

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE MIRISHVILLI FAMILY

They are Georgians by the sound of that name¹ and someone in the family has just given a ton of money and donated ONE MILLION NEW CLOTH KIPPOT²—read my lips: *one million kippot*—to the Western Wall. These replace the old clunky paper ones (which are now on sale on eBay for \$9) which would not stay on your head for very long. They are definitely an improvement.

The new kippah, in white nylon, is inscribed with two logos. One in the front has the logo of The Western Wall Heritage Foundation. They sort of “own” the Wall, after all. The other, on the opposite side, has 4 lines of small print Hebrew:

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof³
For the glorification of the souls of

MOSHE BEN GAVRIEL RAPHAEL AND TAMAR

May their souls be bound up in the cycle of life⁴

Well, I say good for them! I would not have spent my own money on something like that. Nor would I have done what Vadim Rabinovich (according to the sign on the glass case enclosing it) did.

Pause for a word of background. I don't know for sure that this is the same man, but assume that it is. Makes sense, because Vadim Rabinovich is a very big shot indeed. He is a Ukrainian publishing magnate, commodities trader, suspected arms dealer etc. Look him up on Google. He is clearly one of the billionaire oligarchs (many of them Jewish) who stepped in when the Soviet Union collapsed and made a ton of money by doing himself what the government used to do. Rabinovich is politically active, has friends in high places, and is very involved in the Jewish world as president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress. He is also an Israeli citizen.

Makes sense that it's him because who else by that name could have donated God-knows how much money for the construction of a giant menorah—the 7 branch candelabra that once stood in the Temple (an

¹ that is Georgia south of Russia, not Georgia north of Florida.

² yarmulkes

³ Psalm 24:1

⁴ The Hebrew is the standard formula: .ה.י.י.י.י.י.

exact copy, based on the best scholarship, they say)—that sits in a glass case on the terrace above the Western Wall. It is more than 2 meters high and is plated with 43 kilograms of gold. Big bucks from Vadim Rabinovich for the glorification of Jerusalem and Temple one day to be built, and good for him! (Big waste of money, says me.) Anybody who knows what 43 kg of gold costs is invited to write in.

Ukrainians Too

I noted these two matters and thought of nothing more than the facts I wanted to write about. But the story got even more interesting because we were sitting in a really nice little restaurant in the Mahaneh Yehudah vegetable market last Friday afternoon. Not usually my thing either, but the group with whom I was traveling needed to see this part of life in Jerusalem so we went to the market for lunch and atmosphere. The waiter asks if we minded sitting at a table with someone else, and of course we didn't because otherwise we would have waited half an hour to get a seat. Now this "someone else" turned out to be an agreeable man of 30-something who we soon learned is working as a builder/decorator/blacksmith in the nearly-completed Hurva synagogue in the Jewish quarter of the Old City.

Another word of explanation. The Hurvah was a huge Ashkenazi synagogue with the high domed roof that dominated the southern part of the Old City. Finished in 1865 after enough trials and tribulations to earn it the nickname Hurva ("a ruin" in Hebrew) it was an affront to the Arabs who blew it up with a ton of dynamite, along with 7 other synagogues in the Jewish Quarter, the day the Old City fell to the Jordanians in 1948.

We came back in 1967 to find a ruined heap of stones. Several rebuilding plans were submitted over the years, but meanwhile what most of you saw was one big arch set up on the south wall to give a sense of scale.

Well, they have nearly finished rebuilding it! Because that's what our new friend was working on. Dedication is sometime really soon, maybe during these very days. Interestingly enough, it is the only building in the Jewish Quarter that they have deliberately tried to re-make the way it was in the 19th century; otherwise they didn't do "ye olde" in the Jewish Quarter. On principle. So we see the Hurva now, with its gigantic 80 meter dome, nearly done. Jerusalem has a different skyline now.

p.s. They dedicated the building last week. As a consequence of which the Hamas in Gaza declared a "Day of Rage". Makes sense; can't have these pesky Jews building synagogues in the Old City, or anywhere else in the Occupied Territories, now can we? Any excuse for a riot.

We asked our table companion if he knew who was paying for all this. He said that the word around the site is that the funding of the whole project has been undertaken by 3 Ukrainian Jews.

Ukrainians?! Who would have guessed about this contribution of Georgians and Ukrainians to the landscape of the Holy City?! A thing like that hasn't happened since the days of the Tsar. But there it is.

I certainly would not have done any of this, even if I had that kind of money. But here are people who put their money where their mouth is and I think they deserve to be thanked; a million kippot is A LOT of kippot!! 43 kilo of gold is REALLY A LOT of gold. And the rebuilding of a giant building is REALLY REALLY A LOT. They each did a good deed and deserve to have their loved ones and themselves remembered on kippot, on candelabra and on synagogues. So I write about it all here in FROM JERUSALEM. And if that's not immortality, I don't know what is!

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