



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE QUEEN OF CLEVELAND

Compiled by Chaya Shuchat



Rebbetzin Shula Shifra Kazen was born in 1922 in Homel, Russia. Her parents were Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Shagalov and Mrs. Maryasha (Garelik) Shagalov. At the time of her birth, Russia was recovering from a devastating civil war that had followed the Communist revolution in 1917. Thousands upon thousands were dying of starvation.

The Communists tried desperately to stop all religion in general, and Judaism in particular. They insisted that all Jewish children must attend public school to be indoctrinated in Communist philosophy, which included turning in one's own parents to Mother Russia, if the parents were acting in opposition to the Communist regime; i.e., praying to G-d, or engaging in private enterprise. The Communists figured that if they could stamp out religion just for one generation, the next generation would have nobody to learn it from.

Many Jews did, in fear for their lives, stop transmitting Judaism to their children, resulting in widespread loss of faith, practice and knowledge. All of this always started with sending the children to public school. Once a child was going there, a parent would be afraid to say a word to the child about G-d. The child was being taught to turn the parent in!

Fully cognizant of what Communism meant and how the children would be indoctrinated in Communist schools, Maryasha and Elchanan were determined *never* to send their children to public school, no matter what.

Eventually, the large family became known to the

government. Under Communism, children who go to public school receive vouchers for food, clothing, medical care, etc. Under Communism, *all* children go to public school. But these children didn't, so they didn't receive any food, clothing, etc. At that point, the government decided that if this family did not need them for food or clothes or heat, let's see how they do when we take away shelter, too. And the family was simply evicted one bitterly cold winter day, and put out into the snow!

Elchanan and Maryasha picked themselves up, took their six little children by the hand, and walked with them to the shul. They settled in, and the benches became their beds and table. Somehow, every day Elchanan managed to scrape up something or other for the children to eat.

Suddenly, all in one week, even this precarious existence was thrown into turmoil. First Elchanan was arrested and taken away by the Communists for "illegal activities." (This commonly referred to not sending the kids to school, spreading Judaism, or practicing Judaism.) He was never seen again.

And then, just a few days after that, the government decided that (now that nobody had any money to donate to their synagogue) the shul would be closed down and boarded up, since the roof and garden were not being properly maintained. [To read more about the fortitude of this family who lived in a shul, go to chabad.org, which features *N'shei Chabad Newsletter's* biography of Maryasha, written while she was still alive, dictated to Henya by Maryasha herself.-Ed.]

Finally the Communist government had had enough of this courageous young family. Evicting them into the

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snow didn't break their spirit. Arresting the father didn't break their spirit. Threatening to close down the shul on a pretext didn't break their spirit. There must be *some* way to get those kids into school! So they informed Maryasha that the next morning, armed KGB men would be coming to personally escort every one of the children to school.

Quickly, Maryasha divided up the children. She sent one here, one there, to relatives and friends, so the Communists wouldn't be able to find them. Then she took just the two youngest ones and went to the big city of Moscow, where she tried to get "lost."

Alone in the Forest

Since Shula Shifra was the oldest, she had to go off by herself. Maryasha

decided to send Shula to Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov ("Bentche"), a Lubavitcher *chossid* who was well known for both his willingness to help fellow Jews and his ability to do so, due to his various powerful connections as well as his bold, fearless nature.

Of course, it was not safe for Shula to have anything in writing which might lead authorities to Bentche. So Maryasha required of Shula to memorize the directions from their synagogue to Bentche's house. Memorizing all that was quite a job for a 14-year-old; it was quite a journey for a 14-year-old to undertake all alone. Between all the train rides and the walking, it was a 12-hour trip, fraught with perils of every sort.

As Shula made the trip by herself to Bentche's house, she said to herself over and over again, "G-d is walking with me. I'm not really alone." She was telling herself these very words as she entered the dark forest which was to be the last leg of her journey.

The very last part of her memorized instructions was: "Walk through the forest until you come to a row of houses. Bentche's house will be the very last one in the row."

It was dark in the forest. Shula hoped her terrifying trip would soon be over. Finally, she emerged from the pitch black, dense forest and saw the row of houses! *Baruch Hashem!* With her last bit of energy and hope, she walked past all the houses until she reached the very last one. A little boy was standing outside the house.

"What's your name?" Shula asked. "Mendel," replied the boy. "Is this the house of the Shemtovs?" she asked hopefully. Suddenly Mendel (known as "Momik") remembered that he wasn't supposed to talk to strangers, or they



The Kazen Family. Back row, L to R: Devorah (Alevisky), Esther (Alpern), Mrs. Shula Kazen, Rabbi Zalman Kazen, Henya (Laine). Front row, L to R: Bluma (Wineberg), Yosef Yitzchak, Rochel (Goldman), Rivka (Kotlarsky).

might all get arrested and in trouble! Maybe he shouldn't have even told her his name! So when she asked him if this was the home of the Shemtovs, he replied with a resounding, "No!"

Crestfallen, Shula turned back and wandered up and down the row of houses once more. Now Shula felt the freezing cold anew. What should she do now? With her hopes now in shreds, she

returned to that last house and, ignoring the little boy, gathered up her courage and knocked at the door. This just had to be the house!

The door was opened and Shula saw a woman, Esther Golda, sitting and soothing a baby. The baby she called Avremele, and he had red hair. Esther Golda stood up and asked Shula, "Who are you?"

"Shula Shagalov."

Esther Golda thought for just a second, and then asked in surprise, "Chonye's?" ("Are you Elchanan's daughter?") When Shula nodded her head, Esther Golda exclaimed in excitement, "Oy!" And then finally Shula received the warm welcome she had been dreaming of for the past 12 hours.

Bentche and Esther Golda sat Shula



Five generations welcome Shabbos together.

down and fed her. They asked her all about her trip, about her father's arrest and disappearance, and about her family. They let her have a long sleep. She felt so safe, so cared for! And Bentche and Esther Golda promised her, "You are Chonye's. Of course, we will take care of you!"

Soon Bentche explained to Shula that it was not safe for her to be in their home; already, the Communists suspected them of helping out Jewish fugitives and other "crimes," and Shula would only get into trouble by staying with them.

So Bentche arranged for Shula to stay in a room that he rented for her in Moscow. She would work in a garage that he had converted into a factory.

Bentche Shemtov had a whole operation going, which took a lot of nerve. But he kept at it because he knew he was literally saving lives.

Many religious Jews could not get government-recognized working papers, because they would not work on Shabbos. By working in Bentche's factories, however, they could acquire these papers, be legitimate "workers" recognized by the Soviet Union, and still keep

Shabbos. Also, once they had the legal working papers, they were entitled to an apartment, or at least a room in one, and also food coupons (for which they had to stand on line, or "otchere," for hours—but at least there was a chance that at the end of the line they could redeem their coupons for some food).

Shula, as a teenager, considered herself lucky to be working in one of Bentche's enterprises. Her job was to carry two-hundred-pound bags of cloth on her back from the supplier to the factory. After the material was made into scarves or other headgear, Shula would

carry it to the buyer, who would pay Shula. She had quite a responsible job for a young girl; carrying the goods and also collecting the money.

Bentche continually found religious Jews places to stay and food to eat until his “employment” got them the papers they needed to stand on their own two feet. Shula helped support her mother and younger siblings with her earnings. Bentche Shemtov continued to assist them at great risk to himself as long as the family lived in Moscow.

A Wedding in the Forest

Shortly after she turned 17, Shula was introduced to her future husband, Zalman Katzenelenbogen (later shortened to Kazen). He was a son of Reb Michoel *Hy”d*, a very pious *chossid*, and the famed Mume (aunt) Sarah, who saved countless lives by forging Polish passports, enabling Russian Jews to cross the border.

Shula later learned that her *shidduch* with Zalman had been planned years earlier. At one point after her father was imprisoned, her mother had traveled to Leningrad to seek help. Friends arranged for her to stay with Zalman’s mother, who gave Maryasha money to help her feed her destitute family.

One day they were talking when Sarah looked over at her teenage son Zalman and said, “Whom will he marry? There are no *frum* girls left in Russia.”

“I have a daughter,” Maryasha responded. The matter was forgotten, though, until Shula became friends with Zalman’s sister-in-law Musia while in Moscow. Musia and her husband Shimon (Zalman’s brother) suggested the match.

Shula did not have a single decent outfit in which to meet her future

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husband. One friend loaned her stockings, another a shawl, a third one a coat, and somehow she was able to get boots. The only clothing she owned was a dress and a coat that grew with her. She received the coat at age ten, refitted it countless times, and wore it up to her wedding.

For her wedding, a friend who knew how to sew made her a short white dress made of cheap material. But it was new and white, and Shula was thrilled.

The wedding was held on 12 Elul, 1940, in a forest at the edge of

Malachovka, outside of Moscow. Any religious ceremony was punishable by imprisonment or death, including a wedding with a *chuppah*, so it had to be held in complete secrecy. The men came discreetly at different times so as not to arouse suspicion. On the women’s side, there was only the bride’s sister Rochel (later Levin, then Lieberov), her mother Maryasha and her mother-in-law Sarah Katzenelenbogen.

After their wedding, Shula and Zalman Kazen settled in Leningrad, where many Lubavitcher *chassidim* resided. The Frieddiker Rebbe had lived in Leningrad until his arrest and imprisonment in 1927, after which he left Russia.

The Wandering Years

When Hitler *ym”sh* invaded Russia in 1941, Shula convinced her husband and many other families to flee Leningrad. Those who left were saved, while many others died of starvation during the Nazi siege of Leningrad.

Now began years of wandering, years of settling and resettling.

First they traveled in an open cargo train for a month until they reached Tashkent. When it rained outside, it rained on them. At every stop they would try to buy food from the peasants. Shula was pregnant with her oldest child at that time and it was a miracle that she survived.

Shortly after reaching Tashkent, they had to escape from the watchful eyes of the KGB and fled to Samarkand.

As soon as the war was over, in 1945, Shula insisted that the family must escape Russia. There was one person who told everyone that the Frieddiker



Receiving a dollar from the Rebbe's holy hand.

Rebbe has said that everyone should stay put. However, Shula did not believe him. By that time they had three daughters, Esther, Dvonya (Devorah), and Henya. Zalman had found work as a supervisor in a factory. Glad to be earning a living, he was not eager to leave Russia and face

the unknown, but Shula insisted.

The family traveled from Samarkand to Moscow, and from there to Lvov, where they crossed the border into Poland. Shula's mother-in-law, Sarah Katzenelenbogen, convinced Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson to join the family as their

grandmother. Eventually Mume Sarah was arrested by the Communists for her activities and died in prison.

While on the train to freedom, Shula left her sleeping children with her husband and walked to the next car. Upon her return, she saw her husband frozen with fear and the conductor yelling, "These are forged passports!" The conductor had noticed that their daughter Esther's hair was red, and on the passport was written brunette.

Wagging her finger at her sleeping daughter, she said, "I told her not to play with dye! Now look what happened to her hair!"

The conductor accepted the answer. Shula's quick thinking and courage saved the family's lives.

Paris

The family reached a refugee camp in Poking, Germany, where Reb Zalman studied *shechitah* on the advice of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rayatz). Later they traveled to Paris.

After arriving safely in Paris, the

In Her Own Words: Rebbetzin Kazen On Chinuch

Interview by Mrs. Rosa Grossman

THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH THE CHINUCH TODAY. Parents are not teaching their children *derech erez* and the children don't know how to behave.

Today parents give their children everything and take them everywhere; the children are totally indulged. All you hear from them is, "Mommy, I want...!" When do you hear a child say, "Please may I have?" And when do you hear the parents say, "No, you may not"? Is "no" ever final?

When you want to teach your child to have manners, don't put it off. You must react immediately when you notice a lack of *mentschlichkeit* in your child. Teach the child the proper manners right away.

Yesterday I went to the doctor's office and I had to sit in the waiting room for some time. The scenario I witnessed there shocked and deeply affected me.

Surrounding me were several mothers with their children. There were a few little children sitting on the floor. As one mother got up, she stepped on the magazines that were strewn all over the floor. Her child followed her example and also stepped on the magazines.

Another mother said to her child, "Would you like to have a book to look at? Take a book from the shelf." The child stepped on all the books that had been strewn on the floor by all the

children before him—as none of those children had been instructed by their mothers to return the book to the shelf. The child tried to take the book of his choice from the shelf, and a few other books fell down with it. His mother got up and handed him the book he wanted, without instructing him to pick up the fallen books. Nor did she lead by example, picking them up herself and putting them away. She ignored the books on the floor and said, "Come, I will read it to you."

People like to give children their freedom and let them make up their own minds. But children need guidance and rules. We need to teach them our expectations for good behavior and good ethical conduct. They are not born knowing that books belong on a shelf and they are not born understanding that we need to be considerate of other



The Kazen Family. Back row, L to R: Mrs. Esther Alpern, Mrs. Devorah Alevsky, Mrs. Henya Laine, Mrs. Bluma Wineberg, Mrs. Rivka Kotlarsky, Mrs. Rochel Goldman, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak. Front row: Rabbi Zalman and Rebbetzin Shula Kazen.

people's property. They learn this only when we teach it to them, by word and by example.

I went into a shul to *daven* and I saw little children hollering and running all over. I said to the mothers, "What are you going to do?"

They said, "They are little, it doesn't matter."

Children should be raised to sit respectfully during shul. Children should be given a nap during the day so they can sit at the Shabbos table, hear *kiddush* and sing with their Tatte. No matter how young a child is, he or she should sit at the Shabbos table and say amen to the *brachos*.

After two weeks of putting up with the tumult in shul, it was Yud Tes Kislev. I heard singing in the shul's basement, so I went down to the men, banged on the table and said, "My turn to talk!"

I told the men, "You bring children to shul who are seven years old. They don't say amen and they don't understand what kedushah is. All they do is run around. How are they going to grow up to appreciate the holiness of a shul? You need to hire a girl to take care of the younger children during davening, and the big boys should stay with their fathers."

I went into my apartment building and asked two girls to take care of the children during davening and krias haTorah, and I paid them \$20 a week.

We need educators for the old and for the young. The women need to be taught how to deal effectively and respectfully with the men. The men need to be sensitized to appreciate their wives.

Nowadays the educators are against parents and for the children. Parents are made to feel guilty for disciplining their

children and not giving them a say in every matter.

I read the following in Tzvi Freeman's book, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*. A married couple asked the Rebbe for a blessing that their children behave properly. The Rebbe's reply was something I have not seen in any parenting book. Sometimes the most obvious answer is also the most inconvenient and therefore the most avoided.

The Rebbe told them: Behave properly yourselves and the children will see your example. They will naturally want to do the same as their parents.

We each have to decide that parenting is our most important *avodah*. May we be blessed with success in this holy work and merit the praise Hashem gave Avraham Avinu: May each child be a shining star illuminating this *galus* with the light of Moshiach.



family lived in Mr. Eiffel's Chateau, along with 30 other Lubavitcher families. Reb Zalman sold watches to support the family. The Friediker Rebbe established a committee for Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, and Reb Zalman was chosen to be part of it. Members of the *vaad* would go in pairs to collect money for Bais Rivkah in Paris. His partner was Reb Yankel Lipskier. They would go from store to store, asking Jewish storeowners to contribute. Many of these were members of the Communist party. They would ask Reb Zalman about life in Russia, but when he told them the truth of the horrors he had faced, they refused to believe him and would throw him out of the store! Eventually he learned to keep quiet about his experiences in Russia and just raise money for Bais Rivkah.

Every Shabbos the women would sit in the garden while the girls sang and entertained them. There was a sickly woman with a few children who never joined them. Shula would talk to her, help her dress her children and walk her down the steps, telling her that the children needed fresh air.

Another woman gave birth to twins. When the mother returned to the Chateau, Shula was told that the twin girls were lying naked on the floor. The family simply had no money to buy clothing. At that time Shula had five daughters and was quite weak herself. She dragged herself to a flea market, bought material, and sewed undershirts, sweaters and hats for the infants.

In Paris, everyone used a communal *sukkah*. Each person would put *schach* above their place at the table. Reb Zalman used to pile a lot of *schach* above his place, as is the Chabad custom. One night, when he came to the *sukkah*, a man came over and argued that Reb Zalman was sitting in his place. Reb Zalman never liked *machlokes* and so, without a word, he moved to a different spot.

While in Paris, Shula heard that the Lubavitcher Rebbe had asked Jewish women to wear *sheitlach*. She was the first one in Paris to put on a *sheitel*, despite the mockery of other women.

The Kazen family remained in Paris for seven years, until they were able to

obtain visas for the United States.

Cleveland

In 1953, with the assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the family arrived in the United States and landed in New York. HIAS had arranged an apartment for them in Cleveland, Ohio. Mrs. Kazen, however, wanted to live in New York, in close proximity to the Rebbe. A few days before their departure to Cleveland, the Kazens had a *yechidus* with the Rebbe, where Mrs. Kazen raised her concerns about the move.

"Cleveland is also a nice place," the Rebbe said, "with fine people and a good school."

The Rebbe then asked Reb Zalman what he planned to do once he arrived in Cleveland. Reb Zalman responded that he planned to continue his watch business, but the Rebbe suggested that he work as a *shochet* and become the Rav of a shul.

With this clear *hora'ah*, the Kazens embarked on a lifelong Shlichus in Cleveland. Over the next 60 years they were to have a profound effect on the Jewish community. There is probably not a single Jew in Cleveland who has not been somehow touched by the work of the Kazens.

Upon arriving in Cleveland, Rabbi Kazen immediately took to the streets to look for Jews. Two men ran over to him and, looking straight into his eyes, warned him about life in the New World.

"Fanatic, here in America you need to shave your beard," they told him.

But the Kazens would not be swayed. Soon after the move, the Rebbe instructed them to work with local Jewish families and strengthen their Yiddishkeit. The Kazens knocked on doors and invited neighbors to join

study groups on Shabbos. Later Rabbi Kazen was appointed as the rabbi of the Tzemach Tzedek shul.

The Kazen girls used to host Mesibas Shabbos gatherings in their home. They would pick girls up, bring them to their home, serve them *nosh* and tell them *chassidische* stories. Many girls went on to attend Hebrew Academy and some went to seminary in Israel. Lives were transformed thanks to Mesibas Shabbos in the Kazen home.

Since Rabbi Kazen worked full-time as a *shochet*, Mrs. Kazen did most of the outreach work. She started the senior N'shei Chabad sisterhood and the junior N'shei. On a few occasions when Rabbi Kazen went for dollars, the Rebbe would give him a dollar for "*di malkah foon Cleveland*"—the queen of Cleveland.

When the wave of Russian immigrants began arriving in Cleveland, Mrs. Kazen would meet them at the airport, find them jobs and give them furniture. She would take in families to stay in their home—sometimes for weeks or months at a time—until they found a place of their own. She would encourage the new immigrants to register their children in the Hebrew Academy. She would not take no for an answer. She would not leave the premises until the children were accepted in the school. When the principal told her there was no more room in the school, she told him to build another building.

Bringing Cholov Yisroel to Cleveland

When the Kazens settled in Cleveland, the Rebbe told them to speak to a certain rabbi there who would direct them to what is kosher. The rabbi told them that all dark breads were kosher, and Sealtest milk too. Mrs. Kazen came home with her groceries and had just poured the milk into a cup when the phone rang. It was Rabbi Hodakov.

He said, "The Rebbe wants to know which milk and bread you are eating."

She told him they had spoken to the rabbi and bought the products he

recommended.

Rabbi Hodakov said, "The Rebbe wants you to know that in Russia, all dark bread was kosher, but in the United States there may be additives in the bread and milk that are not kosher."

That was the end of the bread and the milk.

Finally, after much searching, the Kazens found a kosher bakery on the other end of Cleveland. They had to take three buses to get there. They'd buy a few cases of bread at a time and keep it in the freezer.

As for milk, occasionally Rabbi Kazen would go to the farm to watch the milking. He'd bring home the milk in huge cans. Mrs. Kazen would skim the cream off the top and make butter and cheese out of it.

One year, when Mrs. Kazen went to the Rebbe for Sukkos, she had *yechidus* and the Rebbe asked her, "What's the situation with kosher milk?"

Mrs. Kazen told the Rebbe that she had spoken to various Rabbanim in Cleveland, but they said it was not worth it to bring *cholov Yisroel* to Cleveland. They had attempted it in the past but there was not enough demand.

The Rebbe said, "Bring it into the schools. Once the children are drinking it, they will ask their parents to bring it into the house."

Mrs. Kazen knew nothing about the milk industry, but what the Rebbe says, you do. So she found one dairy in Cleveland that said they would provide *cholov Yisroel* milk.

Somehow she convinced the Hebrew Academy to purchase *cholov Yisroel* for the students. Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dworkin *a"h* instructed her in all the details of operating a *cholov Yisroel* dairy, including the stipulation that the equipment must be kashered at 212 degrees. She got Rabbanim to check out the dairy, and hired a *mashgiach* for \$40 a week to supervise the milk. Once the school was using the milk, other prominent Rabbanim in Cleveland got behind it, and with the Rebbe's *brachos*, *cholov Yisroel*

took off in Cleveland.

Campus Shlichus in the Hippie Era

In 1971, Mrs. Miriam Popack asked Cleveland to host the Mid-Winter N'shei Chabad Convention. Mrs. Kazen told the Rebbe that she physically could not undertake it because of all the activities she was doing plus raising a family. The Rebbe encouraged her and added that her children would help. The convention was held in Cleveland and it was a success.

At the Motzoei Shabbos session, couples were invited. Together they all decided it was time to open a Chabad House.

Mrs. Kazen had already been active with Jewish university students and even hosted them in her home. She decided it was time to purchase a Chabad House on the campus of Case Western University.

She bought a small building and brought her daughter and son-in-law, Mrs. Devorah and Rabbi Leibel Alevsky, as Shluchim. They are still Shluchim in Ohio to this day, together with some of their children and grandchildren.

At one point Mrs. Kazen brought some students to the Rebbe, and at *yechidus* the Rebbe told them that when they keep Torah and *mitzvos*, their former drug abuse will not affect their future offspring.

Mrs. Kazen always tried to send the students to Morristown Yeshivah or Machon Chana. One young student told her that he had dropped out of university and was having problems at home. She convinced him to go to yeshivah in Morristown.

After a short time, Mrs. Kazen heard that he wanted to leave. Immediately, she drove from Cleveland to Morristown, a distance of 450 miles. It was a difficult and exhausting trip. When she arrived, she found the student all packed and ready to leave. She convinced him to write to the Rebbe. The Rebbe told him to learn for a year and then ask again.

Today he is the father of a beautiful family of Shluchim.

The Rebbe, the Browns, and Mrs. Kazen

Mrs. Elaine Brown relates:

As a young married couple, my husband Phil and I lived across the street from the Kazens. If you know the Kazens, once they found out we were Jewish their challenge began.

We wanted children very badly but couldn't have any, so we decided that adoption was the way to go. We needed a reference for the adoption agency who was not a relative. So we asked the Kazens if we could put their names down as a reference. Sure, they said. We will do that for you, but would you be willing to write to this great rabbi and see what he says?

Well, Hashem had not answered our prayers for a child yet, so what would be different with this rabbi?

If you thought that was the end of the matter, you don't know the Kazens, especially Mrs. Kazen. She hounded us to write a letter. We would show her out the front door and she would come in through the back. We finally relented and they helped us write a letter to the Rebbe. We mailed it, and then began the waiting process.

We didn't have to wait long. Our answer came a few weeks later, on Shabbos Shuvah. We ran across the street to the Kazens' house, waving the letter in the air. We knocked on the door and started to open the letter as soon as they answered. Mrs. Kazen yelled, "Don't open! Wait until after Shabbos!"

And so we did. It was the longest day but we had to wait. Shabbos ended and *havdalah* was said and only then did we open the letter. The Rebbe's answer to us was to start keeping the laws of *taharas hamishpachah*. We had already tried everything else so we figured, why not this?

Our oldest child was born a year later.

Several months later, Phil's mother, Sadie, became so ill that she was hospitalized and lost consciousness. The doctor solemnly told the family to call all her children together. "She probably has only several hours to live," he said. "It is highly unlikely that she will regain consciousness. If she survives beyond morning, it will be as a vegetable."

Phil sat with his brother and two sisters. It was as if they had already started mourning.

And then Mrs. Kazen arrived. "Did you write the Rebbe yet?" she asked the Browns. "You'll see! He will give his blessing and everything will be all right!"

The family was amazed, and even upset. Their mother was on the verge of death, and here this lady was treating it in a cavalier fashion!

Phil's brother Bert was piqued enough to usher Mrs. Kazen out of the room, but not before she had secured Mrs. Brown's Hebrew name and that of her mother.

"I'll write to the Rebbe for you," she promised as she was being pushed out.

A few hours later she came back. The Brown family were deep in sorrow, and hardly listened as she told them: "I spoke to Rabbi Hodakov, who caught the Rebbe as he was leaving 770. 'Tell the family there is no need to worry,' the Rebbe said. 'Let the doctors repeat the tests; they'll see they made a mistake. In the morning, everything will be fine.'"

The Rebbe's answer did not make the Browns feel any better. They could not understand how a Rabbi in New York could know their mother's condition more accurately than the doctors who were treating her. But in the morning, their attitude changed. Mrs. Brown woke up, demanded a cup of coffee, and read the morning newspaper. Her answers to questions were sharp and to the point. This lady was no vegetable.

At that point, Phil's brother Bert decided to become a *chossid*. "The Rebbe didn't just give a blessing," he explained. "He set a time. That's putting yourself on the line. When he proved right, I felt I had to make a commitment."

Shalom Bayis

Mrs. Kazen was instrumental in keeping families together. She counseled women on how to run their homes, raise their children and keep the peace.

One afternoon a woman met Mrs. Kazen and kept kissing and thanking her for keeping her from getting a divorce. The woman had just married off her daughter and walked her to the *chuppah* together with her husband, all thanks to Mrs. Kazen's support, encouragement, and advice.

Years earlier, the woman had come to Mrs. Kazen and said that she was filing for divorce because her husband constantly insulted her and found fault with everything she did.

Mrs. Kazen's advice was simple and clear.

"When he talks nicely, he is talking to you. When he is yelling, he is yelling at the wall behind you."

A newlywed young woman came to Mrs. Kazen and said that her husband liked to bring people home from shul at all hours without asking her, and she simply could not keep up with the flow of guests. This was causing hard feelings between the couple. Mrs. Kazen told her that in her home, she never bought ready-made yogurts, spreads, etc. They were too expensive. She would buy bags of split peas and beans for pennies and put up a big pot of vegetable soup. It would stay on the stove all day and be ready for anyone who dropped in. "You do not have to serve fancy food to guests. You can serve simple, inexpensive food, just make sure that it is fresh and there is plenty of it."

Once a young *baalas teshuvah* told Mrs. Kazen that her mother couldn't stand her husband because he was religious and even had a beard. She constantly interfered in their lives and caused problems.

It got so out of hand that the husband forbade his mother-in-law to come to the house when he was there.

The wife went to a local Rebbetzin who told her that *kibbud eim* comes first. Mrs. Kazen called the Rebbetzin and told her to teach people how to keep Shabbos

and *kashrus*, and not to mix into matters of *shalom bayis*.

The couple moved away from Cleveland (and away from her mother) to another Chabad community and raised a beautiful family of *chassidim*.

At one point Mrs. Kazen had a tenant, a mother of many small children who struggled with house-keeping. Mrs. Kazen taught her household organization skills and helped her with her children. When the tenant went into labor with her third child, her husband was at work, and Rabbi Kazen babysat while Mrs. Kazen drove her to the hospital. The Kazens became their spiritual grandparents and the children often joined the Kazens on trips to New York. When the family moved away from Cleveland, they would come back every Pesach to stay with the Kazens. *Baruch Hashem* today they are proud Lubavitchers and parents of Shluchim.

Older but Not Weaker

Even as they aged, Rabbi Zalman Kazen and *tbl"ch* Rebbetzin Shula Kazen continued to serve their community with the energy of a young couple.

A great-granddaughter, Mussi Alpern of Kfar Chabad, Israel, recalls:

For my *bas mitzvah*, my parents took my brothers and me on a trip to the United States, to the Rebbe. I had the *zchus* to *daven* in the Rebbe's home on President Street, in the Rebbe's room and at the Ohel.

My parents also took us to Cleveland for a few days, to spend time with Bubby and Zaidy [Kazen].

We arrived at 6 a.m. Friday morning and went straight to the shul. Outside we met Zaidy (at the age of 88) shoveling snow around the shul, while Bubby was already in the kitchen cooking for Shabbos. After a few minutes, Zaidy was in the car, driving to pick up people who could not come by themselves to shul. This was a daily pickup.

All Friday, they did not stop

for a second until all the food was cooked, the table was set and the place was spotlessly clean. It was less than an hour to Shabbos and I thought we were finally done. Then Bubby said with all her energy, "We still have time to make banana cake!"

For the Friday night meal, there were "only" 20 guests. (At the Shabbos day meal, there were 150 guests!) Sitting at the Shabbos table was a pleasure, between Zaidy's singing and *divrei Torah*, and Bubby's delicious food. When we finally went to sleep it was past 1 a.m. I couldn't believe it when I saw Bubby and Zaidy lie down to sleep on the hard wooden benches in shul. They would sleep there every Shabbos, as it was too far for them to walk home.

When we woke up in the morning Bubby and Zaidy were already up. We asked Bubby, "So when do you rest?" She answered, "I was educated that we rest after 120."

After *davening*, everybody sat down for a full Shabbos meal with Zaidy's *niggunim* and *divrei Torah*. On Motzoei Shabbos they prepared a big *melaveh malkah* for the community, which ended after midnight. But Bubby and Zaidy still were not ready to sleep. They had to prepare for Sunday.

We went out to the bakery to pick up the leftover bread and cakes, and prepared boxes of food for over 100 needy families who would come to the shul each Sunday morning for their food packages. While we were preparing the boxes, a snowstorm started again, so they spent another night on hard benches.

In the morning when we woke up, Zaidy was again shoveling the sidewalks around the shul. Right after *Shacharis*, people started to come to pick up their packages. While Bubby spoke and sang with

the ladies, Zaidy approached the men, with simplicity and love, to put on *tefillin*.

By then it was time for us to leave to the airport. The impact of those three days will stay with me forever. It was the best present my parents could have given me for my *bas mitzvah*—an eternal gift.

Rabbi Zalman Kazen passed away on the eighth of Tammuz (2011) at age 92. Tragically, he and his wife lost two children at young ages (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Kazen and Mrs. Esther Alpern).

Today Mrs. Kazen lives in Crown Heights. Most of her activities in Cleveland have been taken over by the Alevskys, and their children and grandchildren. Mrs. Kazen continues to be closely involved in all the projects she founded, keeping in touch by telephone.

Mrs. Kazen never lets an opportunity pass. She now has a new mission—mothering the children of Crown Heights (which includes all of us). Whomever she comes into contact with, she feels like that person is her responsibility. She has a direct, blunt style, but people take it from her readily because they know it comes from a place of love and absolute sincerity. She suffered in her youth and remained connected to Hashem under the most difficult circumstances. Now that life is easier, she urges us all to keep Torah to the fullest. ■

Some material in this article is from a forthcoming book on Rebbetzin Kazen's life by Nechamie Margolis. Other sources include "To Know and to Care" by Eli Touger; "Bubbe Maryasha," a biography by Henya Laine as told to Rishe Deitsch, originally published in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter, now on Chabad.org; "Cleveland's Kindest Rabbi" by Dovid Zaklikowski, Chabad.org; "Living in Stalin's Shadow" by Nechamie Margolis, Binah Magazine; Tribute Booklet compiled for reception honoring the Kazens' 60 years of service to the Cleveland Jewish community.