I want to thank my dear friend R. Maury Kelman for organizing this azkara. We are just a few days past Yom Hatzmaut and I am reminded of the dvar Torah that Rav Lichtenstein zt”l was fond of repeating on that occasion. Minhag Sefarad and Minhag Ashkenaz diverge as to whether one makes a beracha or each cup of wine at the seder or only on the first and third. Rav Lichtenstein noted that minhag ashkenaz reflects the views that each and every stage of redemption - vehotzeiti, vehitzalti, etc., even if incomplete is worthy of blessing and celebration. And thus even if our redemption is far from complete in the modern state of Israel there is much to celebrate on Yom Hatzmaut. This evening, in the short amount of time that we have to recall the life and personality of Rav Lichtenstein, it is impossible to capture the totality of the man and his contribution. We cannot capture the full arba’ah kosot of Rav Lichtenstein's life, but maybe we can at least capture one or two of the kosot, one or two elements of the personality of Rav Aharon zt”l and that too is still enough for us to recognize and to appreciate.

It is particularly poignant to speak about Rav Aharon here in the sanctuary of Cong. Ohab Zedek in NYC. Rav Lichtenstein spoke in this very shul many times. In the 1990’s, when my wife and I lived here, I together with others was often involved in bringing Rav Lichtenstein to come to the West Side and deliver shiurim and spend shabbatot with alumni and the community at large as scholar in residence. Thirteen years ago Rav Lichtenstein was up here right next to this bimah serving as the sandek for my second born son, Ephraim, who is here with me this evening at his brit milah. So, it is very special and moving for me that we commemorate Rav Lichtenstein's life and passing here this evening.
The Gemara states in Sukkah regarding the great sage, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai states:

לא הניח מקרא ומשנה, גמרא, הלכות ואגדות, דקדוקי תורה ודקדוקי ספרים, קלים וחמורים
וגrganization שוטה, תכופת וינ小额贷款, שיחה מלאכי השרת ושיחה שידמה, שיחה גדולה, משלות
כובסי, משלות שעולים, דב וฉบ ו hakkן דב וadol מעשה מרכבה דב וקרון דב

There was nothing in the entire corpus of rabbinic literature that Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai did not know, but not only did he know it, but לא הניח, that he did not have "placed in his pocket", it was fully under his control.

The Talmud in Berakhot, on the other hand, records another aspect of the personality of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai:

אמרו עליה ועליה בן יוחנן בן זכאי שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום אדם שלום

That is that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai was the nicest, most considerate, most decent, the most human person that you could ever meet. And of course, on a third level, we know that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai served as a great and courageous Jewish leader at a critical time in Jewish history.

Those are the three aspects of Rav Aharon that I would like to touch upon this evening:

1. Rav Aharon's gadlut beTorah

2. Rav Aharon's humanity, decency, honesty, probity, integrity, humility, and care for others that so many have written and spoken about this week.

3. Rav Aharon as a leader of the Jewish people.
In Torah study, as Rabbi Blau and others have spoken about, Rav Aharon had the entire corpus of Torah under his command. And it was not only that he knew it-but rather, he had it all worked out, it was כמותו בכסופו. He had it all worked out, analyzed, categorized and organized into a clear and magnificent structure.

And, of course when I think of Rav Aharon, I think of the statement of the Rambam at the beginning of the Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishna. In discussing the learning of R. Yosef Ibn Migash, the teacher of the Rambam's father, he writes:

"The talmudic learning of this man amazes everyone who understands his words and the depth of his speculative spirit, so that it might almost be said of this man that his equal has never existed"

This is what the Rambam wrote about the RI Migash in his generation and we can states the same about Rav Aharon z"l in our generation.

In addition of course to his learning, knowledge and understanding, we note his tremendous hatmedah.

Let me mention one story. In the mid-late 1980's Rav Aharon was once visiting YU to see the Rav and conduct interviews. There was a bomb scare in the middle of the night at 2:00 AM in Morgenstern Dorm. We ran out in pajamas, shorts, we had been awoken from our sleep. And Rav Aharon ran out as well, but he was still in his suit and tie. He had been sitting and learning or writing an article or shiur. A few of the boys approached him and asked if he would give us a shiur while we waiting in the beit medrash. And Rav Aharon said sure, but give me 20 minutes to prepare. And so at 3:00 AM in the morning he gave a shiur in the beit medrash in YU for an hour and a half (because for Rav Aharon a proper shiur was never less than an hour and half).
That was the type of hatmadah that he embodied. Many of us remember that after Tisha Be-AV or Yom Kippur, he did not run to eat like all of us, but rather sat down to learn (like the minhag in Volozhin) because that is was he missed the most and that's was the world needed the most at this moment when everyone else was eating, the world needed people learning Torah.

Rav Aharon, of course was the model of morality and human decency that we all looked up to. R. Chaim Navon posted on video a few years ago the statement:

כשהגעתי לישיבה לא האמתי שעד היום יש אנשיים קלח בולדים

"When I arrived at the yeshiva (and saw and experienced Rav Aharon) I couldn't believe that such people still exist in this world"

The level of decency, honesty, concern--refusing to sit up front when he got a tremp, because a husband and wife should sit together, because that's what normal life should be like.

As Rabbi Blau mentioned, the amount of care that he devoted to his family and others.

A small personal story- when I was learning at the Gruss Institute in Jerusalem in 1987. I went out on a date in Tel Aviv and I did not have a car so I took the last bus back to Jerusalem. Rav Aharon gave a shiur that night in Tel Aviv and ran onto the packed, standing-room-only bus at the last moment. I got up to give him my seat out of respect and he gave me a "death stare", what are you doing, sit down...

Those kind of things remain etched in my mind.

And when we speak about balancing values:

A few years ago when he was still a number of us in Chinuch met with him to discuss issues in chinuch. I was a fairly new parent at the time and had young children and I felt very guilty because I was often missing minyan in the morning to take care of the children and help my wife getting them out of the house. And I
felt guilty because when you go to yeshiva, you are inculcated with the importance of tefillah betzibbur and davening with a minyan.

And he turned to me and said: "You know, Nati, from 1963 to 1966 I missed minyan a lot. We had three kids under the age of five and do you know what it took to get the kids out of the house in the winter. And I fully understand that you are there with your wife. And then he went on to discuss the lomduis of whether tefillah betzibbur is a chiyuv or not. I had heard the shiur before, but it was so powerful and beautiful to hear his own personal experience and balancing of values in the real world.

And of course the third aspect, leadership of the Modern-Orthodox community. When I was younger I also questioned, like many others, how terrible it was that Rav Aharon left America and left us.

But on the flip side, maybe in certain ways he maybe had a bigger impact by his work in Israel while continuing to have a tremendous impact on American society and our community. History will ultimately judge what his full impact was.

Here is a short list of some of the areas he played a crucial role in:

Leadership of the Modern-Orthodox community and the religious Zionist community, Torah U Mada, interaction with the world, the world of women's learning, questions of giyur, questions in Russia, moral lacunae in the state of Israel, Sabra and Shatila, Rabin assassination. In all these areas he was such a powerful voice of influence.

Upon his aliyah to Israel and especially when the Rav zt"l, was no longer active and able to be approached, Rav Aharon became very close to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l. And he would often repeat something Rav Shlomo Zalman said about Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer zt"l "that even if Rav Isser Zalman meltzer was not a gaon in Torah, if he knew no Torah at all, he would still have been the sweetest Jew, the most "shayna yid" in all of Jerusalem" Rav Aharon said it as well about
Rav Shlomo Zalman. And as we look back we certainly can say the same about Rav Aharon.

At the end of his published essay in memory of Rav Shlomo Zalman he wrote:

*And yet, what is left with us, and what we shall so sorely miss, is the memory of that remarkable gadol, at once overawing and benign, who bestrode us like a Colossus, and yet related to us, great and small, at the core of our innermost being.*

What more can you say as well about Rav Aharon zt"l.

*יהי זכרו ברוך*