

Mr Rabin devoted the final years of his life. But together with those who have genuine fears and misgivings about aspects of the agreements that he signed, we are an opportunity and a duty to reject words and acts of violence on all sides, to argue through reason rather than invective, and to seek a shared path towards peace not only between Jew and Arab, but between Jew and Jew.

Eruv revisited 1/1/96

The great eruv debate — over, it was thought, with government approval two years ago of the project — this week showed signs of resurrection. A minor change in plans due to local roadworks has necessitated a revised council application. The anti-eruv activists who lost their argument in 1994 seem poised to mount a new attempt to prevent the project. They were mistaken then, as they are now. The eruv, consisting of a thin nylon line strung between a series of nondescript poles, harms no one, defaces nothing, but allows observant Jews to carry or push some objects on Shabbat. For Orthodox parents, this means being able to push a pram; for the disabled, to travel in a wheelchair. Perhaps the saddest aspect of round one of the eruv debate was that prominent among the opponents were Jews — in many cases, people who would (quite properly) endorse the right of other ethnic or religious communities to enrich their own lives within the constraints of their beliefs without encroaching on others'. Surely, they owe that same tolerance to fellow Jews. Surely, too, projects like the eruv do not threaten, but rather embody, the tolerant and multi-ethnic society all Britons would wish to build.

Misrepresenting Orthodoxy?

Rabbi Shmuel Boteach (JC October 25) is guilty of a total misrepresentation of "frum" (his inverted commas) Jews, whom he accuses of supplanting the worship of God with the deification of halachah — that same halachah which he passionately and convincingly espouses as being immutable and the exclusive way for a Jew to attain proximity to God.

Granted, frum Jews do not always live up to the ideal of concentrating on coming closer to God each and every time they observe a commandment.

But, despite that imperfection, in the final analysis our adherence to halachah, be it ritual or ethics, is motivated by our desire to fulfil the will of God, and provides a conscious and/or mystical vehicle towards being God-fearing Jews.

Rabbi Boteach rightly says that this should be our ultimate aim, and it is one which my colleagues and I consider the burden of all our preaching.

As for the "red herring" of preventing a Reform Jew being called up to the Law, how many, if any, Orthodox shuls inquire as to the synagogue affiliation of a visitor?

What may happen is that a mitzvah

be demanded on his behalf not because, in Rabbi Boteach's words, "he wants to say a blessing over God's eternal law in order to enjoy divine communion," but in order to challenge Orthodoxy to recognise Reform as a whole, when even Rabbi Boteach, with all his inclusivist tolerance, significantly speaks only of the "halachic" Reform Jew being denied a mitzvah.

Reverend Gabriel Brodie,
43 Stanley Road,
Salford M7.

As a Liberal rabbi, I wholeheartedly applaud Rabbi Boteach's call to restore God, and the person's relationship with God, to the centre of Judaism.

In a spirit of sincere appreciation, I feel it is necessary to explain that this is precisely why Liberal Judaism cannot assent to the divine authorship of the Torah.

Laws which mandate genocide, legitimise the subordinate position of women, discriminate against children of forbidden relationships and enshrine animal sacrifice as the ideal mode of worship, to mention but a few of the morally and theologically objectionable mitzvot, simply cannot have been given by the wise and loving God whom Rabbi Boteach and I trust and worship.

It becomes necessary — much to the anguish of many faithful Jews — to choose between God and the

Torah as traditionally understood.

Choosing God leads not to a rejection of the Torah but to a deeper understanding of the spiritual quest of our ancestors who wrote it, a profound but critical appreciation of its greatness, and a commitment to contribute our own small fragment to this grand, evolving programme of Judaism, which is the attempt to discern and fulfil God's will for us here and now.

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The tree of life

A silver birch has been planted in the grounds of the Imperial War Museum.

I wonder if they know what a silver birch means to me?

A birch in Polish is "Brzoza." A place of birches is "Brzezinki," which in German became Birkenau, where not a single birch or blade of grass grew, and thousands were murdered daily. I was there.

To me, the silver birch is a symbol of the triumph of life over death.

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Quote unquote

I haven't seen anyone like Berkovic for a long time. He sees passes and pictures that nobody else does.

Graham Souness's assessment of Southampton FC's recent signing, Eyal Berkovic, after the Israeli scored two goals against Manchester United last weekend.

A Jew on vacation is looking for a place to sit. Jewish resorts are the only ones that advertise "Brand-new lobby." A Jew sees a chair, it's a successful vacation.

Jackie Mason in a Times magazine profile.

It's lovely that people cry for Yitzhak Rabin and gather in public squares to light candles and sing sad songs, but who is lighting candles and singing songs for the victims of the next war that is about to break out?

Columnist Amnon Dankner in Ha'aretz.