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## AN INTRODUCTORY BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF R. AHARON LICHTENSTEIN

First things first: The words of the Mishna “*talmud Torah* is equivalent to all of [the commandments],”<sup>1</sup> stand at the center of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein’s thinking. Torah study is the noblest of pursuits, an overriding commandment and the royal pathway to the knowledge of God. The primary arena of Torah study, for R. Lichtenstein, as for the mainstream of Jewish thought, is the study of legal texts: Talmud, its commentators, and codifiers. And when R. Lichtenstein extols Talmud study, he has particularly in mind the Talmud study pursued in the Eastern European tradition, and as developed in the past century under the flag of the Brisker school. To ignore or minimize the emphasis on Torah study, and on Talmud, in R. Lichtenstein’s thought, just because he has championed broad universal concerns and advocated the study of the liberal arts as a vehicle to religious wholeness, is a distortion of his teaching to the point of making it unrecognizable.

We open this issue by presenting a short rendering of R. Lichtenstein’s biography, his massive contribution to the study and teaching of Talmud, and the propagation of Judaism, as well as his other public activities and positions.

<sup>1</sup> *Peah* 1:1.

I

R. Lichtenstein was born in France in 1933, from which his family escaped in 1941 to the United States, finally settling in New York. At Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin he made his mark as a youngster. There he studied with, and was deeply influenced by, R. Ahron Soloveichik and R. Yitzchok Hutner. Entering Yeshiva College at 16, he studied with R. Moshe Shatzkes and, more fatefully, with R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, known as “the Rav.” Following graduation, having been urged by the Rav to pursue graduate studies, R. Lichtenstein took a PhD in English literature at Harvard (from 1953 to 1957), where his primary mentor and thesis advisor was Prof. Douglas Bush. He focused on the 17<sup>th</sup> century, including John Milton, and submitted his thesis on the theologian Henry More.<sup>2</sup> During this period, he continued to study privately with the Rav at his home in Boston. He married Tovah Soloveitchik, the Rav’s daughter, in 1960.

Returning to Yeshiva University in 1957, R. Lichtenstein taught English literature at Stern College for Women while serving as the Rav’s *shiur* assistant, reviewing the lectures and aiding students when R. Soloveitchik was not available. In 1961, Yeshiva University re-opened its *Kollel*, with R. Lichtenstein, at 28, as *Rosh Kollel*. Two years later he began teaching a daily *Gemara shiur* in the yeshiva, and he continued to offer college courses occasionally. R. Lichtenstein was an active participant in the discussions about Torah and the secular world taking place in Yeshiva University throughout the 1960s, and he wrote several important articles during that decade.

By 1970, R. Lichtenstein and his wife were prepared for *Aliyah*. He accepted the invitation of R. Yehuda Amital, who had recently founded Yeshivat Har Etzion in the Gush Etzion region, to join him as a co-Rosh Yeshiva, and was invested in 1971. For nearly forty years, the two jointly built and sustained the most influential Hesder yeshiva. Zerah Warhaftig, the noted *talmid hakham*, legal scholar, and Minister of Religion, later observed that R. Lichtenstein brought “a new style of learning: clarifying *sugyot* in depth in an orderly and precise way.”<sup>3</sup>

During his first forty years at Har Etzion R. Lichtenstein performed an extraordinary schedule of teaching, in addition to his leadership role in

<sup>2</sup> It was later published in book form as *Henry More: The Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Zerah Warhaftig, *Hamishim Shanah ve-Shanah: Pirkei Zikbronot* (Jerusalem: Yad Shapira, 1998), 153.

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the yeshiva. He delivered *shiurim* for advanced students several times a week from his arrival until April 2011, and gave general *shiurim* and *sihot* to the entire yeshiva on a regular basis. Beginning in 1976, R. Lichtenstein also served as the Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University's Joseph and Caroline Gruss Kollel in Jerusalem, teaching there weekly.

R. Lichtenstein has published widely over the course of his career.<sup>4</sup> He has produced scores of formal articles on a remarkably broad range of Talmudic subjects. In addition, students have published volume after volume of lectures, thus creating a permanent record of the decades of *shiurim* that molded generations of students at Yeshivat Har Etzion. Based on the careful notes of students, eight have been published to date,<sup>5</sup> and the raw material for dozens more exists. R. Lichtenstein has also written scores of programmatic essays on important topics concerning Jewish learning and life, as well as on his *hashkafic* perspective on a range of other issues. Many of these presentations are collected in a three volume series – *Leaves of Faith* volumes I and II, and *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, as well as in two volumes of collected lectures and discussions.<sup>6</sup> The most important of his studies in Talmud were recently collected under the title *Minhat Aviv*.<sup>7</sup>

R. Lichtenstein's children, four sons and two daughters, are all involved in Jewish education.<sup>8</sup> R. Lichtenstein considers his family to be his proudest achievement.<sup>9</sup> His educational progeny, graduates of Yeshivat Har Etzion, have gone on to found and teach in many other Hesder yeshivot, and numerous graduates occupy prominent positions in academia and elsewhere in Israeli society. Students who acknowledge

<sup>4</sup> His bibliography is accessible at <http://etzion.org.il/vbm/archive/Bibliography-web.htm>. Updated as of March 13, 2012, 1067 publications were listed, most of which were student-written versions of lectures he gave on topics in halakha or *hashkafa*.

<sup>5</sup> As of 2013, books on *Pesahim*, *Gittin*, *Dina De-Garmi*, *Bava Metsia Perek Ha-Sho'el*, *Bava Batra Perek Hezkat Ha-Battim*, *Zevahim*, *Toharot*, and *Horayot* have appeared.

<sup>6</sup> *Leaves of Faith* (vol. 1): *The World of Jewish Learning* (NJ: Ktav, 2003); *Leaves of Faith* (vol. 2): *The World of Jewish Living* (NJ: Ktav, 2004); and *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, (NJ: Ktav, 2011); *By His Light: Character and Values in the Service of God*, based on addresses by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, adapted by Reuven Ziegler (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003); Chaim Sabato, *Mevakshei Panekha: Sihot im HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein* (Tel Aviv: Yediot, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, *Minhat Aviv: Hiddushim ve-Iyyunim be-Shas*, ed. Elyakim Krumbein (Jerusalem: Maggid Press and Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.vbm-torah.org/ral.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> "Reflecting on 50 Years of Torah Leadership: An Interview with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein," accessible at <http://blogs.yu.edu/news/2011/10/11/reflecting-on-50-years-of-torah-leadership/>.

R. Lichtenstein's crucial influence currently hold positions in many institutions of higher Jewish learning, both in America and Israel, and his belief system is seen by many as the most authentic representation of Modern Orthodoxy in this generation.<sup>10</sup> R. Lichtenstein's strong influence on many of them extends to the substance and method of Talmud study and also to their outlook and approach to many crucial issues of individual and communal, religious, ethical, and national import.

Due to his wide scholarly output and his complex and developed positions on contemporary issues, R. Lichtenstein is considered by many American Modern Orthodox Jews to be their *gedol ha-dor*, like his father-in-law R. Soloveitchik before him. If the Rav bestrode American Orthodoxy like a colossus,<sup>11</sup> R. Lichtenstein has been a remote polestar, projecting his influence from a distance, as his votaries ponder his every word, rendered all the more precious by his unwillingness to meddle uninvited in American affairs. R. Lichtenstein has often been asked to present the *hashkafic* overview at the annual Orthodox Forum gathering, and at many other RCA or YU conclaves, with the justified presumption that his position carries authority for Modern Orthodoxy.

In Israel his primary influence has been through Yeshivat Har Etzion and several satellite yeshivot set up by students. Yeshivat Har Etzion has also founded an affiliated teacher's college and women's *beit midrash*, each of which served as a model for similar programs in other Hesder yeshivot.<sup>12</sup> His stature as Talmudic scholar and teacher has been publicly recognized through the award of the prestigious R. Kook Award for Original Torah Literature (2013) and the Israel Prize in Torah Literature (2014).

His study and teaching of Talmud is rooted in the Brisker method that "is fixed upon the fundamental problems... recognizing the halakhic phenomenon, analyzing, formulating, defining, classifying and categorizing

<sup>10</sup> Alan Brill ("An Ideal Rosh Yeshiva: *By His Light: Character and Values in the Service of God and Leaves of Faith* by Rav Aharon Lichtenstein," *Edah Journal* 5:2) identifies R. Lichtenstein with Centrist Orthodoxy rather than Modern Orthodoxy; as the former label never became popular, we will use the latter term.

<sup>11</sup> R. Lichtenstein used this phrase to refer to R. Soloveitchik on at least two occasions: *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 290, relating the Rav to other *gedolim*, and "Take Rav Soloveitchik at Full Depth," *The Forward* [12 March 1999], 6, relating the Rav to American Orthodoxy as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> See Esti Rosenberg, "The World of Women's Torah Learning – Developments, Directions and Objectives: A Report from the Field," *Tradition* 45:1, 13-36, for the development of women's learning programs.

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it.”<sup>13</sup> In line with the Brisker tradition, R. Lichtenstein’s goal is to analyze Halakha in terms of underlying abstract principles. Commentators on his distinctive contribution have discerned a shift of focus, already initiated by R. Soloveitchik, according to which conceptual clarification becomes the primary goal of study rather than serving as an instrument to resolve contradictions.<sup>14</sup> The volumes of R. Lichtenstein’s collected *shiurim* should be understood less as textual analyses than as topical essays, where fundamental questions are posed at the outset, logical possibilities are mapped out, and these are applied to the textual canvas occupied primarily by the Rishonim. The sources treated as primary texts include a wide gamut of Rishonim, including some *Hakhmei Ashkenaz* who were often overlooked in the prior Brisker literature (e.g. Ra’avya, Ra’avan); *Aharonim* are used sparingly, most often to complement or supplement the analysis.<sup>15</sup>

In the United States, the Brisker approach to Talmud is widely admired and sometimes emulated in Modern Orthodox circles, in part because of the Rav’s precedent, in part because of the relatively homogeneous student body. Training in R. Lichtenstein’s approach is often regarded as the ideal. In Israel there has been criticism, partly due to the visibility of more academic and/or more “spiritualistic” religious and intellectual alternatives, that, respectively, perceive Brisk as either insufficiently historicist or as intellectually elitist. Other reservations stem from greater sensitivity to the frustration of students who are exposed to Talmud just enough to know they dislike it, a situation that R. Lichtenstein has responded to, despite the painfulness of the message to him, by re-examining whether advanced Talmud is really for everyone.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> R. Aharon Lichtenstein, “*Kakh Hi Darkah Shel Torat Ha-Rav*,” *Alon Shevut Bogrim* 2 (5754), 108; passage translated by Elyakim Krumbein, “The Evolution of a Tradition of Learning,” in *Lomdus: The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning*, ed. Yosef Blau (Yeshiva University Press, 2006), 252.

<sup>14</sup> Elyakim Krumbein, “The Evolution of a Tradition of Learning.” See several other articles by Krumbein for more on R. Lichtenstein’s *derekh ha-limmud*.

<sup>15</sup> For R. Lichtenstein’s reflections on his method of Talmud study, see “The Conceptual Approach to Torah Learning” and “*Torat Hesed and Torat Emet*,” 19–88, *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1.

<sup>16</sup> For an English rendering of a dialogue between R. Lichtenstein and R. Shagar, a prominent exponent of a more spiritualistic approach to Talmud, who combined it with selective use of academic methods, see [http://www.lookstein.org/articles/shnayim\\_ohazim.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/articles/shnayim_ohazim.htm). See also the symposium on R. Shagar in *Netuim* 17 (2011), the relevant articles in *Tradition* 45:2 (2012), as well as the dialogue between Rabbi Lichtenstein and Rabbi Yehuda Brandes in *Notes from ATID: Talmud Study in Yeshiva High Schools* (Jerusalem, 2007).

II

For R. Lichtenstein, as noted, the central and ideal religious experience should be the study of Torah. Learning Torah, especially Talmud and Halakha, allows one to be “exposed once again to his Master’s commanding presence.”<sup>17</sup> Gemara should be seen as the central text in this connection, due to its position as the basis of all halakhic literature and its authoritative nature. R. Lichtenstein’s vision of Gemara study explicitly engages the traditional mode of study, apprehended as a holistic system with the Rishonim as the primary interpreters; while recognizing some contributions of academic scholarship, he opposes those who “pass judgment upon” *Hazaḥ’s* work instead of being ennobled by it.<sup>18</sup> Learning for its own sake is linked to a view of the halakhic system as the ground of one’s outlook on the world, as well. R. Lichtenstein, following the Rav, presents Halakha as fundamental axiology.

In his three substantial articles on the integration of secular studies and Torah education,<sup>19</sup> R. Lichtenstein emphasizes that Torah ideals must remain both supreme and central to an observant Jew’s life, and Torah study similarly as important to his or her thinking.<sup>20</sup> Within this frame of reference, R. Lichtenstein identifies several valuable contributions of a general education. One is that exerting a positive religious influence on society requires genuine understanding of the social milieu. Additionally, Torah study itself is, at times, aided by deploying analytic tools developed in the academy. Most importantly, however, “the humanities deepen our understanding of man: his nature, functions and duties.”<sup>21</sup> The observant Jew who studies what Matthew Arnold called “the best that has been

<sup>17</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 11. For more on R. Lichtenstein’s focus on Torah learning, see “Why Learn Gemara,” *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 1-17.

<sup>19</sup> “A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View,” *The Commentator*, April 27, 1961, reprinted as “A Consideration of General Studies from a Torah Point of View” in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 89-103; “Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict,” in *Judaism’s Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration*, ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1997), 217-292; and “*Tovah Hokhmah Im Nahalah: On Torah and Wisdom*,” in *Mamlekheth Kohanim ve-Goy Kadosh* (Jerusalem, 1989), 25-43.

<sup>20</sup> Following in the footsteps of his mentor R. Soloveitchik, R. Lichtenstein has championed serious Torah study for women, including in-depth study of Talmud, and has arguably done more to further it on a practical level.

<sup>21</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 93.

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thought and said in the world”<sup>22</sup> is more likely to become an edified, spiritually ennobled person with an enhanced sense of human complexity.

Some may attain such insight without liberal arts study—R. Lichtenstein regularly refers to Ramban’s introduction to the Torah, which extols a penetrating understanding of the human world without championing philosophical studies as a means to it. If we agree with Ramban about the need for such understanding and are honest enough to recognize our limitations, we ought to avail ourselves of the tools provided by general culture. To be sure, the dangers of corruption and distraction through such endeavors cannot be dismissed. The student must, therefore, redouble his effort and commitment to Torah and *avodat Hashem* in order to overcome these perils.<sup>23</sup>

Because R. Lichtenstein’s argument for general studies is so strongly tied to his sense of moral and religious growth and self-examination, his own living example is not irrelevant to his position. R. Lichtenstein’s thinking and writing on all subjects, both in Torah study and in his perspective on moral and social matters, is indeed marked by a sense of complexity and a striving for thoroughness, honesty, humility, and accuracy, nourished by the breadth, scope, and discipline of his study. He has acknowledged areas where his thinking about issues of Jewish significance has been affected by his general education, by his knowledge of the world, and by his appreciation of the best it has to offer.

Like other close *talmidim* of the Rav (such as R. Walter Wurzburger), R. Lichtenstein has been much occupied throughout his career with the place of morality in relation to Halakha. His early essay, “Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?”<sup>24</sup> utilizes a broad range of Jewish sources, as well as philosophical argumentation, to conclude that “Judaism demands of the Jew both adherence to Halakhah and commitment to an ethical movement that, though different from Halakhah, is nevertheless of a piece with it and in its own way fully imperative,”<sup>25</sup> leaving open the question of whether that moral standard is best viewed

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1903), 299.

<sup>23</sup> See “To Double Business Bound: On the Divided Lives of Ovdei Hashem,” in *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, 269-290, for some of the challenges of integrating two areas of study. For particular fields and R. Lichtenstein’s views on how they can be integrated into a life of *avodat Hashem*, see “Torah and General Culture.”

<sup>24</sup> In Marvin Fox (ed.), *Modern Jewish Ethics* (Columbus, 1975), 62-88, reprinted in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 33-56.

<sup>25</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 52. See also “Being *Frum* and Being Good: On the Relationship between Religion and Morality,” in *By His Light*, 101-133, which deals with many of these issues.

as a supererogatory category within Halakha (*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*) or an internal one. This understanding of the position of morality within Judaism is central to R. Lichtenstein's views on an additional range of issues, from the morality of war,<sup>26</sup> to universal moral duties,<sup>27</sup> to understanding the command to wipe out Amalek,<sup>28</sup> to the existence of a humanistic element within religious Judaism.<sup>29</sup>

This sensitivity to the human condition affects R. Lichtenstein's approach to *pesak halakha*.<sup>30</sup> Though R. Lichtenstein sees Halakha as an autonomous closed system, where only internal halakhic concerns govern a *posek's* decisions, the system itself integrates humane considerations such as *she'at ha-dehak*, *tsorekh gadol*, and *pikku'ah nefesh*, such that "differential *psak*"<sup>31</sup> is called for, when necessary. Thus, though "Halakhah, as a normative order, can never be superseded by external pressures, a specific Halakhah may be flexibly applied – and, in a sense, superseded – by the internal dynamics of the halakhic system proper."<sup>32</sup> This understanding rejects the "where there is a rabbinic will there is a halakhic way" position as an "insouciant view of the totality of Halakhah, verg[ing] on the blasphemous,"<sup>33</sup> as R. Lichtenstein calls for sensitive and responsible *posekim* to apply the law judiciously.

### III

Religious Zionism holds an important place within R. Lichtenstein's *hashkafa* and, in fact, it was his deep belief in this ideology that inspired him to move to Israel, as he left a stable position for the unsure terrain of a new yeshiva. It is no coincidence that this yeshiva combined Torah study

<sup>26</sup> See "War and Morality – A Panel Discussion with R. Dov Leor, R. She'ar Yashuv Cohen, R. Dr. Yaakov Chasdai, and R. Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein," *Tehumin* 4, 184-196.

<sup>27</sup> See "To Cultivate and to Guard: The Universal Duties of Mankind," *By His Light*, 1-26.

<sup>28</sup> See *By His Light*, 126-27.

<sup>29</sup> See "*Mah Enosh*: Reflections on the Relation Between Judaism and Humanism," in *Torah u-Madda Journal* 14 (2006-07, written in the 1960s), and "*Ki Bi-Tselem E-lohim Asah Et Ha-Adam*: Is there Religious Humanism?," Chaim Sabato and Aharon Lichtenstein, *Mevakshei Panekha* (Jerusalem: Yediot Aharonot, 2011), 125-140.

<sup>30</sup> See "*Mah Enosh*" and "The Human and Social Factor in Halakha," *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 159-188.

<sup>31</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 168.

<sup>32</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 170.

<sup>33</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 174.

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with army service, for R. Lichtenstein was an early proponent of Hesder; early in his career at Yeshivat Har Etzion, he wrote a seminal programmatic essay on its ideology.<sup>34</sup> R. Lichtenstein's Zionism is predicated not on messianic imminence, but on the conviction that building a Jewish nation and future on its own soil is in itself a valued endeavor and a prized opportunity. At the same time, R. Lichtenstein notes the multifold halakhic benefits of living in Israel, as discussed in several Rishonim, primarily Ramban.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the State of Israel connects a Jew to generations of other Jews who have lived in Israel, and to the living Jewish nation as it actively builds the Land. Furthermore, life in Israel affords a more integrated life than is possible in the Diaspora, a greater sense of wholeness, since there is societal and religious value even to the mundane aspects of one's daily existence.<sup>36</sup> R. Lichtenstein's passion for the Land of Israel expresses itself in his assertion that every Jew should at least aspire to move to Israel, to nestle, as it were, in the bosom of the Divine Presence.<sup>37</sup>

In Israel R. Lichtenstein has been categorized as a political moderate, partly because he adopted the Rav's view that territorial compromise is permissible in the land of Israel for the sake of peace. He has refrained from entering the partisan political arena, and has adamantly refused to allow politics to overshadow Torah in the life of the Yeshiva. Even when R. Amital stood as a candidate for the Knesset, the students at Har Etzion, unlike those at many other yeshivot, were discouraged from curtailing their Torah study in order to canvas.

Yet R. Lichtenstein has, from time to time, taken positions on urgent public issues and has presented general perspectives on occasional matters. Invariably when he has lifted his voice, it has not been to cheerlead for those with whom he finds himself in agreement. Rather he has repeatedly called into question one-sided, often popular opinions. During the first Lebanon war of 1982, for example, after the Christian militiamen who enjoyed Israeli support massacred Palestinian refugees, R. Lichtenstein's open letter to Prime Minister Begin, calling upon the government to investigate whether Israeli officials had failed to exercise restraint over the marauders, first appeared in the religious nationalist newspaper

<sup>34</sup> "The Ideology of Hesder," *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 135-158, Hebrew: "Zot Torat Ha-Hesder," *Alon Shevut* 100, 9-33.

<sup>35</sup> "Diaspora Religious Zionism: Some Current Reflections," in *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, 291-317, at 294-98.

<sup>36</sup> *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, 299.

<sup>37</sup> See "On *Aliyya*: The Uniqueness of Living in *Eretz Yisrael*," *Alei Etzion* 12 (2004), 15-22, accessible at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/alei/12-02ral-aliya.doc>.

*HaTzofe*.<sup>38</sup> Some years later, when R. Elazar Shach publicly attacked secular Zionism, and labor Zionism in particular, during an Israeli cabinet crisis, it was to readers of the secular *Maariv* that R. Lichtenstein explained that his world was that of R. Shach and Ponevezh, and that he differed from his Haredi confreres primarily insofar as he insists on recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of secular Zionism.<sup>39</sup> Where others are tempted to magnify the gap between Religious Zionism and the Haredi community, R. Lichtenstein here went out of his way to define it narrowly. He revered and pursued personal relationship with major figures in the non-Zionist Orthodox community—most notably with R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, but with others as well—and has lamented the unwillingness of other Religious Zionist *rabbanim* to do likewise.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, he has repeatedly criticized the inclination of Orthodox spokesmen to derive unholy comfort from phenomena of malaise in secular society, as if their decline were necessary for our self-confidence.<sup>41</sup> The lesson, to at least some of his students, is that engagement in public affairs is sometimes a duty, but never an occasion to play to the galleries.<sup>42</sup>

In recent years R. Lichtenstein has been more forthcoming on burning issues – he opposed rabbinically-backed calls to disobey orders in the army,<sup>43</sup> and questioned a prohibition on renting land to Arabs<sup>44</sup> – possibly as a reaction to the increasing tendency of militant and separationist streams of Religious Zionist culture to seek out areas of potential divisiveness between themselves and the government or society and to magnify the fissures in Israeli society and politics. His recent book, *Mevakshei Panekha*, a presentation of his views in conversation with R. Chaim Sabato aiming for popular Israeli consumption, reached a large secular Israeli audience interested to learn about a rabbinic authority who treats them and their culture with respect and understanding.

<sup>38</sup> “*Habzarat ha-Gaava ha-Leumit u-Zekifat ha-Koma ha-Yisraelit*,” *HaTzofe*, Oct. 15, 1982, 5. The Rav phoned the Prime Minister’s office in the same cause.

<sup>39</sup> *Maariv*, “*Shefayim U-Shefayyut*,” *Maariv*, June 21, 1991, p. B/13.

<sup>40</sup> See “A Portrait of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zts”l*,” in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 247-250; and “The Israeli Chief Rabbinate: A Current Halakhic Perspective,” in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 261-277.

<sup>41</sup> *Mevakshei Panekha*, 141-156.

<sup>42</sup> Another example is his criticism of R. Dov Leor’s eulogy for Baruch Goldstein (see “A Rabbinic Exchange on Baruch Goldstein’s Funeral,” *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 255-260).

<sup>43</sup> “A Rabbinic Exchange on the Gaza Disengagement,” *Tradition* 40:1 (Spring 2007), 17-44; 40:2 (Summer 2007), 49-70.

<sup>44</sup> Translated as “Response to the Esteemed Rabbis, Signatories of the Letter Forbidding the Sale of Homes to Gentiles in the Land of Israel,” accessible at <http://kolharav.blogspot.com/2010/12/rabbi-aharon-lichtensteins-response-to.html>.

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Beyond his intellectual prowess and dedication, R. Lichtenstein's attractiveness as a religious and ethical role model is very much connected to his remarkable personal qualities. His personal integrity, depth of character, humility, indomitable enthusiasm, his attentiveness to the dignity and needs of other human beings, and his truly and unfailingly humane comportment are an abiding inspiration and ideal for many whom he has taught and influenced. It has been lamented that the intellectual brilliance of R. Lichtenstein may, at times, obscure his moral and human greatness. If this is what a life dedicated to *avodat Hashem* is about, it is hard not to want to share in that quest.

It is, of course, difficult for *talmidim* to expatiate on the character of their mentor, especially when so much of what we would speak about pertains to private exchanges and painstaking individual guidance. For the insider elaboration is inadequate and superfluous; for outsiders, it smacks of hagiography and bragging that does not fit the humble, down to earth qualities of the individual being praised. It may be best to give the floor to an outsider, one who abandoned Talmud and Orthodoxy for the analytic philosophy of language, and who, decades later, seeking a way back, looked up his undergraduate teacher. He provides the following anecdote:

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, a Talmudic scholar, Harvard PhD in literature, and published scholar of Cambridge Platonism, invited my family to his home at 7:00 a.m. on a Sunday, before he headed out to his yeshiva. When I tried to thank him for all he had done for me—Talmud with him was like boot camp for analytic philosophy—his humility inserted itself; he lowered his head and changed the subject. The contrast with much of academia could not have been more stark.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Howard Wettstein, *The Significance of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22-23.