



שמע קולנו

"הנמצא כזה איש אשר רוח אלקים בו"

Divrei Hespel in Memory of HaGaon HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein *zt'l*

מו"ר הגאון הצדיק הר"ר אהרן ליכטנשטיין, זצ"ל

On the Occasion of His First *Yahrtzeit*

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It is with a great sense of trepidation and personal inadequacy that one approaches a distinguished *ציבור* for the purpose of being one's *Rebbe*.

In general, it is exceedingly difficult to be *אדם גדול* a true *מספיד*, as one will invariably fall short of adequately transmitting the extent of his greatness, especially to people who may not have been *זוכה* to meet him or know him personally. HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, *zt'l*, was an *אדם גדול* in every sense of the word; he seemed, at least to us, his *talmidim*, to be larger than life in so many areas - a personification of what the *Gemara* (גיטין דף נ"ט.) means when speaking of those who are characterized as representing *אחד* *וגדולה במקום אחד*, a unique combination of Torah and greatness.

Much has already been written and said about Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, both during his lifetime and after his *פטירה*; I therefore present these words not necessarily to be *מחדש* anything, but rather to express, in some small way, my own heartfelt sense of *הכרת הטוב* to someone who had a profound influence upon me, and indeed upon so many others. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, taught us not to strive nor even to settle for mediocrity - one should never be comfortable with being a "בינוני" - so I will do my best with this *הספד*, mindful of the *Gemara's* lesson (יבמות דף ע"ה.; ועיי"ש בפ"י המאירי) that there are consequences if the members of a community allow a *תלמיד חכם* not to be *נספד כהלכה*, and hopeful that if my words in fact fail to do Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, justice, they will at least be inspiring to some.

הנמצא כזה איש אשר רוח אלקים בו - *Can there be found someone else like this man who has the spirit of God in him?* (בראשית מ"ו:ל"ח)

These impressive words of genuine respect, exclaimed by Paroh in admiration of Yosef, posing a rhetorical question to which the answer is obviously no, are the words which come to my mind when thinking of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*. And lest one think that such words of adulation, praising the perceptible evidence of *רוח אלקים* in another person, may perhaps have been suitable for Paroh, who is hardly a role model for us and who may have been awe-struck primarily because his own

character and that of those in his circle contrasted so starkly with that which he perceived in Yosef, but might not necessarily reflect what we ought to focus upon in assessing somebody else's greatness, we should recall that when הקב"ה directed Moshe Rabbeinu to appoint Yehoshua as his successor, He described the latter as "איש אשר רוה בו" - *a man in whom there is spirit* (במדבר כ"ז:י"ח). And none other than the *Mashiach* himself is described, in the passage read as part of the *Haftorah* on the eighth day of *Pesach*, as an individual upon whom ה' רוה, *the spirit of God*, rests (ישעיה י"א:ב).

Why was Paroh moved to express such a powerful sentiment? The answer would seem to be that once in a while, one comes across a person whose stature is so imposing, whose personality is so towering, and whose character is so striking that one simply has no choice but to react with such an exclamation. This is certainly how we felt in the presence of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, in consideration of his singular and remarkable nature. On a personal note, I felt that I wanted to be with him as often as possible. When I was a student in Yeshivat Har Etzion, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, used to give an optional Friday morning *Shiur* on the Ramban's commentary to that week's *sidra*, after which he drove to Yerushalayim, where he then lived, either to be home for *Shabbos* or to pick up his family and ultimately return to the *yeshiva* for *Shabbos*. Following the *Shiur*, anyone who wished to go to Yerushalayim would run to his car in the hope of getting a "trempp" and thereby be spared what was then an uncomfortable 45 minute bus ride to the city and simultaneously be treated to an open discussion with Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, about any number of exciting topics. Eager to take advantage of such an opportunity to be with him, I would always try to be one of his Friday morning passengers - grabbing a ride even if I didn't have to go to Yerushalayim at all (as long as I wasn't taking a seat from someone who really did have to get there), sometimes turning right around and heading back to the *yeshiva*. Though over-awed, I simply could not get enough of him.

What was it in Yosef that Paroh found so inspiring and so significant? It would seem that he saw three things: Yosef's wisdom and perception, as evidenced by his ability to accurately and clearly interpret his troubling dreams, his keen awareness of and insight into the world in which he lived, as evidenced by his well developed plan to respond to the coming challenges, and his personal character which reflected his broad concern for others, as evidenced by his desire to save the entire nation in times of trouble, though he had not been asked to do so.

The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (פרק א' משנה ו') presents the famous imperative of עשה לך רב, guiding each person to seek out a mentor and a teacher. What exactly should a *talmid* look for in a *Rebbe*? I would humbly suggest three similar things, all of which Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, possessed in a manner not common, even among outstanding personalities.

Number one is true greatness in Torah, which itself is manifested as an all too rare combination of four components.

First, of course, is knowledge of Torah. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, knew כל התורה כולה - he was as comfortable in the lesser known areas of זרעים קדשים וטהרות as in the more frequently studied areas of מועד נשים ונזיקין. Indeed, I recall that when I learned in his *yeshiva*, he used to give a *Shiur* in the *Beis Medrash* on *Motzaei Shabbos*, not long after *Havdalah*, on *Mishnayos* in *Seder*

Taharos, which he presented with the same care, the same passion, the same precision, and the same clarity as in his regular *Gemara Shiur*.

His superlative intellect, his seemingly photographic memory, and his remarkable breadth of knowledge literally dazzled us - there did not seem to be anything which he did not know about. A *chavrusa* of mine once related to me that when he spent a *Shabbos* at the Lichtenstein home, he witnessed a conversation in which some of the older children of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, who spent their early years in America, were trying to explain to their younger siblings how much larger the United States is than Eretz Yisrael, and how one single state, Texas, is itself many, many times the size of Eretz Yisrael. When the younger children found the assertion hard to believe, they turned to their father, who on the spot told them what the square mileage of Texas is! Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was indeed blessed with a phenomenal memory due to which he had “instant recall” and a wide array of information at his fingertips.

Of course, it was in the realm of *Talmud Torah* where this superior ability was most striking, at least in terms of impressing us, his *talmidim*. I remember once being in his *Shiur* when a student posed a question to him based on a passage from a *Gemara* in a different *Massechta* than the one we were then studying. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, though apparently familiar with the passage, thought for a moment or two and, clearly perplexed, asked the student, who himself had an incredible memory, where that *Gemara* is found. When the boy answered that it is in *Masseches Shabbos*, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, nodded, opened the *Gemara* and immediately turned to the exact page where that passage appears - even though *Masseches Shabbos* has some 157 *blatt*!

Some time later, I heard a story from people who were present that Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, on a visit to America from Eretz Yisrael, once returned to the Yeshiva University *Shiur* of his illustrious father-in-law, the Rav, Maran HaGaon HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *zt'l*, (which he would do as regularly as possible during those visits) when the latter, in discussing a complex *sugya*, noted, after having spoken for some two hours, that many years earlier he had demonstrated that this *sugya* was in fact parallel to another seemingly unrelated *sugya* in numerous ways. He then asked if anyone in the room was familiar with all of those parallels. When nobody spoke up, the Rav, *zt'l*, turned to Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, and said, in effect, “*Nu*, Aharon, tell them what I said,” whereupon Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, spoke for over an hour outlining precisely the exact parallels which the Rav, *zt'l*, had presented so long ago. When Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, finished, the Rav, *zt'l*, turned to the young men in his *Shiur* with a smile and said, “You know, boys, he has a pretty good memory!” Indeed.

This extraordinary ability was for the most part a special gift from the רבונו של עולם which he was זוכה to receive. But an exceptional level of Torah knowledge is only one aspect of greatness in Torah.

A second aspect is a staunch commitment and devotion to *Talmud Torah*, or what we call התמדה, which is probably best defined as a combination of diligence, perseverance, persistence, and constancy in terms of one’s Torah study. For Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, *Talmud Torah* was his life. It’s what he desired to do most, it’s what he engaged in most, it’s what he represented most. One sensed that he was always “thinking in learning,” even when involved in other activities; his Torah thoughts were uppermost in his mind no matter what else he was doing. People who knew

him when he attended Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, the high school of which he completed at age 14 or 15, have reported that upon his graduation, he spent at least two years in the *Beis Medrash* engrossed completely in learning, finishing major portions of *Shas*; upon applying to Yeshiva University for college, he responded to the question on the application form which asked for a summary of what *Limudei Kodesh* areas he had studied by writing, “all of *Tanach*, all of *Shas*.” Classmates of his when he was a student at YU have affirmed that he was consistently the last person in the *Beis Medrash* at night, finally leaving during the wee hours of the morning. And those who knew him when he pursued his advanced studies at Harvard University have attested that he would often have a copy of the *Teshuvos HaRashba* with him which he learned regularly between (during?) some of his classes there.

I myself once had a conversation with him which had to do with a *halachah* presented in, among other places, the *Machzor Vitry*. He informed me that he had conferred with the Rav, *zt'l*, about this very matter some time earlier and that when the discussion turned to the *Machzor Vitry*, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, told the Rav, *zt'l*, that he happened to have a copy of the *Machzor Vitry* with him in his briefcase, which he then produced for the Rav, *zt'l*, to look at inside and then share his insights. I remember being quite struck by the report that he had his copy of the *Machzor Vitry* with him at that moment - the *Machzor Vitry*, while certainly an important work, is not the kind of *Sefer* which one typically has with him. I own a copy of the *Machzor Vitry* myself, and have looked things up in it and cited it not infrequently, but I do not carry it around in my briefcase! But when somebody is always engaged in serious learning and is always contemplating matters concerning *Talmud Torah*, it should perhaps not be so surprising after all that he has any number of *Seforim* with him, even *Seforim* that are not as “standard.”

A third identifying feature of Torah greatness is the ability to transmit Torah knowledge, along with the desire to do so. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was a master teacher, whose erudition was evident in both the spoken and the written word. His clarity of thought and presentation was almost astonishing; the highly organized nature of his *Shiurim* was something to behold. Those who were fortunate to hear his *Shiurim* will recall the two words which signified that he was ready to conclude (often after over two hours): “...טוב, לסכם...” - “now, to summarize...” After saying these words, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, would proceed, in just a few minutes, to briefly review all the major points of the *Shiur* - the statements, the suppositions, the analyses, the questions, and the answers - in the exact order in which he had presented them, seamlessly moving from one to the other, further illustrating both the breadth and the carefully crafted structure of his remarks.

Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, also loved to teach Torah and he worked hard in order to be able to do so. He gave of himself 100% and would certainly have been within his rights to echo the words of Yaakov Avinu, “כי בכל כחי עבדתי” - “for with all my strength I have worked” (בראשית ל"א:ו). He said *Shiurim* as often as possible. His Israeli *talmidim* recall that when they would have to go off to the army for their military service, leaving the *yeshiva* very early in the morning, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, would come, sometimes as early as 4:00 am, to give them one more *Shiur* before their departure. When he traveled from Eretz Yisrael to the United States, he would frequently give two or more *Shiurim* in different venues on the very day of his arrival, showing no signs of fatigue from the trip; I presume he did the same upon returning to Eretz Yisrael. And all of his *talmidim* can remember watching him literally running - or at least walking very, very rapidly -

to his *Shiur* room when it was time for the *Shiur* to start, usually carrying many *Seforim* under his arm.

When in New York, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, would often stay in the YU apartment which had previously been used several nights a week by the Rav, *zt'l*, located in one of the dormitory buildings. On one trip, there was a bomb scare in that particular building in the middle of the night, and the police evacuated everyone, obviously including Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, to the *Beis Medrash* across the street so that they could search the building (fortunately, it turned out to have been a hoax). Initially, the students were sitting around the *Beis Medrash* without doing much, but once it became clear that the situation was going to last for a while, somebody asked Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, if he would give a *Shiur*; he of course complied and spoke, with no advance preparation, for well over an hour on the subject of פיקוח נפש. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, exemplified the famous comment of the *Gemara* (פסחים דף ק"ב.) which indicates that as much as a student may desire to learn, the teacher desires to teach even more.

A final facet which contributes to true Torah greatness is דקדוק, or precision, in the observance of *mitzvos*, characterized by an unflinching and uncompromising commitment to *halachah* and its immutability. In this regard as well, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, stood out to all who observed him for even a short period of time. It was clear how meticulous and how careful he was at all times when performing *mitzvos*, when *davening*, when reciting *berachos*, and so on. He personally was מחמיר when it came to many דינים, though he did not necessarily impose these stringencies on others. I remember the first time I saw him drying his hands at the sink for נטילת ידים and observed how much time he spent rubbing the towel against his hands over and over again so as not to have even a drop of water on his hands when reciting המוציא. Only later did I discover that he was actually then drying his hands *before* washing them for נטילת ידים, out of concern for those opinions that require the hands to be completely dry at that point (עיין שלחן ערוך אורח חיים סי' קס"ב) (סעיף ב' וברמ"א ובפוסקים שם. ועיין חזון איש או"ח סי' כ"ד ס"ק כ').

Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was also מקפיד to always wash מים אחרונים before *bentsching*; he once told me that this was a חומרא which he accepted upon himself when he left Yeshiva University to go to Harvard for graduate school, stating that he felt that since he was then leaving the safe Torah environment of the כותלי בית המדרש, it would be appropriate to take upon himself an added stringency as a kind of reminder that he needed to be more "on guard" in his new surroundings - this despite the fact that he spent many hours a day learning Torah even when in Harvard. And many years later, when he was not physically well, he declined to accept a glass of water offered to him in the *Beis Medrash* after he had delivered a lengthy *Shiur*, noting that he was always מקפיד to avoid eating and drinking in the *Beis Medrash*, out of respect for the מקום הקודש. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was, in our eyes, a true עבד ה', with the emphasis on the word עבד, connoting someone who serves with all his might, with all his heart, and with every fiber of his body, completely subjugating himself to his Master and His will.

The second characteristic which one should look for in a *Rebbe* is the *Rebbe's* ability to relate to the world in which the *talmid* lives. Does the *Rebbe* understand that world? Can he comprehend the problems faced by the *talmid* in that world? In our circles, from which the majority of the *talmidim* of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, come, most people are college educated, respect so-called secular knowledge, and interact on a daily basis with the broader world; to be an effective *Rebbe* for

those living in that world, one must himself be aware of the “ins and outs” of that world. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was certainly thoroughly familiar with the wider world in which he - and his *talmidim* - lived, both in Eretz Yisrael and in America. He himself valued worldly and scholastic knowledge, and, obviously, he had a vast storehouse of this knowledge himself, having been extensively educated at the highest of academic levels. He of course used this knowledge to enrich his Torah personality and he fused it into his tremendous base of Torah knowledge in order to create a unique whole, qualifying him as not only a leader but a moral spokesman for and an eloquent voice in our particular community.

Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, believed in accepting truth wherever it may be found (קבל את האמת ממי שאמרה) and that a particular point, even in Torah, could therefore be enhanced by a reference to something or someone outside the Torah world. His now famous שיחה in the *yeshiva* on *Tu B'Shevat* one year, when he took the opportunity to translate and analyze Robert Frost's popular poem “*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*” as a means of teaching about the proper way to relate to an artistic creation and the challenges posed by an appreciation of the beauty of nature, is a well publicized example of this. It seems to me that he would frequently cite one example or another of “a celebrated essay by Matthew Arnold.” Now, with due respect to all, it was always my feeling that most people in the audience had otherwise never heard of Matthew Arnold, that those who did most likely had never read or certainly did not remember the essay which Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was quoting, and that almost nobody knew how, why, or by whom the essay was in fact celebrated! But Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, mentioned it nonetheless, not, to be sure, as a way of showing off, since he had no need to show off and self-aggrandizement was not at all a part of his personality - in fact, it was antithetical to his personality - but rather because he maintained that the particular citation augmented his overall message. And for those who analyzed his words carefully, it did indeed.

Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, had profound insight into the human condition and understood quite well the modern world and the struggles encountered by those who try to navigate it. He was not afraid to speak his mind and to point out both the good and the bad in the world which his audience was a part of. More than anyone else in his generation, it was Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, who represented the ideal of תורה ומדע, at least in so far as the term reflects the notion of integration of various disciplines through the lens of Torah. He respected the “תורה ומדע community” and the balance which the members of that community attempt to maintain, but at the same time was critical of it, urging people to take a regular השבון הנפש and make sure that they are not hiding behind תורה ומדע as an excuse for general laxity and laziness when it comes to שמירת המצוות. It is in this vein that he once noted that if the overnight camps in the more “modern” world have an hour or two less a day of formal learning than in the typical “*yeshivishe*” overnight camps, it is not because the youngsters in the more modern camps are engaged during that extra time in the study of literature, philosophy, history, or science and the like - it's because they play more baseball or basketball, which of course are not classic examples of the synthesis of תורה and מדע. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, then, was undeniably well aware of the “ins and outs” of the world from which his *talmidim* came and thus certainly had the qualifications to guide and lead that world.

The third quality that an effective *Rebbe* should have is a sterling character. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, with his exquisite מידות, with the evident יראת שמים that he radiated, and with his always exemplary conduct, was certainly such a person. I recall a *Shiur* he once gave in which he

analyzed the famous passage from the *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov davening*, “וטהר לבנו לעבדך באמת” - “purify our hearts to serve you with truth” by carefully examining each word in the phrase individually. It struck me then and even more so later on that that phrase actually sums him up in many ways - he was a living embodiment of its message regarding a pure hearted, truthful servant of the Almighty.

It appears to me that there are at least two manifestations of a sterling character, and again, both were found in the unique personality of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*. One is on the personal level. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was a true gentleman in every sense of the word - he was refined, dignified, clearly possessed of a detectable *צלם אלקים*, and was a man of high moral standards. A number of years ago, there was a certain scandal in Eretz Yisrael involving rabbinic figures. I did not and do not know most of the details, but I do know that when I read what Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, had to say about the matter, it was clear to me which side of the issue to come down in favor of because I had absolutely no doubt that with Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, the goal was to reach the truth alone, plain and simple, and to do so as fairly and non-judgmentally as possible. I knew that there was no “agenda,” no “politics,” and no “*schtick*” because such was his pure character.

As demonstrated above, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, had a massive intellect, and he used it to further his own sense of *יראת שמים* and his personal *שלימות* of character. He was also a deeply passionate person. While this assessment might surprise some who may have viewed him as somewhat dispassionate and cold, I believe that this is because people mistook the combination of his tremendous humility and perhaps a certain natural shyness for coldness when he was in fact very emotional in many ways. One does not read and indeed master literature and poetry as he did without being emotional; his writings are certainly filled with both passion and emotion. More than other things, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, considered it of the utmost importance to teach students passionately about *יראת שמים*. I remember attending a talk that he once gave years ago at which he was asked to discuss what the appropriate curriculum ought to be for high school girls - whether it should include *Gemara* or not, and if so, how much, which sections of the *Gemara*, and matters along those lines. Before he even approached those issues, though, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, first spent over twenty minutes stressing the over-arching significance of teaching girls - and boys - about *יראת שמים*, as that is the key to successful Torah education. *Chazal* teach us in *Pirkei Avos* (פרק ג' משנה ט') that *כל שיראת הטאו קודמת להכמתו, הכמתו מתקיימת* - *one whose fear of sin takes priority over his wisdom, his wisdom will endure*; Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, lived this, combining his passionate *יראת שמים* with his great wisdom.

As just alluded to, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was a man of great humility who had no pretenses and no airs about him. It is noteworthy that according to the *Gemara* (עירובין דף י"ג:), the *halachah* generally accords with the view of *בית הלל* over that of *בית שמאי* because the former displayed great humility; apparently someone's humility is not simply an expression of a *מדה טובה*, but is also a reason to accept his *halachic* rulings. One of my *chavrusos* in Yeshivat Har Etzion came from a high school which was more “*yeshivishe*” in its outlook and he told me that he initially had absolutely no intention of ever coming to “Gush.” At the suggestion, however, of his father, who had known Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, from their student days at YU, he agreed to go meet with Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, and take a *bechinah* with him. As directed, he went to a certain office in New York City, expecting that the *Rosh Yeshiva* whom he would soon see would be a man with a long beard, a long black coat, and a big black hat. Consequently, when Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, came into

the room and started asking him a few questions, my *chavrusa* assumed that this man was a member of the office staff, an administrator of some sort who would be taking care of various technical and clerical matters relating to the application process before bringing him into another room to have his *bechinah* with the *Rosh Yeshiva*. When he realized quickly that this man was in fact the *Rosh Yeshiva*, he was taken aback, and soon was so amazed by his thorough knowledge and insightful explanation of the *sugya* which they were discussing that he decided that it was to this simple and ordinary looking man's *yeshiva* that he had to go.

Another example of the humility which characterized Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was shared by Rav Yehuda Amital, *zt'l*, his partner for so many years as the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Har Etzion. Some time after Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, moved with his family to Eretz Yisrael, he was called upon to do some service in the army, which Rav Amital, *zt'l*, one of the leaders of the *Yeshivot Hesder* movement, arranged. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, reported to the base to which he was sent for his tour of duty. During the week, Rav Amital, *zt'l*, called the base to speak with Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, and see how he was getting along. The two conversed for a while until, as Rav Amital, *zt'l*, related, he heard some commotion and yelling in the background and Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, excused himself, saying that he was being ordered back to the kitchen to finish cleaning the pots and pans. Upon hearing this, Rav Amital, *zt'l*, stunned to learn that Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was assigned to wash dirty utensils, demanded to speak immediately with the ranking officer on the base, to whom he made it quite clear that a mistake had been made and that this man, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was not to be given such tasks. For Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, though, there was no thought that there had been any error; if this is what he had been told to do, this is what he would do, without standing on ceremony or arguing that it was beneath his dignity.

In addition to the above, a sterling character is also manifested by one's interaction with other people. As a *Rebbe*, he displayed love and concern for all of his *talmidim*, regardless of their background, their ability, and so on. As a refined human being, he respected the *צ'לם אלקים* in all people, thereby emulating the practice of the *Avos HaKedoshim* as detailed by the *Netziv* in his famous introduction to his commentary on *Sefer Bereishis*, where he demonstrates that the *Avos* were *ישרים*, men who were straight and just, as they dealt fairly and justly with people from all walks of life, even those with whom they had nothing in common, as was the case with Avraham Avinu and the people of Sodom. A *talmid* of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, when he still taught at YU related to me that there was once a rally at the United Nations on behalf of the people in Biafra, an African country where a terrible famine was claiming many, many lives. Upon hearing about the rally, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, rearranged his *Shiur* schedule so as to enable students to attend. When some expressed surprise about this, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, responded by explaining that "a humanitarian concern is a concern of ours as well." Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, too was a *ישר*.

Though most noted for his brilliant and encompassing *Shiurim* in *Gemara*, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, also served as a *בעל מוסר*, sharing *Chazal's* ethical teachings with his *talmidim*., though not necessarily in the classic manner. I am told that when the *Mashiach Ruchani* of YU was unable to deliver his regular "*Mussar Shmooze*," to the boys, it was Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, who was one of his substitutes, using the Rambam's *הלכות דעות* as the springboard for his message. But the truth is, as others have pointed out, he was a walking "*Mussar Sefer*" himself. Indeed, a friend of my son's who was learning in Yeshivat Har Etzion reported that a prominent *Rosh Yeshiva*, who himself is known as a *בעל מוסר*, told him that as a student in that *yeshiva*, he does not need a

Mussar Sefer; all he has to do is “watch that man,” referring to Reb Aharon, *zt'l*. His relationship with, sensitivity towards, and respect for all other human beings inspired anyone who witnessed his behavior. As a *ישר*, he followed the “דרך ישרה” - *the straight path* which the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (פרק ב' משנה א') defines as projecting “תפארת” to all observers. תפארת means splendor, grandeur, or majesty, but also connotes a sense of perfect harmony, all of which characteristics were personified by Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, making him the consummate role model of ideal conduct. (It is perhaps noteworthy that Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, passed away on the day of the גבורה שבתפארת count known in Kabbalistic and Chassidic literature as representing שבתפארת, *the power in splendor*, and he was buried on the day representing תפארת שבתפארת, *the splendor in splendor*.)

He of course treated his family members with exceptional love and care. Those *talmidim* who saw the way he interacted with his aging father when the latter could no longer hear or function well realized even then that they were seeing the fulfillment of *כיבוד אב ואם* at the highest level. Many of us also recall his behavior as a playful father, carrying his young son on his shoulders, and some are aware of his willingness to alter certain things in his kitchen in order to comply with some *Kashrus* stringencies for which one of his sons expressed his preference (even though, as Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, noted, he was completely convinced that his kitchen was fully Kosher beforehand). But this attitude was evident even in his dealings with relative strangers.

A number of years ago, one of my daughters was confronting a challenge concerning which I felt she should consult with an *אדם גדול*. The issue was such that I thought that Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, would be the best person to guide and advise her. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, readily agreed to see her; I therefore made an appointment when he next came to America and we met at the home where he was staying. They conversed for close to an hour, while I sat quietly in the corner of the room. When we left, my daughter said that she was profoundly taken by two things, besides the time he so generously gave her and his obvious insight and clarity of analysis concerning the situation at hand. One was his opening comment to her when he said, in effect, that “I don’t know you, so I will speak to and advise you as I would my own daughter.” The second was the incredible *דרך ארץ* with which he addressed her - here was a very young woman coming before one of the *גדולי הדור* and he spoke to her with such respect, such dignity, such politeness, and such sensitivity to her feelings, as though she were an equal - she could not help but be supremely impressed and indeed awed by his character.

Finally, his impeccable honesty and integrity stood out as distinguishing features of his uncommon personality. People on his *yeshiva*’s Board of Directors have related that when Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, had slowed down physically and was no longer able to maintain the same schedule of regular *Shiurim* and the same level of service to the *yeshiva*, he recommended that his salary be downgraded accordingly. Needless to say, it is difficult for me to think of too many people who would ever request a reduction in salary. When I was a student in the *yeshiva*, the chief administrator of the business office told me - in an effort to demonstrate the nature of the phenomenal memory which Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, possessed - that part of the financial agreement which the *yeshiva* had made with Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was that they would pay for his gas when he drove to and from his home, which was then in Yerushalayim. The arrangement was that at the end of each month, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, would submit his receipts from the gas stations and be reimbursed accordingly. One month, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, entered the *yeshiva* office clearly

perturbed, and stated that he had somehow lost that month's receipts. The administrator tried to assure him that there was no problem; they would simply calculate the expenses based upon the previous months, since the totals would likely be more or less the same. Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, however, was not comfortable with this proposal, as he claimed that he had made a couple of fewer trips that month, and he then said that if the office will trust him, he could present by heart exactly what was on each receipt! Now, this story does indeed illustrate the nature of his unbelievable memory, but upon reflecting further on this story, it occurred to me that it also illustrates his outstanding honesty and integrity: Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, did not want to take any money from the *yeshiva* - even a very small amount - to which he was not properly entitled.

One last story will confirm the sterling nature of his character in terms of his interactions with others; it was told to me by a friend who was a student of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, in his Yeshiva University *Shiur* in the 1960's. At the time of the Six Day War in 1967, a rally was held in Washington, DC, to encourage US support for the State of Israel at that crucial moment in history. Several busses went from YU with students and faculty members, including Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, on board. After the day in Washington, the busses returned to New York, and as they would be arriving quite late at night, especially having made rest stops along the way so that people could buy snacks and drinks, this student offered to walk Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, who then lived several blocks away, home from YU. When the busses got back, the people quickly filed off, going to wherever they were headed, and this student found himself waiting on the sidewalk for Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, whom he did not see anywhere. Assuming that Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, must have somehow gotten off the bus unnoticed and walked home by himself, the student was about to leave when he decided to go back onto the bus just to check one more time. And there indeed he found Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, helping the bus driver collect all the bags, wrappers, cans, and bottles which the students had left on the bus, explaining that the driver too wanted to get home and there is no reason that he should have to be delayed because people had left garbage behind.

בראשית מ"ו:ל"ה) - *Can there be found someone else like this man who has the spirit of God in him?* (בראשית מ"ו:ל"ה)

In sum, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, in addition to his staggering intellectual brilliance, represented true *יראת שמים* in a manner very rarely seen. It is known that when still in YU, Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, used to be the one who read מגילת קהלת in the *Beis Medrash* on *Sukkos* - it is the longest of the מגילות and he would read it quite slowly - and he would especially emphasize the penultimate verse: *The end of the matter, when all has been considered, is, fear God and keep His commandments, for that is the whole [duty] of man* (קהלת י"ב:ג). This verse succinctly captures the world view which Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, stood for. His *יראת אלקים* was of the kind suggested by an earlier verse in that same מגילה which states, *כי עיין במתנות כהונה ובעץ יוסף שם, (קהלת ז':י"ה) - for one who fears God performs them all*. The *Midrash* in there identifies רבי אבהו דקיסרין as the example *par excellence* of someone with this praiseworthy trait. Why רבי אבהו? Some commentators suggest that it's because רבי אבהו had expertise in many, many areas and hence "performed them all" (ועיין במתנות כהונה ובעץ יוסף שם, (קהלת ז':י"ה); others (עיין פ"י מהרז"ו שם) understand it as a reference to רבי אבהו having standardized the sounds blown for *Rosh HaShanah*, concerning which there had previously had been divergent practices, by adopting and thereby showing sensitivity to all of them, and hence "performing them all" (בראשית מ"ו:ל"ה). ובראשית מ"ו:ל"ה) (עיין ראש השנה דף ל"ד).

(רב האי גאון). Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, was perhaps the רבי אבהו of our day; he clearly had proficiency in a wide array of diverse areas, and he sought to harmonize, with a combination of sensitivity and integrity, different approaches. And he was certainly, as demonstrated, a ירא אלקים.

With the passing of Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, we mark as well, at least to some extent, the passing of a generation. He was alive during the Holocaust, he saw and learned from HaGaon HaRav Yitzckak Hutner, *zt'l*, from HaGaon HaRav Aharon Soloveichik, *zt'l*, and from the Rav, *zt'l*, when they were still very much at the height of their respective powers, and he was, in that sense, along with all his other astonishing qualities enumerated above, a link for us to Torah giants of the past. I think it is safe to say that we are not likely to meet somebody like him again. When I was trying myself to decide in my late teens which *yeshiva* in Eretz Yisrael to attend, my father, after assuring me that the choice was mine and that I should go wherever I believed I would learn best and accomplish the most, told me that if, however, all else is equal, I should go to Yeshivat Har Etzion because I would not come across anybody like Reb Aharon, *zt'l*, anywhere else. How right he was. And while his singular characteristics, as detailed here, are such that I, like most of us, his *talmidim*, cannot realistically expect to become what he was, I am and always will be deeply proud to be numbered among תלמידיי של אהרן, the disciples of HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, *zt'l*.

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