

B”H

### **Rabbi Zalman Kazen o”h**

“They don’t make ‘em like they used to,” were the words of a fellow from Cleveland who became involved in Yiddishkeit through the welcoming smile and warm embrace of Rabbi Zalman Kazen of blessed memory who passed away last week in New York at the age of 92.

Reb Shlomo Shneur Zalman b”r Michoel was an old world Jew who lived through the pain and persecution of Stalinist Russia and survived to build an amazing family despite the most difficult circumstances.

Born in Gizhatsk near Moscow in 1919, his childhood and youth were spent evading the communist net and learning Torah in the underground network of Chadorim and Yeshivos operated clandestinely by the Lubavitch movement in Russia. Those who were caught were executed, exiled or imprisoned. With total commitment and self-sacrifice he and his friends were perennially on the move, always trying desperately to keep one step ahead of their murderous pursuers. It wasn’t like moving ahead in the Yeshiva world or going from Brooklyn to Bnai Brak. It was learning Torah in a permanent state of wandering. Some of the towns he learned in were Kursk, Varozhnitz, Klintzi, Zhitomir, Charkov, Kiev and Berditchev.

His father, Reb Michoel Katzenelenbogen (may Hashem avenge his blood), was taken away and shot by the communists. His mother, the legendary Mume Sarah, the heroine of books and even a DVD drama, was imprisoned by the communists and died in prison. But not before she managed to help smuggle hundreds of Jews out of Russia with forged passports that she had arranged. Legend has it that the very last passport that she was saving for herself, she gave away to Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, the mother of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Rebbetzin Chana did escape Russia and eventually joined her illustrious son in Brooklyn. Tragically, Mume Sarah herself never made it.

In 1940, while still in Russia, Reb Zalman married his Eishes Chayil, Rebbetzin Shula in a forest near Malachovka not far from Moscow. The marriage would endure for over 70 years and generate true,

faithful Jewish generations. But until they would manage to leave Russia and get to the USA they would still have to go through many difficulties and challenges in DP Camps in Europe and then as refugees in Paris.

When asked how he and his friends were able to display such superhuman strength and defiance in the face of the terrifying might of the communist empire, Reb Zalman would always credit the Previous Rebbe, Reb Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch who was determined that his commitment to Torah was sacrosanct and non-negotiable no matter the circumstances, even until “the very last drop of blood.”

With the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), they settled in Cleveland where Reb Zalman became known as a master Shochet. He received his Shechita Ordination from leading Rabbonim of the time including the famous Gaon Rav Eliezer Silver, the President of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the USA and Canada. For decades, he was one of Cleveland’s most respected Shochtim and his shechita was used throughout the Torah community including the Telshe Yeshiva.

Later, he also became the Rav of the Tzemach Tzedek Shul in Cleveland Heights. There he served for decades until only two years ago when due to health reasons he relocated to Brooklyn where he was able to be cared for more comfortably.

He served the Cleveland Jewish community for over 50 years. His Ahavas Yisroel for every Jew, from Rosh Yeshivah to simple laborer to secular university students was legendary. Many have affirmed that it was his loving embrace that brought them into the Torah community and kept them there, despite the challenges they often experienced.

The Kazens were instrumental in the establishment of Chabad in Cleveland. Today there are 6 Chabad Houses in Greater Cleveland.

Starting in the 1970’s, he and Rebbetzin Shula worked heroically for the newly arrived Russian immigrants in Cleveland. They set up a Free Food Bank, held Minyanim and Yom Tov events and arranged over 500 Brisses for Russian boys and men between the age of 3 and 35! The Rav even *shlepped* himself around in his big van (it was really

more of a small bus) personally picking up and delivering Russian men to the minyan every weekday! When someone remarked that “*es past nit far a Rov*,” (it is unbecoming for the Rav to be a driver) his response was “If the Baal Shem Tov, before his rise to prominence, could have been a *bahelfer*, transporting children to and from Cheder, then surely I can too.”

He was loved and respected by all, including the Telshe Roshei Yeshivah. Many of their rabbinic students would visit him at the slaughterhouse to familiarize themselves with the laws of *Shechita* and *Kashrut* during their Semicha studies. He also gave a Motzoei Shabbos Tanya shiur that was attended by many Telshe Yeshiva students, although that was somewhat ‘unofficial.’ In more recent years, Aish Hatorah would bring their new students to the Tzemach Tzedek Shul so they could meet Reb Zalman and thus cast their gaze on the countenance of a true ‘Tzaddik.’

Indeed, he was a Tzaddik. He was a man who had no ego, no puffed up pride, no personal pleasures; I don’t think he ever took a vacation in his whole life. It wasn’t easy but Rochel did manage to persuade him on a few rare occasions to visit us in South Africa for family simchas. His last visit was when he officiated at the Chupah for our Zeesy and Rabbi Asher Deren in Johannesburg in 2003. He was an old-fashioned Russian Yid with simple tastes and absolutely no airs. His big, easy smile was genuine and sincere.

As a son-in-law I can attest to his abundant generosity. I once heard a good *vort* from a wise cousin of mine who does much good work helping people with shidduchim. When we were looking for a shidduch for one of our children she advised us: “Don’t look for rich. Look for generous.” Wise words indeed as, sadly, the two are all too often mutually exclusive. My farther-in-law was not rich but he was most certainly very, very generous.

Whenever he had a spare minute he would study Torah; unless he was busy doing a selfless act of Chesed. That was his life, Torah and Chesed. Nothing else.

Unfortunately, the Kazens lost two children to dreaded diseases - Rebbetzin Esther Alperin of Brazil, their eldest, and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok their only son and youngest (founder of Chabad in Cyberspace). Reb Zalman accepted his suffering in faith and trust and

still remained full of joy all his life. Even in his last days he retained his gentle uncomplaining demeanor. His doctor, Dr Eli Rosen said to the Rebbetzin at shiva, "It was a privilege to treat your husband."

He was the patriarch of an amazing family and his children, grandchildren and now great grandchildren are serving Jewish communities and spreading Yiddishkeit as Rabbis, Rebbetzins, educators and Chabad Shluchim throughout the world in dozens of cities including far away Shanghai, Krakow, Panama, Paris, Milan, and of course, Johannesburg and Cape Town. He leaves over 300 direct descendants.

*Yihei zichroi boruch.* May he be a good advocate On High for his family and for Klal Yisroel.

*By Rabbi Yossy Goldman  
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