

The Happy Man from Boston*

“The Happy Man from Boston” – thus Rabbi Chaim Simons characterized Chaim ל"ו in his book “Three Years in Military Compound – Reminiscences of a Hebron Settler.” His memories of Chaim during this period underlie lifelong aspects of his personality.

One of the more “colourful” settlers was Haim Mageni. Haim was born in the United States and was a follower of the Bostoner Rebbe. He married Shoshana and in the summer of 1969 they joined the settlers in Hebron. At any simchah, Haim would joyfully lead the singing. On one occasion I was in his house and he asked me what I wanted to drink. I jokingly answered “green beer.” Haim disappeared into the kitchen. I heard all sorts of sounds coming from that room and he soon appeared with a cup of drink – its taste was beer and its colour green! How he made it I don’t know.

Whilst in the Memshal, Haim worked at a number of professions. He began by working in the settlers’ grocery shop and after a short period went to work in the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem. Finally he became a well-known tourist guide and he worked at that until his sudden, untimely death in 2001. Whilst in the Memshal, he related to me how, when he met a group of tourists who had just crossed the Allenby Bridge, he greeted them with the words “Welcome to Israel.” One of the tourists immediately retorted, “No politics!”

Haim Mageni was nationalistic to the extreme. As we all know, there are numerous opinions of what to add and, what not to say on Yom Ha’atzmaut. The most “extreme” order of service was brought out by the Kibbutz Hadati Movement. This includes Hallel with a Berachah, special Reading from the Torah, Kiddush, al Hanisim, and so on. This Movement wrote in the preface to their book that they had consulted with a whole list of Rabbis, who included Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook. I heard that Rabbi Kook was rather annoyed that they had mentioned his

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name. He commented that they had asked his opinion, but they had not followed it. Haim would as far as possible follow this book to the letter. I even remember seeing him making Kiddush from it.

Haim and I wrote a joint letter to Rabbi Meir Kahane to give him encouragement for his efforts on behalf of Russian Jewry. What had happened was that a Jew who had managed to get out of Russia – which was very difficult in the 1960s – had come to address us in the Memshal on this subject one Sukkot. He told us of the work that Rabbi Kahane and the Jewish Defence League in America were doing on this question and asked us to write him a letter of encouragement. After his talk he was asked whether there were Sukkot or Arba'at Haminim in Russia and he answered that one only saw them in the Synagogue.

It was at this meeting, that either the speaker, or maybe Rabbi Waldman reported that when a group of Russian Jews arrived in Vienna they were met by Rabbi Kirshblum of the Jewish Agency. They immediately said to him “Don't give Yehudah and Shomron away. It is for us when we arrive.”

Whilst they were in the Memshal, the Mageni's first two daughters were born. At the kiddush they made for the first one, Haim asked me to talk on the names they had given her – Yona Tiferet. I managed to connect up both names with Yom Kippur. From then on, whenever a child was born in the Memshal, Haim would call on me to talk on the names.

When I went into his house, I saw that on the door-post of the room of Yona Tiferet, that they had fixed a Mezuzah at the head height of a young child. This was of course a “dummy Mezuzah” placed there in order to encourage the young child to be aware of and kiss the Mezuzah. I thought this was a wonderful idea.