His Example is Compelling - Raphael Z. Schwartz

My first exposure to Rav Lichtenstein, zt"l, was his terse, elegantly written and concise biography of the Rav, zt"l. I, like thousands of others, read his published articles, and was inspired by his doctoral dissertation, which is arguably one of the finest Harvard has ever published. He dedicated that book to his parents, echoing Rabbi Akiva, suggesting everything he had was theirs. He was proud of each of his children. His Rebbitzen is one of the greatest in Jewish history.

My sister took his English Literature courses at Stern College. He made a lasting impression on all his students. My son, Moshe, learns in Gruss and was one of the last group of talmidim to benefit from his tutelage there. He inscribed a copy of Rabbi Chaim Sabato's Mevakshe Panekha to him "le-mazkeret Rav le-talmid be-nach Yisrael Saba." That spirit will never die.

Rav Lichtenstein was a close observer of the world's complexities. He was murkav, a gestalt, more than the sum of his parts. The Hebrew term murkav also implies a composite. His interests were as capacious as his curiosity, his memory, phenomenal, his insight superior. He was a graduate of the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore, the second oldest Day School in the United States, which he attended for years and contributed to as a token of bakarat ba-tov. His extraordinary example demonstrates what can be achieved by anyone thirsting for knowledge. His Bar Mitzvah was in Baltimore.

In addition to his credentials from YU and Harvard, he was a Musmach of Mesivta Chaim Berlin, a student in the Kollel Gur Aryeh. He was a "magid shiur" in the Yeshiva Hechal HaTorah. As is known, he revived the YU Kollel. An autodidact, he was also professionally trained. He did undergraduate work at The Johns Hopkins University and Brooklyn College. He was a recipient of a U.S. National Defense Fellowship. He understood military needs advanced yeshivot hesder. His Torah protected the Gush and the nation he loved. At one time, he seriously considered pursuing another Ph.D. in Near East Studies at N.Y.U. Fortunately, for the Jewish people, he dedicated his entire life to "ba-Torah ve-ha-mitzvah."

In a moving shiur on the mitzvah, "ve-abava le-re'acha kamoka" he made impassioned reference to a people "forged on a crucible of suffering." Noble, dignified, a scholar, a gaon, he was also a sensitive soul. He exemplified ve-balakhsa be-derakhav, a life lived in Imitatio Dei. Rav Aharon applied literary analysis to the vast corpus of Torah literature. He dedicated himself selflessly to the Jewish people, moved to Israel "le-hishtakea." His example is compelling.

Rav Lichtenstein encouraged the creation of Jewish Art. Literature is art. Socrates taught that love of knowledge, literally, philosophy, is the highest form of beauty. Six years before the Six Day War he related that he "went to Har Tsiyon on Tisha be-Av, kinah in hand. A few yards from the Old City wall, he walked into a desolate, bombed out house. Sitting on a sandbag, he recited the "Kinhoth," Halevi in mind. As his son, Shai, noted, he was a poet. Indeed, he was. He sanctified the secular, raised the beauty of Yefet be-ohalei Shem. In a multiplicity of ways, with sterling integrity, he taught sophisticated lomdut in the derekh of Brisk and Volozhin. Grateful for his example, we will always be. To be his student was a privilege. His words live on, cherished by those who were influenced by him,"be-nach Yisrael Saba." His merit and legacy endure. Menuchato kavod."The nishmato tserura be-tosor ba-Hayyim."