aharon, who learned from him, his writings, his behavior and his leadership - R. Aharon was in our blood. He was part of us. He penetrated to the deepest layers of our being. R. Aharon became our religious, spiritual, and moral compass; he was the "demut dyukno"- in the deepest and realist sense.

What was it about R. Lichtenstein which was so unique? Why, in the late 1960s, was this young scholar the great hope of the American Torah world, why did R. Yehuda Amital invite him to be the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, and why do thousands of his students, their spouses and their families, and countless others, feel so attached and indebted to him? I would like to point to a few of his characteristics- those which made him unique, those which made him our teacher and our rebbe, and then offer initial thoughts on the impact of his passing on the Torah world.
When I think of R. Aharon, the person, our rebbe, the following characteristics come to mind.

1. Knowledge: R. Lichtenstein's scope and depth of Torah knowledge was awe inspiring and unparalleled. He had a complete command over the entire Rabbinic corpus, and most specifically, over the Talmud; every daf, every sugya, the Rishonim, the sevarot, and the relationship between one sugya to another. His mastery, his presentation, not to mention his hatmada, took our breath away. I remember once when he met with a group of older talmidim who attended the "chaburot" (a shiur for older talmidim who often learned different topics than the rest of the yeshiva), R. Lichtenstein turned to us, and said, with honesty and not a bit of arrogance: "mi-bechinati - ha-kol patuach" - What would you like to learn, Zera'im, Mo'ed, Nashim, Nezikim, Taharot, Kodashim - "ha-kol patu'ach" - all options are on the table. How many scholars of that magnitude do we ever meet? Of course, he also had full mastery of Tanakh and Jewish philosophy, and his command of secular knowledge, of literature, philosophy, history and other areas related to the human experience, and its full and natural integration into his spiritual and general weltanschauung, was rare, if not unheard of, as well.

2. Wisdom and depth: R. Lichtenstein displayed wisdom, sensitively, understanding and depth. He was consulted by students, rabbis, educators, and leaders, from around the world. Despite leaving America in 1971, he was still viewed as the spiritual and moral authority of many American rabbis, especially as R. Soloveitchik's health declined. After the Rav's passing in 1993, I recall an American rabbi telling me of an initiative to ask R. Lichtenstein to return to America! In Israel, his council was sought by many, and his honesty and integrity was accepted by all. His participation in the "Forum Takkana", for example, lent credibility to the difficult decisions which the group faced in confronting abuse within the Orthodox community.

3. Humanity - Moral and Ethical Behavior: R. Lichtenstein was our moral and ethical anchor. "Va-asita ha-yashar ve-hatov" - to act in an upright and proper manner- is a foundation of our faith and a behavioral imperative. Many have related to his moral and ethical sensitivity, some focusing on his personal behavior, some upon treatment of others, and some even display his sensitivity towards all of God's creations, including the people of Biafra, the Vietnamese boat refugees, victims of natural disasters, and even the residents of Beirut, and other war-torn areas. Unfortunately, we live in an era when we are surprised to hear stories in which rabbis exhibit basic human behavior. We are amazed when a rabbi insists on waiting in line for food, and in putting his own plate in the sink, when a rabbi calls a students at 11.00 at night to apologize, lest he embarrassed him that day, or when a rabbi insists that he sit in the back seat of a car so that the husband and wife can sit together in the front seat, or when a rabbi washes the dishes and does the laundry, or gets down on his hands and knees to help someone search for his eye glasses, or assists in cleaning a bus after returning from a rally in Washington DC in 1967, etc. This is sad and unfortunate. But for those who watched R. Lichtenstein, his simple and humble behavior was inspiring.
4. Dedication and Focus: As many have described, R. Aharon ran, literally. He was not only completely and entirely dedicated and devoted to Torah study in particular, and to Avodat Hashem in general, he threw his entire body and soul into fulfilling these tasks. He believed that one should strive, and work towards excellence. This applied, by the way, not only to religious observance, but to honoring one's parents, raising one's children, investing in one's family, and to tikkun ha-olam as well. One must strive for, and work towards, excellence. That is the behavior of a servant of God.

5. Piety. I generally do not believe in using the abbreviation "z'tl". There are many great torah scholars, but very few tzadikim, and very few chassidim. But I feel compelled to relate to his tzidkut, and to his chassidut.

To watch R. Aharon daven was itself a religious experience! People flew from around the world to spend Rosh Ha-Shana and Yom Kippur in Yeshiva. But we all knew, that aside from the singing, and intensity of the Beit Midrash, we really wanted R. Amital to pray for us, and to watch R. Lichtenstein daven. We would look up from our prayers as he would spend hours reciting the viduy of Yom Kippur, wondering, what could he possibly be confessing? We would watch as his body stood strait as a pencil, and then swayed with power and might, in pure devotion and concentration, during the Mussaf of Rosh Ha-Shana - He was talking to and he was pleading with God. His religious life was, as he described it, "kodesh kodashim"- but we got a glimpse, a small glimpse.

R. Ezra Bick, in his moving hesped delivered at R. Lichtenstein's funeral, captured perfectly the essence of R. Aharon- Avodat Hashem. Everything his did, all of his endeavors, were part of his Avodat Hashem. R. Bick suggested that we carry on that legacy: once we commit ourselves to a life of Avodat Hashem, then our choices, our commitments and our priorities will fall into place.

As for R. Aharon's legacy, I will mention a few central, and tangible, contributions to the Jewish world.

First, R. Aharon was a teacher. He taught thousands of students, first in Yeshiva University, in the Gruss Kollel, and primarily in Yeshivat Har Etzion. His reach and influence extended beyond those who sat in his gemara shiurim - many consider themselves students through contact with him outside of the classroom, through his writings, and by learning with his students. His talmidim, both those who studied with him, those who identify with, and those who were influenced by his teachings, can be found in yeshivot and midrashot in Israel and abroad. They can also be found in universities, in labs, in the business world, and in all walks of life- they spread his Torah to their families and their communities.

Second, R. Lichtenstein elevated and deepened learning throughout the Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist world. He showed us how one can be thoughtful and analytical, and that Torah can be deep and sophisticated. No one ever felt that they had
learned enough; the longer one learned with R. Aharon, the less we realized that we
know. Torah is a deep and endless sea, and it relates to all aspects of our lives, and to
all components of the human condition. And then some. R. Lichtenstein’s model of limud
Torah, combining breadth and depth, and his analytical methodology, penetrated his
students, and they adapted his style of learning and teaching, each in his own way, in
centers of Torah learning throughout the world.

Third, unlike his teacher and father-in-law, R. Soloveitchik, R. Aharon articulated and
explained his beliefs and ideals in his thousands of sichot, and tens if not hundreds of
articles. R. Lichtenstein explained, clearly and convincingly, why he supported the idea
of Hesder, why he embraced the study of secular studies, why he encouraged more, and
deeper learning opportunities for women. He formulated his approach to the State of
Israel, a non-messianic approach, and how he envisioned the interaction between religion
and State. While R. Lichtenstein’s biographers may focus on different aspects of his
legacy, the broad lines, his commitment and dedication to certain ideas and principles,
has been clearly articulated and documented and there will be little disagreement as to
his approach to these topics. His teachings and writings are a tremendous resource, and
a gift, to students of Torah, and to those who seek a full, rigorous, and meaningful spiritual
life. His ideas strengthen, encourage, inspire and proved guidance for an entire
generation.

Fourth, but not last, R. Aharon not only articulated his views, but he modeled a behavior
and embraced values which desperately needed the support of a Torah giant. R. Aharon
whole heartedly embraced the philosophy of Torah and Mada, and students of literature,
philosophy and other areas of general wisdom, who enrich their religious personality and
search for insights, truths and even inspiration in general studies, feel a great sense of
security knowing the R. Aharon chose a similar path. Torah students who balance their
studies with army service can be confident that they are doing not only the proper thing,
but fulfilling a religious and moral imperative. And those who offer women a serious, deep
and rigorous Torah education, those who relate to women as spiritual beings created
equally in the image of God, and those who hold women to the highest religious standards
and expectations, can declare proudly that they are following in the path of a Torah giant,
the gadol ha-dor, R. Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l.

Am Yisrael has lost a great tzadik, a tremendous lamdan, and an enormous servant of
God. But in what way will we, and the broader Orthodox community, feel his loss?

R. Aharon’s halachic and religious prowess not only inspired a generation of religious and
lay leadership, but his towering spiritual and moral stature gave legitimacy to many of the
values so basic, and so central, to Modern Orthodox Jews. On the one hand, his ability
to engage and embrace the outside world, his unswerving support for providing Torah
education for women, his human sensitivity towards men and women, and Jews and non-
Jews alike, and his full belief and commitment to the State of Israel and the need to
participate in all aspects of its existence, are the bread and butter of the Modern Orthodox
- Religious Zionist philosophy. On the other hand, his spiritual, halachic and moral integrity, and his commitment to all aspects of the halachic tradition (mesora) set a high bar for our community, and provided a formidable hurdle for those who advocated spiritual mediocrity and halachic short-cuts.

I fear that in his absence, support within our communities for these basic values will be weakened, insecurity will spread, and these ideas will no longer be viewed as rooted in the deep and powerful spiritual world and tradition which R. Aharon framed.

I also fear that with the disappearance of the last tower of religious leadership and integrity, voices of religious shallowness, and spiritual and academic mediocrity, on the right and the left, will be given free reign in our communities.

It behooves us to study and teach his Torah, and to pass on his values, for our sake, and for the honor of the Torah.

I recall the many hespedim given after R. Soloveitchik passed away, in 1993. I remember the sense of being orphaned. I can still hear R. Hershel Schachter, in tears, asking, "who can replace him?" Incidentally, R. Lichtenstein felt the same sense of loss, and after R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l passed way, he related that he felt that there were truly no Sages of that caliber, and human sensitivity, left. At the time, as I had not learned by R. Soloveitchik, I understand and related to their sentiment, but I felt differently: we still had R. Lichtenstein. The world was not bereft of scholarship and piety, because R. Aharon was there.

But now that R. Aharon has passed, what are we to do? Where are we to search for such Torah scholarship and depth, for ethics and morality, for integrity, for wisdom, for passion, and for true piety, Ahavat and Yir'at Hashem? Where are we to look? To whom will be bring our halachic and moral dilemmas? Who will provide us guidance? We are orphaned. We are indeed bereft of a Torah giant, of our teacher, and our master.

I am certain, however, that R. Lichtenstein zt"l would want us to deepen and intensify our avodat Hashem, to learn more Torah, with depth and passion, to be kinder and more sensitive, to engage the world around us, both intellectually and through our actions, and to dedicate ourselves to the furtherment and fulfillment of the Torah ideals which he so strongly and fervently articulated and lived.

Yehi zikhro barukh.