A Memory of My Late Teacher, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein by Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Finkelman

CMTL is proud to post the following recollection from Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Finkelman, a dear friend and contributor to many of our programs. Rabbi Finkelman would love to hear from anyone who can add more details, such as the date or the name of the moderator of the event he describes.

Students opposed to the role of the United States in the Viet Nam war held a teach-in 1970 or 1971. We attended classes in limmudei kodesh in the morning and early afternoon, but refrained from attending secular classes in the afternoon and evening. Highlight of the program was the teach-in that evening, at which the committee invited Rabbi Lichtenstein to deliver the keynote talk. I attended that night, along with my bride of a few months.

Rabbi Lichtenstein began by apologizing, explaining that his words would probably not satisfy his audience. He then spoke in his usual measured way, considering alternatives and counter-arguments, generously treating with respect the range of possible opinions, including that of the government in pursuing the war.

When he concluded, the master of ceremonies announced that Rabbi Lichtenstein had agreed to take some questions from the floor. Rabbi Lichtenstein then asked the m.c.'s permission to allow one person in the audience to ask the first question, as this person had requested of Rabbi Lichtenstein earlier that day.

Of course, the m.c. went along with the plan.

Dr. Tova Lichtenstein then stood up and lit into her husband's talk, explaining that he had given the position of the U.S. Government far more respect than it had earned, and pointing out many other ways in which the talk was not adequate.

I do not remember the details of her powerful words. I remember the expression on his face as she spoke. As she took apart his arguments in public, he gazed upon her with such affection and admiration, as if to say, "Now you can all see why I married her."

Marilyn and I may not have learned much about the war in Viet Nam that night, but we learned an unforgettable lesson about marriage.

Though I feel sadness remembering my late teacher, I have to smile as I remember that evening.

Shalom,

Eliezer