Join The Independent's free WhatsApp Channel
JOIN NOW

The trouble begins when Jews stop being invisible

First it was attacks on ritual slaughter, then criticism of the practice of circumcision. Now comes a campaign against a Jewish eruv enclosure in north London. It all makes Matthew Kalman rather uneasy.

Matthew Kalman • Friday 30 May 1997 23:02 BST • Comments

BREAKING NEWS
For free real time breaking news alerts sent straight to your inbox sign up to our breaking news emails
Email
SIGN UP
I would like to be emailed about offers, events and updates from The Independent. Read our privacy policy

Later this month, BBC's Omnibus will broadcast a documentary on the Hampstead Garden Suburb in north London. This bold experiment in 1920s suburban living has become an exclusive, largely white, middle-class enclave whose tree-lined streets and smart, red-brick houses have become a magnet for comfort-seeking residents as diverse as Lulu, King Constantine, Lord Soper, Martin Bell, the Sultan of Brunei and Richard & Judy.

A large part of the programme is devoted to the controversy surrounding the eruv, a plan to erect a symbolic boundary around several square miles of north London, including parts of the Garden Suburb.

According to orthodox law, Jews are not permitted to push or carry most objects in public places on the Sabbath. This restriction does not apply to certain areas bounded by walls, fences or natural features such as rivers. If an eruv can be erected then orthodox Jews within its area will be able to take pushchairs and other non-essential items out on the Sabbath which will enable families to spend more of the day together.

5 positions for weight loss

Most of the proposed eruv will be delineated by railway lines, motorways and terraces of houses. In those places where such features do not form a continuous line, structures similar to telegraph poles will be erected to complete the boundary. Of 83 such poles, seven were planned for the Garden Suburb. The authorities concluded that the poles and wires would be all but invisible to non-users while of great benefit to many residents and granted planning permission.

However, approval came only after a bitter struggle in which some local residents waged a long campaign to have the scheme rejected. Although the Hampstead Garden Suburb forms only a small area of the eruv zone, it was within these leafy and exclusive streets that the battle has been most intense. Diehard opponents like Lord McGregor of Durris are threatening to take the decision to judicial review.

Supporters of the eruv cannot understand what all the fuss is about. They argue that the finished scheme will have as much practical effect on non-users as a parish boundary or postcode. Many non-observant Jews support it too. They may not observe or even understand such traditions but they respect the right of their orthodox friends to practise their ancient religion unhindered.

The debate has arisen at a time when the Anglo- Jewish community is experiencing rapid change. On its secular wing, Jews are quickly and happily assimilating into British culture and society. Jews are significantly more welcome in the clubs, boardrooms and golf courses of Britain than their (mostly) immigrant great-grandparents could ever have dreamed of. Meanwhile, on its religious wing, the Jewish community is becoming more observant. This, combined with greater Jewish knowledge, has fuelled the development of new religious facilities.

Kosher restaurants and Jewish schools are flourishing. The proposed eruv, an ancient Jewish facility first developed by King Solomon and now common in Australia, Israel and north America, was accompanied by an application to the same planning authority to build a new mikvah (ritual bathhouse).

Scan me
Join The Independent's free WhatsApp Channel

But, while Britain may be more welcoming to Jews than ever before, it

Join The Independent's free WhatsApp Channel
Breaking news updates, daily headlines and more
Scan me

Most Popular
Warren Buffett finally reveals endorsement decision in 2024 election
America's next civil war has already started – this is how it will end
Can Kamala Harris beat Donald Trump? Latest poll updates
Former first son says his Republican dad would've voted Trump
Todd Chrisley fired from job at prison chapel
Popular videos
Eminem hits out at Trump in three-word plea to voters at Detroit rally
'Donald Trump' sent to nursing home in new Eric Swalwell video
Harris responds to reports Trump said he 'needed generals like Hitler'
indy100
Trump speaks 'at 5th grade level' in his speeches, new study suggests
I'm a Celebrity: The most iconic moments over the years
The biggest reactions to Call of Duty: Black Ops 6 as gamers give first verdicts
What's next for the Menendez brothers?
Donald Trump just called the US a 'garbage can'
Promoted Links by Taboola seems as if that welcome is warmest for those who leave their religion at the door. Even Lord Soper, the nonconformist champion who might have been expected to welcome this Jewish non-conformism denounced the eruv plan as an "impertinence".

The intensity of the opposition has raised serious questions about the limits of tolerance in a supposedly multi-cultural Britain. Jewish ritual slaughter is regularly the target of campaigns to have it banned. Over the past two years, attacks on the Jewish tradition of circum- cision have risen to an unprecedented level.

5 positions for weight loss

The pressure to shed religious observance and conform is intense. From the invitation to dine at a college high table to the need to impress the boss on a Saturday morning round of golf, Jews wishing to climb the professional and business ladder are faced with daily choices between their religion and their career.

Religious Jews have been alarmed to discover that their prospects can disappear overnight once their faith becomes too visible. Last year the Guardian newspaper encouraged the resignation of a young advertisement sales executive rather than let him have Friday afternoons off to observe the Sabbath. Perhaps they didn't realise that his brother, now an orthodox rabbi, had become famous for playing in the Varsity football match at Wembley in a kippa.

He, like the proposers of the eruv, saw no reason why Jewish religious practice should not be incorporated within the framework of a multi-cultural Britain. For the residents of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, that challenge remains.

`Faith & Reason' is edited by Paul Vallely

More about: Gardening Golf Restaurants Suburbs

Join our commenting forum

Join thought-provoking conversations, follow other Independent readers and see their replies

Comments ↓

Promoted stories

Taboola Feed

חלית בסרטן? ייתכן ומגיע לך פיצוי כספי ענק

Sponsored | **עו"ד פייל - רשלנות רפואית**

מקבלים אותו החשמל - רק בזול

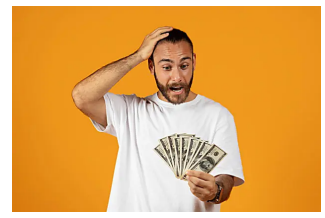
Sponsored | **אמישראגז** **צרו קשר**

בעלים ומנכ"ל אאורה יעקב אטרקצ'י בונה מחדש את הבניין שקרס בחולון

Sponsored | **אאורה סרלין חולון**

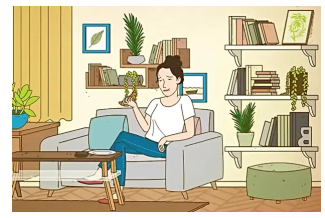
לפרוש בלי דאגות: תכנון פרישה נכון
...יל לכם את הקצבה החודשית ויתן לכם

מטרות פיננסיות



איך תקבלו פיצוי על פציעה קשה בתאונת דרכים?

עו"ד גבריאל מלאך **מידע נוסף**

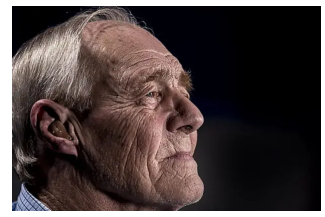


מהישראלים במשקל עודף: 40 49.1% סיפורי הצלחה שיתנו לכם השראה

מכון אברהמסון

מתעניינים בהוצאת דרכון גרמני?

משרד עורכי דין דקר, פקס, לוי **מידע נוסף**

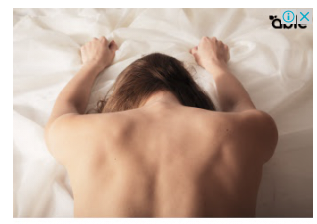


אל תשלמו על ביטוח תאונות אישיות
...יעדי אם אתם מעל גיל 65 - תקראו את

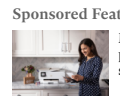
שמענו - ביטוח תאונות אישיות **מידע נוסף**

בעל הבית השתגע: המזרן האורטופדי הפופולרי במדינה נמכר במחיר חסר...

ד"ר קומפורט

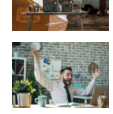


Sponsored Features



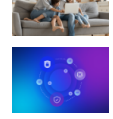
Make the most of your HP printer with an Instant Ink subscription

How Jackery's latest products can bring you more portable power



5 offers on life's big purchases: holidays, hobbies, cars and furniture included

Protect your family's online privacy with ESET home security



Explore the benefits of Payment Orchestration with Fabrick

טלטלה בשוק הנדלן: חנויות במרכז העסקים החדשני בכפר אזר יימכרו ב-619 אלף ש"ח בלבד

Sponsored | BRITANIA ISRAEL

מידע נוסף

זמינה לבנייה: קרקע בזכרון יעקב במתחם "רובע הבוסתן" החל מ- 390,000 ₪

Sponsored | WINEPARK ZIHRON

אל תגישו תביעת ביטוח סיעודי לפני שתקראו את זה

Sponsored | שמענו - ביטוח סיעודי

מחירים שלא נראו בתל אביב: אאורה משיקה את בניין...

Sponsored | אאורה הטייסים תל אביב

כמה עולה ביטוח רכב לשנת 2024? התשובה עשויה להפתיע

Sponsored | ביטוח רכב | מחעות חיפוש

NEWS

Stephen A Smith spars with Fox News' Hannity over Trump's...

NEWS

What is pink cocaine? Drug cocktail linked to Liam Payne's...

NEWS

Republican strategist has surprising insights on 'pathetic' Trump's election chances

Humans experience rapid ageing at 44 and 60 – here's how to slow it down

Having just past her 'accelerated age' age Maria Lally, looks at why it happens and what you can do about it

Sponsored | PROMOTED BY INDEPENDENT PREMIUM

Read More Comments

כך תוכלו לקנות דירה להשקעה בדובאי עם משכנתא ב-0% ריבית

Sponsored | FALCON YIELD

קושי בפעולות יומיומיות כמו להתקלח, להתלבש? כך תקבלו גמלת סיעוד

Sponsored | עו"ד פייל ושות' | מידע נוסף

NEWS

Trump's claim Tiffany graduated top of her class at Georgetown...

NEWS

Top Democratic strategist reveals why he's certain Harris will win...

חיותא. רק לכלבים וחתולים. כיסוי רפואי של עד 30 אלף שקלים. לא מכסים בני אדם, מצטערים

Sponsored | אמיר

LIFESTYLE

Rob Lowe confirms 'inevitable' Brat Pack romance with fellow star