

My Favorite Eiruv—Sharon, Massachusetts by Rabbi Chaim Jachter – a 5780 Update [□]

I am often asked which community's Eruv is my favorite. I currently serve as an Eruv consultant for more than sixty communities throughout North America, and I have seen more than a hundred Eiruvim on three continents. Which do I like best? Hands down, without a doubt, it is the Eiruv created and maintained by the Young Israel of Sharon, Massachusetts.

Why is it my favorite? The answer is simple. The community aspires to attain the high Eiruv standards set by Rav Moshe Heinemann of Baltimore, meticulously maintains those standards to the best of abilities, and in addition to regular rabbinic involvement, more than 45 lay members of the community regularly are involved in the ongoing weekly inspection and upkeep of the Eiruv.

High Standards

The Sharon, MA Eruv maintains very high Halachic standards, higher than what is typical in many communities. A Lechi is attached to every pole, unless a wire runs atop a pole and even breaks less than three Tephachim (Lavud; the equivalent of approximately nine inches) are not tolerated. There are no barriers (Chatzitzot) between the Lechi and wire, Tachuv is not relied upon and there are no openings more than three Tephachim wide between Tzurot HaPetach and Mechitzot (Halachic walls).

For many communities adopting such a strict standard is simply not feasible. It will simply result in much too many installations to properly monitor and maintain. Why is the Sharon community able to sustain such high standards? I believe it is a combination of a variety of positive factors.

The Founding Rav – Rav Meir Sendor

Rav Meir Sendor, the founding Rav of the Sharon Eruv succeeded in establishing from the very creation of the Eruv, a culture of high level community involvement in the Eruv. In most other communities, one person is hired to inspect the Eruv each week. In many communities it is often nearly impossible to find even a second individual to help with the Eruv's weekly inspection.

It is very difficult for a lone Eruv inspector to maintain hundreds of installations. By contrast, when more than twenty people inspect an Eruv weekly, each inspector has only a few dozen Eruv components to monitor, which is quite a reasonable task. Each inspector requires approximately a half an hour to complete his section, which again is a reasonable undertaking.

Rav Sendor insisted from the beginning that responsibility for the Eruv's upkeep be shared by community members. To everyone's credit, the Sharon community bought into this idea. The two times I delivered a Shiur to the Sharon community, dozens of congregants attended the talk and actively participated.

It is challenging for a community rabbi to institute such a policy for an already existing Eruv. The Sharon policies succeed since they were instituted at its creation. The beginning of a process characterizes its long term trajectory. Kudos to Rav Sendor for launching the Sharon Eruv on a very high standard.

The Community Members

The Sharon Eruv is divided into more than twenty sections and community members rotate each week in their inspection of their small portion of the Eruv. Each portion is inspected on foot to insure proper upkeep. Rotating inspectors keep everyone honest and alert. In most other communities the weekly inspection is conducted by car. Although this is accepted practice, it is not the best practice. There is no substituting a walking inspection where one is far more likely to notice nuanced and subtle issues with the Eruv than he would if he were whizzing by at thirty miles per hour.

The Community Rav – Rav Noah Cheses

In many communities the community Rabbanim are not involved with the Eruv on a regular basis. The inspection process is farmed out to someone to inspect the Eruv and the Rav is consulted if there are any problems. Hopefully, the community Rav will conduct a yearly walking inspection of the entire Eruv together with a Rav with considerable experience with Eruvin.

Rav Noah Cheses of the Young Israel of Sharon, by contrast, is a hands-on community rabbi who often is involved with Eruv maintenance and repair. He

occasionally will review portions of the Eruv to keep inspectors “on their toes” and will help with emergency repairs on Fridays.

The Outdoor Sharon Culture

An advantage of the Sharon community is that the prevailing culture is one of love of hiking and outdoor activities even in cold weather. Many people choose to live in this community due to its rich open spaces. Thus, Eruv inspections fit with the prevailing Sharon culture making it a very enjoyable experience that is consequently embraced by the community.

Active involvement with the Eruv enhances a sense of community and commitment to careful observance of Halacha. Devotion and attention to the details of the Eruv spills over to other areas of Halachic observance. In a day and age when people crave active religious activities, Eruv inspection perfectly fits the bill (especially in such a beautiful setting such as Sharon).

Help from Hashem

Needless to say, without help from Hashem our efforts would be for naught. Many fortunate set of circumstances permit the Eruv to function. One example is the manner in which utility wires run across the railroad tracks that slice through town, to serve as a Halachic wall (Mechitza) on both upper and lower ground levels. Another is how recently large sections of overgrown areas were cleared by the railroad companies allowing for a much more safe and efficient inspection and maintenance of the Eruv when it runs near the train tracks.

Conclusion

The Sharon Eiruv continues to maintain a high standard regarding many areas of Halachic dispute regarding Eirubin. Indeed, the Sharon, Massachusetts Eiruv serves as a model for Eirubin worldwide of how the synergy between the local Rav, experienced outside Rabbanim and the involvement of a large percentage of lay community members creates and maintains a top-notch community Eiruv.

All communities should consider implementing at least some of these standards. While it is difficult to change practices midstream, people are often receptive to slow change. In the meantime, all communities should ponder the benefits reaped by the Sharon community from its Eruv policies and at least consider how to introduce at least some of these practices to their communities.