To the family of HaRav HaGaon Aharon Lichtenstein, ztv"l:

I have been bereft of words this past month while mourning the loss of this giant of a man. I have wanted to add something more, something unique - a chidush (!), to what has already been said. After every eulogy I have listened to and every written piece I have read about our beloved Rosh Yeshiva, I find myself in agreement saying – yes, this is the man and these were his characteristics. Each one has captured his essence. And yet each time I find something more is revealed and some further nuance articulated. But what have I to add.

And after one month’s time I remain at a loss. The only thing I can add is my personal story and exchange with HaRav Aharon. This story I shared with the audience at the 2003 Gush dinner in NY. The story is about a two word question Rav Lichtenstein asked me during my b’china for entrance into the Gush.

I had prepared the Sugya of ma’amad shloshtan in Gittin. Upon being asked how the mechanism of ma’amad shloshtan worked I commenced to recite all the shitot rishonim I prepared for. The Rosh HaYeshiva listened intently without interruption for what seemed to me an eternity. I was so proud of myself at that moment. I thought I possessed all the requisite knowledge for a Gush education. And then HaRav Aharon threw me with his two word question – “Umah da’atcha?” For that I was not prepared.

With those two words he taught me so much.

He taught me to think for myself. He showed me that a great man cares about what a kid thinks. He demonstrated that being an independent thinker is essential to being a religious person. He taught me that simply memorizing words from pages of a safer without thinking them through is not true learning. He taught me that what I think matters. He taught me that there is no alternative but to think for oneself.

All this with was accomplished with just two words.

Those two words served as my introduction to the Gush and my introduction to the great and revered HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, ztv’l. Those two words have been an inspiration to me my entire life. They have shaped who I have become and the Jewish educator I strive to be.

Although he has departed this world his words live on forever.

For me personally, if only for those two words - dayainu!

HaMakom Yinachem Etchem b’Toch Shar Avalai Tzion v’Rushalayim.

Scot A. Berman