

Ham & High

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1993

133rd year

Tempers fray as day of eruv reckoning nears

THE CONTROVERSIAL issue of whether 85 poles can be erected in Barnet streets to form an eruv for the orthodox Jewish community will finally be decided on Wednesday night — after 11th hour accusations and counter-claims.

The council's planning and research committee will consider the proposal by the United Synagogue eruv committee to put up poles and span them with wire to mark part of the boundary of an eruv, or symbolically enclosed area. Planning officers have recommended that the application should be approved.

Within the eruv, which would cover Hampstead Garden Suburb, Golders Green, Hendon and parts of Child's Hill, Jewish law would be relaxed to permit Orthodox Jews to carry keys and push prams and wheelchairs on the Sabbath.

Opponents of the proposal have been collecting signatures to a petition objecting to the erection of the poles and wire, and claim that by the time the committee meets they will have collected more than 1,500 names.

They have also called into question the eligibility of some of the 3,400 names on the petition circulated by the eruv committee. The committee has reacted angrily to this, saying that it had carefully checked the petition, as had Barnet Council officers, who had accepted its accuracy.

The eruv supporters have also accused some of their opponents of conducting a last-minute dirty tricks campaign, allegedly tell-

proposed. This allegation has also been angrily denied.

If the proposal is approved on Wednesday the application may have to go back before the public works committee because proposed locations of poles have been changed since the plan was first considered. That decision would be up to public works committee chairman Don Goodman and officers in the engineering department. "We never vote on party lines on planning — every member represents his own ward. It is an understanding that people consider planning matters on their planning merits," said committee chairman John Iplady.

● The United Synagogue eruv committee has arranged a public meeting on Monday night "as a constructive opportunity to provide information and explanation" about the proposed eruv.

The meeting, at 7pm, is at the Golders Green United Synagogue in Dunstan Road.

It will take the form of a panel discussion, the panel to include the synagogue's Rabbi Ivan Binstock, eruv committee chairman David Schreiber, solicitor Edward Black and committee member Syma Weinberg.

"There is a great deal of evidence of a lack of understanding and information about our proposal," Mr Schreiber told the Ham & High this week.

"We are very surprised that there is such opposition from people who appear not to understand the issues and who do not have

Understanding is key to eruv

I HAVE been asking myself why it is that the planning application for an eruv, a structure which is physically far less intensive than, say, the numerous telegraph poles and wires belonging to British Telecom, or the Christmas lights and decorations around the borough, should stir up so much feeling.

As an orthodox Jew who would find an eruv a useful facility, all the irrational opposition seems, initially bloody-minded. It is tempting to feel (as many Muslims would feel about not being allowed a permanent site for a mosque) that the community does not accept us as a permanent religious grouping in this country. That feels very rejecting.

Why do some Christians and Jews of other persuasions feel so emotive about opposing the eruv? I think that one important factor is that the concepts behind an eruv are particular to Orthodox Judaism and are not shared by Protestant Christianity or Progressive Judaism. Indeed, they are some of the key issues that led to the distinction between Judaism and Christianity, and between Orthodox and Progressive Judaism.

These concepts are:

- The absolute authority of the letter of the Law of Moses as a divine revelation.
- The acceptance of a framework of religious law for the faith/community, as decided by a religious authority.

Religious Jews who accept these concepts will understand the call for an eruv. For others, who do not believe the first five books of the Bible are a divine code to be applied through the interpretation of a religious authority, the eruv must seem legalistic and (apparently) meaningless. To such people, accepting an eruv in the public arena might feel like a denial of their own belief-system, and just the sort of thing their religious founders were speaking out against.

This feeling, on both sides, of rejection explains, perhaps, why so much emotion has been stirred up over a few lampposts connected at the top by a thin string.

I think that it is possible, with understanding, to resolve this conflict. The key question is: can we feel secure enough to acknowledge and accept the existence of other religious groupings, with beliefs different, in some respects, from our own?

JONATHAN SAMUEL,

32 Haslemere Avenue, NW4.

ANYONE may obtain a day-pass to the British Library in the British Museum.

Babylonian Talmud is on open access (Shelves 2013, B and C).

The volume editor of Eruvin (eruv) writes in the Introduction that greater freedom of movement on the Sabbath may be achieved by one or other prescribed rituals, of which the principal form is termed erub (eruv), and continues:

"The erub consists of a specified quantity of foodstuffs deposited in a specified place, and contributed by or on behalf of the people concerned. Different abodes or domains are by this means regarded as amalgamated, associated or fused into one. In certain circumstances a cross-beam or a side-post to form a sort of doorway to an alley is also necessary."

A cross-beam across the alley (access) or entrance to a shared courtyard, or a side-post and a beam, or two side posts, converts this area into a shared "private domain" in which the greater freedom of movement is permitted (Chapter 1).

Alternatively, "one erub may be provided for all the town" (borough) if its "public domains" (highways 16 cubits wide) have a side-post or a cross-beam fixed on either side, and if it was previously owned by one individual (Chapter 5). So the United Synagogue eruv committee is exercising its imagination in applying, instead, for wires suspended between poles in a part only of the never privately owned borough of Barnet.

The prescribed ritual for the "public domains" is only applicable to a town without a wall round it (Chapter 5), so the eruv committee could choose to use its imagination differently, by supposing that Barnet is a walled town, for which partial "imaginary boundaries" are anyway permitted, and posts and side-beams are not required for the "public domains".

The eruv committee should withdraw its application and instead establish a non-divisive Sabbath domain, without poles and wires on highways or other public land, for all who would want to use this.

DR JEFFREY SEGALL,
308 Cricklewood Lane, NW2.

I AM a young Orthodox Jewish mother hoping soon to have the benefit of the proposed eruv. I was discussing the matter outside my house with a neighbour without the same interest in the outcome of the current planning application. She nevertheless agreed that it would be very valuable for me and that it would therefore be un-neighbourly to oppose it, particularly since it would not inconvenience her in the

Whilst we were discussing the matter, my neighbour was approached by another resident canvassing support for an anti-eruv campaign. My neighbour refused her support and was countered by: "You realise that if you don't sign you'll have 'them' moving in next to you!"

This is what the anti-eruv movement is all about.

FIONA RABINOWITZ,
Address supplied.

MR SIMON'S letter (February 12) criticising mine (February 5) is misleading. The erection of an eruv, a permanent structure, can hardly be compared with the Notting Hill carnival. Nor are those of us opposed to the application interested in "Totalitarian 'exorcism'..."

What concerns us is precisely the point that the community is multi-racial and multi-cultural and for a small minority to seek to impose their will on the rest of us is a denial of our freedom.

ELIZABETH LAWRENCE,
107 Wentworth Road, NW11.

THE MAIN problem with the proposed eruv is that it lacks the most elementary safety features. While the pro- and anti-eruv factions argue about trivia, the things that really matter are being ignored.

For example, the planned poles are not even to be equipped with lightning conductors — an omission which could be disastrous. Suppose an eruv-pole was suddenly vaporised by lightning during a freak Sabbath storm. This would compromise the integrity of the eruv perimeter and, in an instant, the eruv itself would cease to exist.

When an ordinary telegraph pole is struck by lightning all that happens is people's phones get cut off; an eruv strike could cut off their path to salvation. It may be a chance in a million, but it is surely not one worth taking.

It is a little-known fact that the old children's song Ring a Ring o' Roses is about an eruv that was struck by lightning. Children link hands in eruv-formation to sing about a pocket full of posies — which were being carried on the Sabbath. The "atishoo" represents a divine sneeze (ie thunder), and we are all too familiar with the appalling consequences.

Lightning-proof eruvs are, of course, nothing new. The oldest one in England, of megalithic construction, is still standing on Salisbury Plain after 4,000 years.

BRIAN SIMPSON.