

My Favorite Eruv - Sharon, Massachusetts: A 2019 Update

Among the issues that the Sharon Eruv adopts a high standard is the topic of Karpeif.

Karpeif Exclusion in Sharon, Massachusetts – 2017 Reflections

Sharon, Massachusetts is replete with many lush forest areas that seem to pose a Karpeif challenge. However, one must understand the community to appreciate how the forested areas are an integral part of the community.

In 2013 Money magazine ranked Sharon is the best place to live in the United States. Here is part of Money's description of the town:

A half-hour train ride from Boston or Providence, this one-time summer resort has the natural beauty of a more remote place. Forty percent remains open space, and the town jewel, Lake Massapoag, offers a place for residents to swim, picnic, and enjoy concerts on Memorial Beach.

Accordingly, the open space is clearly part of the Dirah! Moreover, a major part of the town culture is hiking and outdoor athletics. An incredibly high percentage of the population engages in outdoor activities which include hiking in the town's forested areas. The forests are very much integrated in the living space of the town and need not be regarded as a Karpeif.

Accordingly,, the original Poskim for the Sharon Eruv, Rav Shimon Eider zt"l and (Yibadeil L'Chayim Aruchim) Rav Moshe Heinemann required that only the most dense and watery¹ of the forests² be excluded from the Eruv. In this manner, the Eruv would not simply rely on the Dvar Shmuel but would satisfy even those who adopt a strict attitude regarding Karpeifiyot. The Sharon

¹ Regarding watery areas see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 358:11. Rav Heinemann In the aforementioned lecture) cites Rav Moshe Feinstein who rules that in contemporary times even water that is less than three tefachim (approximately 9 to 11 inches) deep should be regarded as a Karpeif. Although the Mishnah Berurah (Biur Halacha op. cit. s.v. V'Hi') considers it a problem only if the water is at least three tefachim deep, Rav Moshe feels that in contemporary society, unlike in the past (see, for instance, Yoma 77b and Ta'anit 23b), people do not walk through any body of water even if it is very shallow and thus any body of water is not part of the dirah.

² "Vietnam-like" density and inaccessibility is the way that one of the community members describes the areas that are excluded from the Eruv.

community loyally and lovingly maintains these borders and excludes these areas from the Eruv.

A 2017 Change

Regarding one of the excluded areas, though, the reality has been changing. It was decided in 2017 by the relevant Rabbanim that it is no longer necessary to exclude the Hammershop Pond and the Ames St. playground from the Eruv. In the past this had been done because the pond area was deemed to be a Karpeif but that has changed over the last year as the town of Sharon has invested significantly into cleaning up the pond and its vicinities. During the winter of 2016-2017 a new dam was built to raise the water level, which makes it more conducive for boating and a new path is currently being built so that the area can be used more regularly. Additionally, the hiking trails between the pond and Lake Massapoag have been better maintained by the local boy scouts.

All of these changes have made this area more fit for recreational usage and part of the Dirah. Upon my suggestion, Rav Noah Cheses (the Rav of the Young Israel of Sharon) even encouraged the community to use it for recreational purposes going forward to further bolster its status as part of the Dirah. This psak din was made in consultation with Rav Moshe Heineman and Rav Willig. The recently retired long term Rav of the community, Rav Meir Sender was also involved in the decision.

Conclusion – a 2019 Update

The Sharon Eruv continues to maintain a high standard regarding the issue of Karpeif. However, I have noted in my 2019 review of this Eruv, I noticed the growing difficulty in maintaining this high standard. I suggested that the community revisit this issue and consider adopting a more lenient approach to Karpeif, similar to the standard practiced in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Rav Mordechai Willig has consistently advised to respect the rulings of prior Rabbanim. However, a type of Hatarat Nedarim might be in order if the strict standard proves to be unsustainable in the long run. Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein (Kitvei HaAruch HaShulchan number 64) permits relying on the lenient view

regarding Karpeif in case of pressing need (Sha'at HeDechak). In prior years adopting the lenient approach was not necessary since it was not a Sha'at HaDechak. However, once the circumstances change to the effect that it is now a Sha'at HaDechak, relying on the lenient view may be necessary to insure the long term viability of the Eruv.

A wise individual once suggested the following standard in regards to a Chumra (Halachic stringency): Chumrot are beautiful but they are negotiable. When observing a Chumra brings one spiritual satisfaction then the embrace of a Halachic stringency is appropriate. However, when adherence to a Chumra is a source of frustration and even pain, then it might be time to return to observance of basic level observance regarding that matter of Halacha.

The Biur Halacha (489:10 s.v. Af) in regards to adopting a strict standard regarding Chadash urges one not to adopt an all or nothing approach to this Chumra. Just because one cannot observe the higher standard does not mean he should not try to observe it the times when he is able.

Similarly, even if the Sharon community decides to adopt a more lenient approach to its Karpeif challenges, it still can and should maintain its high standards regarding many other Eruv issues such as Tachuv, Lavud, Chatzitzot and the Chumra of the Tevu'ot Shor. Chumrot are not a matter of all or nothing.